

Perceptions and Experiences of Former Upward Bound Participants of the
Effectiveness of the Program in Supporting Low Socio-Economic Hispanic Students

By

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A Dissertation

In

Higher Education

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of Texas Tech University in
Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for
the Degree of

Doctor of Education

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May, 2017

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The dissertation process is without a doubt an intensive and all-consuming effort, although it has also been a wonderful learning experience. This journey has enlightened and sparked a tremendous desire for education. This process will also lead me to new endeavors in both my personal and professional life.

As with most accomplishments, we have others to thank in our journey. I would like to acknowledge my dissertation committee: Dr. Dave Louis, Dr. Juan Muñoz and the chair of that committee, Dr. Stephanie Jones. Without question, these professionals had a tremendous effect on my success in multiple ways. But in particular, without the guidance and caring input from Dr. Jones, this would not be possible.

For my children, who have endured many days, nights and weekends as I worked through this process, I have nothing but love and devotion. I do this not only for myself, but also for you and I hope I serve as a positive role model, as well as an example of what hard work and dedication can accomplish and the importance of education. Finally, to my parents who instilled in me the work ethic needed to accomplish something of this magnitude, and especially to my father who passed many years ago, I can only smile and hope you are proud of your son.

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ABSTRACT

TRIO programs are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantage backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Within TRIO, Upward Bound is a pre-college initiative that offers an array of academic and cultural activities structured to encourage enrollment, retention, and degree completion from an institution of higher education. Upward Bound programs serve first-generation, low-socioeconomic students from underrepresented demographics. For the purpose of this study, first-generation status was defined as neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree (Pell Institute, 2008) and low socio-economic status was defined as having an average household annual income under \$39,563 and family size of five in 2017 (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). First-generation, low socio-economic college going students are those who meet both of these criteria (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

Since its inception, the Upward Bound program has influenced students' aspirations and goals of attending college, by providing support mechanisms for underrepresented and low socio-economic students. Upward Bound has been subjected to budget challenges due to the evaluation of federal programs. This has been because of Upward Bound's methodology and conflicting program outcomes based on research studies.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants about the effectiveness of the

program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Of specific interests in this study are the perceptions of these former participants and how their participation affected their college success, what services provided by the program were the most beneficial or detrimental, as well as what recommendations they have to improve the services provided by the program to better support Hispanic undergraduate students.

An intrinsic case study methodology was utilized to address the four research questions that guided this study. The study was framed by Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and the tenet of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1989). There were a total of ten participants who were enrolled in a large, public research institution in Texas and completed the Upward Bound at the same institution. Data was collected through means such as the researcher, semi-structured interviews, field notes, reflexive journaling, and institutional documents. The constant-comparative method and open coding were utilized to analyze the collected data. Additionally, trustworthiness was included in the research process.

The overall findings of this study support that the participants perceived that the Upward Bound program provided valuable mechanisms that supported their success in higher education as first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students. Their perceptions were supported through their experiences gained while participating in the Upward Bound program and their recent college experiences. Three major themes emerged from the analysis of the findings of each of the four research questions. Research question one produced the following themes: 1) summer bridge programs are important to student success; 2) tutoring is a factor in college readiness; and 3) college tours expose students to other options for college.

Research question two produced the following themes: 1) self-efficacy is an important factor for student development; 2) it is very important to guide students in achieving their goals; and 3) equity is very important in higher education. Research question three produced the following themes: 1) Academic Saturdays are effective in supporting students; 2) motivational speakers are positive role models; and 3) mentoring and advising is fundamental to student success. Research question four produced the following themes: 1) implementation of new programming during Academic Saturdays; 2) the format of tutoring; and 3) Forming Self-esteem and confidence.

The results of this study led to several implications for higher education practice. The first implication to higher education suggests that without college preparatory programs, a significant number of students will not be ready to attend institutions of higher education when they finish high school. The second implication for institutions of higher education suggests limiting the options of high school graduates to explore universities before deciding which school to attend could lead students to make uninformed decisions. The third implication for higher education institutions suggests that if the number of students that graduate high school without a financial plan to be able to attend college keeps increasing, then the college enrollment for recent high school graduates will decrease. The fourth implication for institutions of higher education suggests that without the proper personal and academic mentoring, underrepresented students such as first-generation, low socio-economic students will not be able to relate to others that have faced the same challenges and have a role model who they can follow. The fifth implication for institutions of higher education

suggests that the time a student can spend before actually enrolling in college credit classes can depend significantly on the score students obtain in college admittance exams. Therefore, it is important for students to excel in these tests.

The findings of this study produced several recommendations for higher education practice. The first recommendation is that institutions of higher education should create first-year programs for first-generation, low socio-economic college going students to engage them in the college atmosphere and make them feel that they also count and are important. The second recommendation is that institutions of higher education should allocate more resources in order to send admissions recruiters to visit high schools that are located in rural places, ensuring that high school graduates have an opportunity to learn more about different colleges and universities. The third recommendation is that institutions of higher education should create alliances or partnerships with high schools to institute the importance of higher education and financial literacy early in high school students. The fourth recommendation is that institutions of higher education should encourage their faculty to participate in mentoring programs for first-generation, low socio-economic college going students. The fifth recommendation is that institutions of higher education that currently host Upward Bound programs in their campuses continue developing the programs and expand the search for talent in high schools.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Access to higher education and the social and economic benefits that come with a college degree are tremendous (Arnold, Castleman, & Wartman, 2012), although historically, these benefits have been disproportionately conferred on students from the middle and upper income classes (Castleman & Page, 2011; Perna, Chunyan, Walsh, & Ralble, 2009). The issue of college access continues to create problems for the nation's goal of having a well-educated work force (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). Disparities in income and wealth continue to grow. According to the U.S. Department of Labor (2015), enrollment in college and the completion of a degree are necessary and important to achieve upward social mobility and higher socio-economic status (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Students who earn a bachelor's degree tend to have higher incomes than those who do not pursue a college education (Johnson, 2006; Segal, 2007). Haveman and Sneed (2006) estimated that in 2010, more than 40% of jobs required a post-secondary degree.

In response to this inequity and for the purpose of creating greater parity, the federal government has distributed millions of dollars to college preparation or intervention programs (Anderson & Larson, 2009; College Board, 2013a). Access to higher education for minority and low socio-economic students has continued to gain importance, but has also created new challenges for higher education, including the need to increase additional support services and financial support to support student

success (Douglass & Thomson, 2012; The Century Foundation, 2015). In addition, stakeholders, policymakers, and higher education administrators have attempted a variety of approaches to address gaps in student services and financial aid for minorities or low socio-economic students (Castleman & Page, 2011).

Beginning with the administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson and his Great Society, a set of programs to eliminate poverty and racial discrimination, and subsequent push for the Higher Education Act of 1965; the U.S. has continued to acknowledge a disparity in educational equity (Pub. L. No. 89-239; U.S. Department of Education, 2015a). The total financial aid awarded to undergraduate students increased from \$96,385 million in 2008 to \$130,772 million in 2013, providing more students with the opportunity to afford the cost of a college education (College Board, 2013b). When combining all federal, state, institutional, and private aid in 2013; the amount of undergraduate support was a reported 33% increase from \$138,297 to \$185,094 (College Board, 2013b). A closer look at the information made available by the Department of Education suggests that over the years, the federal government has continued to create policies, laws, and specifically funded higher education programs that address and aid students from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2013, 2015b). Many of these efforts are intended to improve access to institutions of higher education. Of specific focus in this study are TRIO programs, specifically Upward Bound, which are supported by this federal funding.

A band of such programs are dubbed the *TRIO* programs, which are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide resources for

individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (Caro, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

TRIO programs are considered college transition programs -- educational programs intended to bridge the gap between high school and college (Cervantes, Creusere, McMillion, McQueen, Short, Steiner, & Webster 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These programs also are designed to increase higher education enrollment and completion of first-generation, low socio-economic college going students (Caro, 1991; Pitre & Pitre, 2009). The Pell Institute (2008) defines first-generation as neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree. Low socio-economic status is defined as having an average household annual income under \$39,563 and family size of five in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). First-generation, low socio-economic college going students are those who meet both of these criteria (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

Within the TRIO programs, Upward Bound is a pre-college initiative that offers an array of academic and cultural activities structured to encourage enrollment, retention, and degree completion from an institution of higher education (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). Students apply for and are accepted into the Upward Bound program during their ninth or tenth grade year in high school, and continue until their admission into a college or university (Knapp, Heuer and Mason, 2008; U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). These programs are typically associated with colleges and universities that provide supplemental academic instruction and tutoring, cultural enrichment activities, or counseling (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c).

The federal government allocated \$263,412,436 to Upward Bound for the 2015 fiscal year (U.S. Department of Education, 2015d). This allotment of millions of dollars illustrates how the American education system recognizes the need to develop programs and practices that increase participation in higher education across lower income and diverse students (Zaback, Carlson, & Crellin, 2012). Upward Bound programs can be hosted by two-year colleges, four-year public and private colleges and universities, and a small number are based in community organizations. The

distribution of Upward Bound projects is important because the location of the institution has direct impact on who gets to participate in the program. Upward Bound programs serve low socio-economic, future college-going students by providing program participants with support services such as financial aid counseling, training to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid or (FAFSA), academic tutoring, mentoring, instruction in core subjects, and test-prep (ACT/SAT) for college entrance (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). Figure 1 presents the distribution of Upward Bound programs nationally for 2014-2015. The figure indicates that public four-year institutions host the majority of Upward Bound projects, followed by two-year institutions.

Figure 1. Percentage Distribution of Upward Bound Projects by Sector of Host Grantees

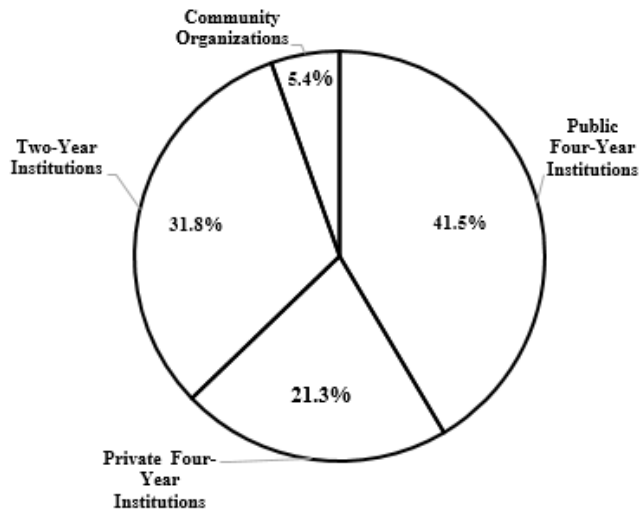


Figure 1. 2014-2015 U.S. Department of Education (2015)

Statement of the Problem

Since the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965 that sought to increase low socio-economic and minority student participation in higher education, providing access to higher education for low socio-economic students has been the objective of the U.S. Department of Education that still remains a significant challenge (Kelly, 2005; Mortenson, 2007; Pub. L. No. 89-329; O’Brien & Shedd, 2011). According to the Executive Office of the President (The White House, 2014), 82% of high-income students from families in the top fifth of the income distribution enrolled in college immediately after high school graduation in 2014. In comparison, only 52% of high school students from low socio-economic families in the bottom fifth of the income distribution enrolled in college after graduation. In addition, the national college completion rate for low socio-economic students who received Pell Grant awards was

51% in 2015 and 65% for students who were non-Pell Grant recipients (Waldman, 2015).

In evaluating data from 2010, it is clear that the disparity in college completion rates has continued over the years. For instance, college completion data showed that in 2010, 74% of high-achieving, high-income students attained a bachelor's degree within six years, as opposed to only 29% of high-achieving, low socio-economic students (Breakthrough Collaborative, 2010). According to Pitre and Pitre (2009), information reported in the *NASSP Bulletin* suggested that the need to increase post-secondary graduation rates for underrepresented high school students is apparent, and without programs like Upward Bound, greater numbers of students from underrepresented demographics would not be able to achieve post-secondary success. This need is evidenced by statistics reported by the Pell Institute (2015) that indicated that dependent individuals in the top family income quartile were over eight times as likely to obtain a bachelor's degree by age 24 as opposed to those in the bottom income quartile (77% compared to 9%).

Access to higher education continues to be an issue that is pervasive in our democratic society (Pell Institute, 2016, U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, in 2013, 45.5% of high school graduates classified as low socio-economic enrolled in post-secondary education. When comparing data from October 2008 through 2013, the percentage of college enrollment of this population had decreased from 55.9% to 45.5%, supporting that the participation of low socio-economic students is only decreasing (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2013).

It is highly important to ensure that federal programs such as Upward Bound accomplish their core initiative, which is to create increased access and participation in higher education and to increase the college completion rates of diverse groups (U.S. Department of Education, 2012, 2013). Additionally, it is imperative for secondary school officials and administrators to identify and promote programs like Upward Bound among underrepresented students in order to improve their college attainment rate, and also to promote greater equity in the higher education setting (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004; Muhlhausen, 2011).

First-generation, low socio-economic, college-going students lead these disadvantaged groups, and the largest are Hispanic. In 2016, the U.S. Census Bureau reported the Hispanic population at 56.6 million (Kelly, 2005; U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Caspar (2014) suggested that when low socio-economic, Hispanic students begin the process of applying to college, they tend to be at a disadvantage because of the lack of guidance about college they receive at home. This happens due to the fact that their parents did not attend college. This disadvantage was confirmed by the findings of the study conducted by Snyder, Dillow, and Hoffman (2008). These researchers analyzed data from the NCES and found that only 54% of first-generation, low socio-economic and minority students who were actively seeking college, actually attended an institution of higher education; compared to 84% for non-first generation and/or high-income student populations and demographics. Again, the importance of college preparatory programs and how they can change the lives of underrepresented students who lack proper guidance when applying for college is important to the

success of first-generation, low socio-economic college going students (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2015a).

The achievement of Hispanic first-generation, low socio-economic college going students continues to be a major concern, as the success and failure of these students is of national interest (Pell Institute, 2016; Pena, 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau (2015) defines Hispanics as those who classify themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories. In 2017, they are the largest growing minority group across the nation, particularly in the Southwestern U.S. In Texas, Hispanics are poised to become the *majority* by 2040 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015).

The demographics of the State of Texas are undergoing significant changes. Evidence of this is that Texas higher education has been in the spotlight since the Fifth Circuit Court outlawed the use of race and national origin in college admissions in 2013 (Domina, 2007). Studies have been conducted to evaluate the college readiness of Hispanics and other demographics to explore if college admittance should be based on academics and not race. For instance, Barnes and Slate (2011) examined the college readiness rates of Hispanic and Caucasian public high school graduates in Texas across a three-year period. This study involved 27 analyses of college readiness, and found that although the college readiness rate has increased for Hispanics, students from other demographics also increased their rates, maintaining an inequality level among demographics. Additionally, the achievement gap between Caucasian and Hispanic students was almost a 17% difference in college readiness rates in reading, with Hispanic rates at 37.04% and Whites at 53.21% (THECB, 2015a).

To address the disparity of college readiness in first-generation, low socio-economic college going students, the education system relies on programs like Upward Bound (Pub. L. No. 89-239; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Although Upward Bound has helped many students nation-wide over the years to gain access into higher education, as well as to persist and complete a college degree, it has been subjected to budget challenges (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016c). Annual budgets for Upward Bound programs have remained at *level-funding* since 2012, meaning no increase, decreasing the capabilities of the programs nation-wide to assist more low socio-economic, first-generation college students in enrolling in higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). Table 1 shows the level of Upward Bound funding between 2012 and 2015.

Table 1

TRIO FY 2012-2015 Funding

Program	FY 2012	FY 2013	FY 2014	FY 2015
Upward Bound	\$269,229,023	\$250,117,297	\$264,578,959	\$263,412,436

U.S. Department of Education (2016c)

Upward Bound programs have simultaneously been subjected to increased scrutiny due to not having enough data to support their importance and achievements (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). This lack of data is caused by a delay in the reporting of information, so the data available does not show real-time changes and impact of these programs (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). This

increased scrutiny has led to contested and controversial overtures from federal officials to evaluate these programs and their outcomes (Cahalan & Goodwin, 2012).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants about the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Of specific interests were the perceptions of former participants' preparation for college success, what services provided by the program were the most beneficial, as well as what recommendations they had to improve the services provided by the program based on their experiences. For the purpose of this study, success is defined as enrollment in a postsecondary institution in the fall after high school graduation (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015a; U.S. Department of Education, 2015b).

Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study:

1. How do former Upward Bound participants perceive their participation in the program affected their college success?
2. What are the perceptions of former Upward Bound participants of how the program supports low socio-economic students?
3. What Upward Bound programming do former participants perceive was the most effective in supporting their college success?
4. What recommendations do former Upward Bound participants have for improvements to the support services provided by the program that they

perceive will have the most effect on the success of low socio-economic Hispanic students?

Significance of the Study

The success of programs such as Upward Bound, whose purpose is to develop the skills and motivation in students necessary to complete a program of secondary education and a college degree, is measured by the U.S. Department of Education every fiscal year in order to determine the renewal of the federal funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). This funding is dependent on the analysis of the Upward Bound program objectives and determining whether they were met or not, by collecting the perceptions or experiences of the program participants (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c).

The measurable success and effectiveness of Upward Bound programs have been under much pressure from policymakers and legislatures because of the large amount of resources allocated to these programs and not having sufficient data to prove their effectiveness (LeBlanc, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 2003; Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). Educational programming has seen increasing pressure and demands have escalated to ensure that program evaluation and assessment occurs with educational organizations to enhance accountability and programmatic change efforts (Baughman, Boyd, & Franz, 2012). The importance of research and empirical evidence that illustrates how Upward Bound programs positively impact the lives of their intended population and meet federal objectives is crucial for its continuation (Booker, 2012; Caro, 1991; U.S. Department of Education, 2016a). According to Dawn (2009), “Congressional and federal agency decision

makers need evaluative information about how well federal programs are working, both to manage programs effectively and to help them decide how to allocate limited federal resources” (p. 1).

The significance of this study to institutions of higher education that serve first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic students is paramount as the number of these students who enter college, but who do not complete a degree, continues to remain high. As the NCES (2015a) has reported, students from the bottom income quartile accounted for only 14% of college graduates in 2015. This rate is very low when compared to the rate of students from the top income quartile who accounted for 60% of college graduates during the same year. The U.S. Census Bureau projected that there will be a 27% increase in Hispanic students enrolled in a post-secondary institution by 2020 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015), but a large contingency of them will not matriculate or complete a degree in post-secondary education. In 2015, only 36.6% of Hispanics aged 18-24 were reported as enrolled in a degree-granting institution (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a).

In a study conducted by Perna, Chunya, Walsh, and Ralbe (2009) that explored the status of equity for Hispanics in public higher education in Florida and Texas, the researchers found substantial inequalities for Hispanics in a variety of areas, such as enrollment in post-secondary institutions, staff and faculty representation, as well as other areas in institutions of higher education. This study explored all public higher education institutions, public 4-year predominantly White institutions (PWIs), public flagship institutions, and public 4-year Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) (Perna et al., 2009). The researchers used the annual Fall Enrollment and annual Completions

surveys of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System to collect data of undergraduate students and data from the U.S. Department of Education for faculty, administrative, and managerial employment (Perna et al., 2009).

This study is significant as it contributes to the knowledge base of how past participants in an Upward Bound program perceived it contributed to their college success. Gaining an understanding of past participant perceptions of the Upward Bound program's effectiveness, as well as what they perceive can help improve the program's development, can help lead to improvements that can support closing the educational gap for Hispanic, low socio-economic, college-going students (Booker, 2012; Pub. L. No. 89-329).

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical framework for this study is based on social cognitive theory and the component of self-efficacy. Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory proposes that individuals do not simply respond to environmental influences, but rather they actively seek and interpret information. He explains that individuals "function as contributors to their own motivation, behavior, and development with a network of reciprocally interacting influences" (p. 169). In addition, Bandura (2005) states that social cognitive theory is agent-like, has the potential to change something or someone, and helps with development and adaptation. He describes an agent as someone who intentionally influences one's functioning and life circumstances. "In this view, people are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting. They are contributors to their life circumstances not just products of them" (p. 1).

Social cognitive theory is composed of four processes of goal realization: 1) self-observation, which involves the assessment of an individual's own thoughts to notify and motivate the individual to focus his effort toward *goal setting* and influence himself by behavioral changes; 2) self-evaluation, which happens when an individual make a comparison of his or her performance at that moment against his or her desired performance; 3) self-reaction, which is the element where an individual could be motivated by the reactions of others; and 4) self-efficacy, which is the belief that goal attainment is sufficient motivation in itself, and can denote to how people have predetermined opinions about how they are able to complete certain tasks (Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 1989). Additionally, individuals' perseverance can lead them to overcome obstacles and complete the task they set their minds to.

Bandura (2005) addresses the role of self-efficacy in an individual's success, which he perceives is woven into larger social learning theory (Ashford & LeCroy, 2010) and social cognitive theory. In these theories, cognition and motivation take on the role of catalysts. Perceived self-efficacy is concerned with peoples' belief in their ability to influence events that affect their lives. This core belief is the foundation of human motivation, performance accomplishments, and emotional well-being (Bandura, 1977, 2005). According to Bandura,

Unless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little incentive to undertake activities or to persevere in the face of difficulties. Whatever other factors may serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one can make a difference by one's actions (2005, p. 179).

Self-efficacy beliefs are an important aspect of human motivation and behavior that influence the actions that can affect one's life. Bandura (1977) outlined four sources of information that individuals employ to judge their efficacy: 1) performance outcomes (performance accomplishments); 2) vicarious experiences; 3) verbal persuasion; and 4) physiological feedback (emotional arousal). Williams and Williams (2010) note, "individuals with high levels of self-efficacy approach difficult tasks as challenges to mastery rather than threats to be avoided" (p. 455).

Additionally, these self-efficacy judgments influence individuals in the way they reflect, find motivation, and how they complete tasks (Alfassi, 2003). For instance, a case study conducted by Peiffer (2015), found that supportive adults and parents could institute self-efficacy and motivation in the student to achieve his or her goals. A study conducted in 2014 explored the perceptions of African American males at community colleges in Ohio (Jones, 2014). The criteria for participation was limited to students who had been enrolled in at least one semester in one of the three community colleges studied. Additionally, this study targeted high rank administrative personnel in charge of programs that included a large number of African American students in the three community colleges in order to gain access to a larger population. In this study, the first assumption follows the tenet of Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy, and the second was that all participants answered the questions honestly and accurately. This study sought to determine whether academic achievement could be predicted from academic self-efficacy and campus environmental perceptions of community colleges in the state of Ohio. The findings of this study suggested that the personnel at these institutions should act as role

models for this demographic of students and also those in charge of pairing students with mentors should focus on increasing the self-efficacy of African American students.

Lent, Brown, and Larkin (1984) explored the self-efficacy beliefs and success of college students whose majors were in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. This study explored the interaction of four sources of self-efficacy including mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and emotional arousal with academic performance, and the prediction of the main source of self-efficacy that affects academic performance. The researchers administered a survey to measure the mathematics self-efficacy of 178 students. The findings of this study suggested that self-efficacy results were correlated with grade point averages and mathematics scores. Additionally, the researchers found that mastery experience was the main predictor for academic achievements of mathematics.

In addition, a study conducted by Zeldin and Pajares (2000) used a qualitative approach to explore the role played by self-efficacy beliefs in the academic development of a sample of 15 women involved in mathematic careers. The researchers used an interview protocol that followed the theoretical sources of self-efficacy which helped the participants of the study to explore the ways their confidence was built. The findings of this study showed that the perceived position of vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions could be stronger for women in predominant male domains than for people functioning in traditional settings.

Social cognitive theory and its component of self-efficacy is an appropriate theory to frame this study, as it supports that positive self-efficacy and self-determination can provide an environment that fosters motivation in a social setting. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants about the effectiveness of the program in supporting their preparation of college and their success. According to social cognitive theory and the tenet of perceived self-efficacy, without the proper motivation, students are less likely to achieve goals and to build self-esteem and confidence.

Summary of Methodology

This qualitative intrinsic case study sought to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants at a large, public research university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S. The study was conducted through the lens of the social constructive paradigm. Participants were purposefully selected based on their past experience, knowledge and successful completion of the Upward Bound program at the study institution. Data collection for this study was conducted through the lens of the researcher, semi-structured interviews, and documents related to the Upward Bound program. In addition, field notes and reflexive journaling were used. The researcher used triangulation of findings, member checking, and the use of rich, thick descriptions in order to establish the trustworthiness of the study. The data collected was then analyzed through the constant comparative method and using open coding techniques, the researcher was able to determine major themes.

Assumptions of the Study

The assumptions of this study were as follows:

1. Participant bias was limited by having open discussions prior to, and during the interviews to not influence the responses given.
2. Participants were able to speak about the effectiveness of the program and their success.
3. Participants were honest in their responses.

Limitations to the Study

The limitations to this study were as follows:

1. This study was limited to one Upward Bound program at one large, public research institution in Texas.
2. All participants were from only the study institution.
3. The transferability of the findings of this study is based on context and is at the discretion of individual readers.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions were used throughout this study and are operationalized as follows:

Council for Opportunity in Education – The Council for Opportunity in Education (COE) is a non-profit organization, established in 1981, dedicated to furthering the expansion of college opportunities for first-generation, low socio-economic college going students with disabilities throughout the United States.

COE's membership includes more than 1,000 colleges and universities (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016).

Federal TRIO Programs – TRIO programs were established in 1965 to ensure equal educational opportunity for all Americans, regardless of race, ethnic background, or economic circumstance (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2015).

First-Generation College Student – A student neither of whose natural or adoptive parents received a baccalaureate degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 1998).

Higher Education Act of 1965 – The Higher Education Act of 1965 was a legislative document that was signed into law on November 8, 1965 “to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance for students in post-secondary and higher education” (Kaplin & Lee, 1995).

Hispanic or Latino – Those people who classify themselves in one of the specific Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino categories “Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano, Puerto Rican, or Cuban.” Origin can be viewed as the heritage, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States (U.S. Census, 2016).

Low-Social Economic Student – The term “low-social economic or low socio-economic individual” means an individual from a family whose taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150% of an amount equal to the poverty level determined by using criteria of poverty established by the Bureau of the Census (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

Upward Bound Program – Upward Bound provides fundamental support to participants in their preparation for college entrance. The program provides opportunities for participants to succeed in their pre-college performance and ultimately in their higher education pursuits (U. S. Department of Education, 2012).

Summary

Access to higher education continues to be an issue for underrepresented high school students. This study focused specifically on low socio-economic, first-generation, Hispanic college going students. In order to assist students from this demographic, the TRIO programs were established in 1965 as outreach and student support services programs designed to provide resources for students from disadvantage backgrounds. Upward Bound is part of TRIO and it is focused on providing college preparation to high school students. The Council for Opportunity in Education and TRIO programs across the country continues to stress the importance of Upward Bound programs and is battling to maintain access and services to all students that they serve as the college graduation rates continue to decrease for low socio-economic, first-generation Hispanic college students.

This study focused on the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants concerning the effectiveness of the program and how this affected their lives as low socio-economic, first-generation Hispanic college going students. The results of this study could be used in implementing and/or making recommendations that implement effective programming for post-secondary success for this demographic.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter II presents a review of the literature that supports the challenges, as well as obstacles that Hispanic students must overcome to graduate from high school and, subsequently, the obstacles of access to institutions of higher education. Chapter III presents the methodology and research design used to conduct this intrinsic study. Chapter IV provides the findings of the study. Chapter V presents a discussion of the study's findings, implications and recommendations based on the findings for higher education practices, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter presents a review of the literature that informs this study. The following topics will be discussed: (1) evolvement of higher education for minority students; (2) growth and status of the Hispanic population in higher education; (3) access to higher education ; (4) Federal TRIO Programs; and (5) Upward Bound programs. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants about the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students.

Evolvement of Higher Education for Minority Students

Access to higher education in the U.S. has continued to evolve. In the early 1930s, higher education was available for a select group of students, generally those who were White and from an elite social class (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Historically, while educational opportunities flourished in the U.S. for the White majority, opportunities for ethnic minorities were relatively scarce; many minority students were dissuaded from pursuing a college education (Weinberg, 1977). As society has evolved, education has become a necessity for a growing population and has become more accessible to a wider composition of students.

As access to higher education has evolved, the enrollment of low and middle class students has grown to outnumber wealthy students (Cohen et al., 2014; Cohen & Kiser, 2010). There are multiple reasons for this, but of focus in this study are those related to laws and policies that have evolved through the U.S. federal government.

Between 1945 and 1975, higher education enrollment in the U.S. soared (Cohen et al., 2014). During this period, many traditional minority students, including African American, Hispanic, Asian, Pacific Islander and American Indian or Alaska Native, attended college (Cohen et al., 2014). In 1947, the Truman Commission advocated for access to higher education for minorities by signing into legislation, federal programs to provide financial aid to anyone who wanted to attend college (Vaughan, 1985). Additional financial backing came from several new programs, such as federal grants and loans that assisted minority students to attend college (Cohen et al., 2014).

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 also contributed to the enrollment of minority students in higher education. The civil rights movement regarded education as being “an ethical concern connected to the national values of democracy, freedom and equality” (Beach, 2011, p 38). This Act gave all people the right to vote, use public facilities, and obtain a job according to ability (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In support of the Civil Rights Act, the U.S. government established laws to assist people of various backgrounds and ethnicity to attend or continue in college, as well as gave minorities the ability to be part of society and attend college, as a result helping increase enrollment at higher education institutions (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Other laws that have supported access to higher education for minority students, including the Vocational Education Act of 1963 and its amendments of 1968 and 1972; the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963, which provided financial assistance for construction, rehabilitation and improvement of academic facilities; the Higher Education Act of 1965 and its amendments, which provided student loan programs; and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibited the

discrimination of accepting students based on sex (Cohen et al., 2014). The act that has significantly contributed to the access to higher education for minority students, though, is the Higher Education of 1965 and its subsequent amendments.

President Lyndon B. Johnson articulated the need for more higher education opportunities for lower and middle-income families (Pub. L. No. 89-329). During his administration and the Great Society domestic agenda, which looked to create equal opportunities for under-represented populations in the U.S., a task force was created to study the barriers for average Americans to attend and persist in higher education (Pub. L. No. 89-329). This taskforce produced a study that found that access to higher education and financial assistance was the most prevalent need for potential students. The results of this study led to the Higher Education Act of 1965 (McCants, 2003). The Higher Education Act of 1965 was a legislative act created and signed into law “to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities, it also provided assistance for students in post-secondary and higher education” (Pub. L. No. 89-329). The Higher Education Act of 1965 provided assistance for higher education institutions, with regard to smaller and less developed community colleges and underrepresented universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Since the initial passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, several iterations have been reauthorized to renew existing programs and policies. In addition, new programs and policies directed at addressing the needs for educational resources across colleges and universities, as well as financial aid for low socio-economic college going students have been implemented. Among the many student support programs created as part of the Higher Education Act of 1965 was the

establishment of the federal TRIO programs (Cervantes, Creusere, McMillion, McQueen, Short, Steiner, & Webster 2005), which are the focus of this study. All of the federal initiatives discussed above gave impetus for minorities to educate themselves.

Growth and Status of the Hispanic Population in Higher Education

According to the latest U.S. Census Bureau (2011) data, the population in the U.S. between 2000 and 2010, grew from 15.2 million to a total of 50.5 million people of Hispanic origin, which was 43% of the U.S. population during this time. The Census Bureau projects that there will be 4.8 million individuals aged 15-19 of Hispanic origin in the country by 2021. This number represents 8% of the projected total Hispanic population, which is estimated to be at 53.4 million. The projected increase in this demographic identifies a unique and important consumer target for corporations across the country, as well as for higher education entities (Greenwood, 2012). Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education has projected that there will be a significant increase in higher education enrollments of Hispanic students by 2020. In 2009 there were 254,700 Hispanic students enrolled in institutions of higher education, but this number is projected to increase to 370,700 by 2020 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

The Texas Department of State Health Services (2007) estimated that in 2007, the Hispanic population in the state of Texas was 8.7 million. The current 2017 Hispanic population in Texas is 11.8 million, showing an increase of 3 million Hispanics in Texas within the past 10 years (Texas Department of State Health Services, 2017). According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board

([THECB], 2015b), the ethnic demographics of the state of Texas had been undergoing significant changes.

The state of Texas had the second largest undergraduate student population in 2015, with more than 400,000 students enrolled in public colleges and universities, constituting an increase of almost 120,000 students since 2008 ([THECB], 2015b). Of concern, though, is that only 18% of Hispanics obtained a college degree between 2011 and 2013, a 27.6% difference when compared to those considered White (45.6%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2014). The increase in the demographics of the student population in Texas leads to concerns with how prepared higher education systems are for such a demographic change (Hainline, Gaines, Long Feather, Padilla & Terry, 2010). In addition, according to Hainline et al. (2010), enrollment rates in higher education are difficult to predict due to the extent of the factors that contribute to enrollment. These factors include the current economic situation, programs that provide financial assistance to low socio-economic students, and rates of high school graduates.

Access to Higher Education

The issue of college access continues to create problems for the nation's goal of having a well-educated work force (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012b). Haveman and Sneed (2006) estimated that in 2010, more than 40% of jobs required a post-secondary degree. Disparities in income and wealth continue to grow in the U.S. The completion of a college degree or certificates is necessary and important to achieve upward social mobility and higher socio-economic status (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). Students who earn a bachelor's degree tend to have higher incomes than those

who do not pursue a college education (Johnson, 2006; Segal, 2007). O’Keefe and Djeukeng (2010) examined economic capital (money, resources, and tangible opportunities) and cultural capital (knowledge and know-how about college), as well as social capital in relation to poor and higher income families. O’Keefe and Djeukeng posited that students from low socio-economic backgrounds are lagging behind their counterparts when it comes to enrolling, persisting, and graduating from college.

The benefits of college attendance are not limited to economic improvement. College graduates typically enjoy greater job satisfaction, better health, and a holistically improved quality of life (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak & Terenzini, 2005). Higher standards of living can also contribute to a more educated and responsible citizenry that, in turn, is less likely to develop a reliance on public assistance (Hansen, 2006). Improving college participation rates for this growing demographic could be critical to avoid a potential increased dependency on state and local economic, health, and social assistance programs (Harnisch, 2010).

In response to the need for more educated citizens in Texas, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ([THECB], 2015c) implemented in 2015, a statewide student success initiative known as 60X30TX, which focuses on increasing all forms of postsecondary attainment. Its overarching goal is to have at least 60% of Texans aged 25-34 holding a postsecondary credential or degree by 2030. The focus of the 15 year education plan is that it “strengthens the mission of excellence and quality in Texas higher education by setting goals that cannot be postponed without postponing the progress of Texas” (p. 1).

In the U.S., the largest and fastest growing sector of the college going population through 2014 was that of first-generation (both parents not having a college degree), low socio-economic (per federal standards) college-going students (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The term first-generation college student has been used in different contexts over the years. The NCES identifies first-generation college students as those whose parents have no college experience (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015a). For the purpose of this study, first-generation status is defined as neither parent having earned a bachelor's degree (Pell Institute, 2008). Low socio-economic status is defined as having an average household annual income under \$39,563 and family size of five in 2016 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b). First-generation, low socio-economic college going students are those who meet both of these criteria (U.S. Department of Education, 2016b).

Figure 2 illustrates the trend of college enrollment by socio-economic status from 1990 to 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). Data from the NCES suggested that the immediate college enrollment rate, following fall semester, for high school graduates from high-income families was higher than the rates for students from middle and low socio-economic families (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). During this 14-year span, low socio-economic students have maintained an enrollment rate below 60%, and have underperformed when compared to middle and high socio-economic students. The immediate college enrollment rate for high school graduates from high-income families (81%) in 2014, was 29% higher than the rate for those from low socio-economic families rated at 52% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b).

Figure 2. Percentage of recent high school completers who were enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges by the October immediately following high school completion

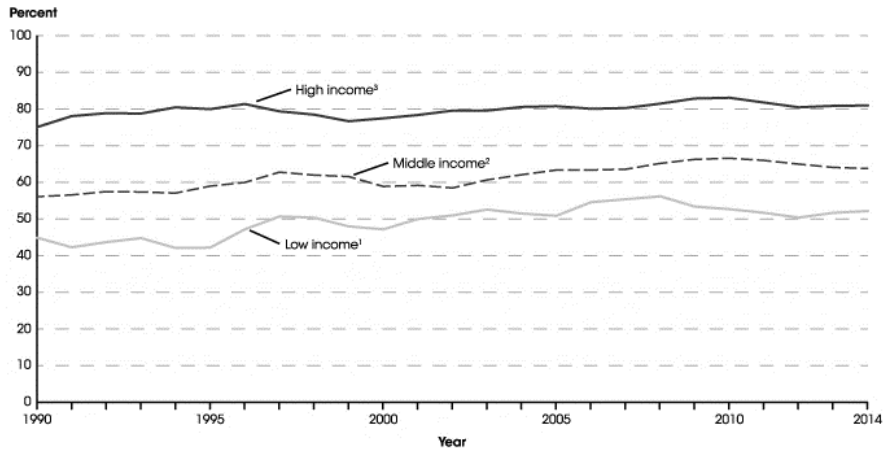


Figure 2. 1990 - 2014 National Center for Education Statistics (2016b)

The latest national information available suggests that more high school students are graduating from high school compared to previous years, but this increase in high school graduation rates is not being reflected in college enrollment (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). Data suggested that 82.3% of high school seniors graduated in 2013-2014 compared to 81% in 2012-2013 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). The high school completion rate for Hispanics was reported at 76.3% in 2013-2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015b). Also, the total college enrollment rates have actually decreased 1.9% between the Spring of 2014 and 2015 from 18,948,521 to 18,592,605 students enrolled in institutions of higher education.

National data suggested that the trend of recent high school graduates from Hispanic origin enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges has not changed measurably from 1990 to 2014 (52% to 62%), in contrast with the trends of White and Black

students, which increased from 63% to 68% and 49% to 63%, respectively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). This information is illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Percentage of recent high school graduates who were enrolled in 2- or 4-year colleges by race/ethnicity

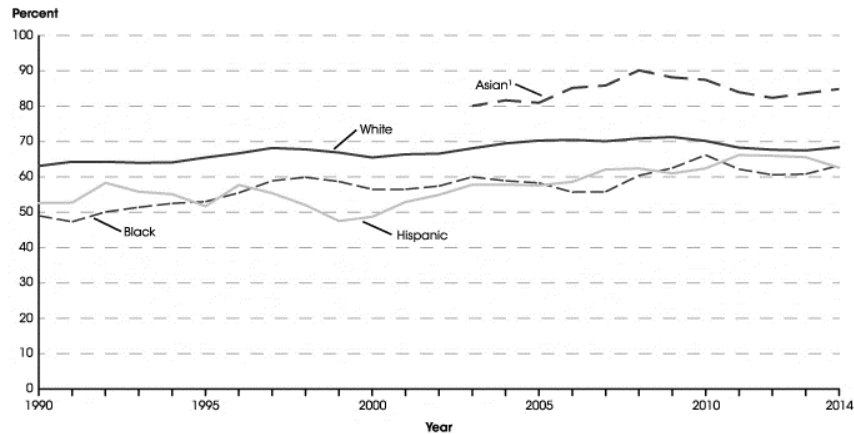


Figure 3. 1990 - 2014 National Center for Education Statistics (2016b)

The literature that was reviewed for this study reported that 52% of the 335,711 first-generation high school graduates who took the ACT exam in 2013 did not meet the college readiness benchmark. Also, the study suggested that 94% of first-generation, low socio-economic college-going students hope to earn a post-secondary degree, thereby showing a greater need for higher education support services to ensure the success of these students (American College Testing, 2013). Although there programs that help low socio-economic students to become prepare for college, a large number of low socio-economic families are unaware of them and do not use the resources these programs have to offer (Klugman & Butler, 2006). A study conducted at the University of New Hampshire by Greenwood (2012), explored some of the post-secondary programs that provided support services for Hispanics. The study

conducted focus groups that suggested that without support services programs such as Upward Bound, it would not be possible to ensure the success of low socio-economic students who may possess the talents, but often do not have the essential resources or information to guide them into participating in higher education.

Federal TRIO Programs

TRIO Programs (TRIO) are federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). According to the U.S. Department of Education's Title II on teacher quality enhancement:

TRIO includes eight programs targeted to serve and assist low socio-economic individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post-baccalaureate programs. TRIO also includes a training program for directors and staff of TRIO projects. The recipients of the grants, depending on the specific program, are institutions of higher education, public and private agencies and organizations including community-based organizations with experience in serving disadvantaged youth and secondary schools.

Combinations of such institutions, agencies, and organizations may also apply for grants (p. 92).

The Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) and its special programs originally established what became TRIO for students (McElroy & Armesto, 2003). Upward Bound, the first TRIO initiative in 1968 and managed by OEO, began with 18

piloted programs. The Upward Bound program is a pre-college program geared towards high school students between the ages of 13 and 18, who must have an academic need to be ready for post-secondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2013).

Also in 1968, Talent Search was created under the Higher Education Act. Similar to Upward Bound, Talent Search serves first-generation, low socio-economic college going students in the K-12 educational system, and helps students prepare for higher education pursuits (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). The Higher Education Act of 1965 was subsequently reauthorized, and with the 1968 Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, came the Student Support Services program. The Student Support Services program became known as the *third* in a series of educational opportunity programs. Student Support Services (SSS) rounds out the original programs named TRIO, supporting first-generation, low socio-economic college going students during their undergraduate careers (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2011). At the end of the 1960's decade, *TRIO* was the term coined to describe the three original federal outreach and student support programs (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Over the years, the TRIO programs have been expanded and improved to provide a wider range of services and to reach more students who need assistance, both in completing a high school diploma, and receiving help with access to post-secondary institutions (Council for Opportunity in Education, 2016). The next iteration of the Higher Education Act came in the form of further amendments, which in 1972, added the fourth program to the TRIO group by authorizing the Educational

Opportunity Centers (EOC). The 1976 Education Amendments authorized the Training Program for federal TRIO staff and employees. Initially, this was known as the Training Program for Special Programs Staff and Leadership Personnel.

The Education Amendments in 1986 added the sixth program, the Ronald E. McNair Post-Baccalaureate Achievement Program that prepares participants for doctoral studies. Additionally, in 1990, the U.S. Department of Education created the Upward Bound Math & Science program to address the need for specific instruction in the fields of math and science. Finally, the Omnibus Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2001 amended the Student Support Services (SSS) program to permit the use of program funds for direct financial assistance (grant aid). This grant aid assists current SSS participants who are receiving Federal Pell Grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Upward Bound Programs

The purpose of Upward Bound has been since its inception, to foster among low socio-economic youths and potential first-generation college going students enrolled in high school(s), the skills and motivation necessary for enrollment and success in post-secondary institutions of higher education (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). The goal of the program is to increase the academic performance and motivation of eligible participants so that they complete high school and successfully pursue post-secondary education program(s) (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Upward Bound programs in the U.S. remain the largest and the longest-running federal program in terms of annual funding allocations and popularity (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Funding for the original 18 piloted Upward Bound programs began with disbursement of funds to experiment with pre-college programs that served underserved populations (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004). Proposals were then submitted to the Office of Economic Opportunity from various colleges, which had common goals of developing and delivering college-based programs that were administered to high school students. The Office of Economic Opportunity received those 18 initial proposals that were later funded. Subsequently, in 1966, Upward Bound was expanded from 18 pilot programs to 220 (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004). The following year, they were moved from the Office of Economic Opportunity to the U.S. Department of Education, where they have remained.

The original pilot enrolled approximately 2,000 students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The success of the original 18 pilot programs in the recruitment of students and the interest of higher education institutions resulted in the expansion of the programs from 18 in 1965 to 220 in 1966 (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004). In this same time frame, the number of students participating increased from 2,000 to 20,000 (Cahalan & Curtin, 2004). In 2015, Upward Bound programs across the country received approximately \$300 million making it the second largest per student served program (at just under \$5,000) annually (U.S. Department of Education, 2015d).

Currently, individual Upward Bound programs typically serve between 50 and 150 participants annually (U.S. Department of Education, 2015c). Students who are chosen to participate in Upward Bound are between the ages of 13 and 18, plan to pursue a post-secondary education, and demonstrate a need for the services provided by Upward Bound to accomplish their goal (Grimard & Maddaus, 2004). Institutions

recruit students from targeted high schools in their surrounding area. The U.S. Department of Education (2016c) requires that two-thirds of the program participants must be from low socio-economic (defined as taxable income less than 150% of poverty level) backgrounds and potentially first-generation college students as it helps to reduce the risk of students not matriculating, persisting and graduating from college. First-generation means that neither of the student's parents has completed a bachelor's degree at the time of acceptance into the Upward Bound program (Pell Institute, 2008). The remaining one-third of program participants can be either low socio-economic or potentially first-generation college going students who are at risk of academic failure (U.S. Department of Education, 2016c).

To coincide with the regular school year and/or semester(s), upward bound participants receive tutoring in academics. Staff provides mentoring, as well as instruction in core subjects and test-preparation (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Upward Bound is mandated to provide an intensive summer residential and non-residential program. The summer programming is designed to expose and simulate the college going experience for high school students. In addition to the required academic year and summer programming, Upward Bound programs also have a summer *bridge* component for recent high school graduates. This usually occurs in the summer immediately following high school graduation and is intended to motivate students to enroll in a post-secondary institution in the fall. The *bridge* component consists of tuition support, housing, meals, and textbooks necessary to complete six semester hours. As of 2015, Upward Bound programs serve an estimated 61,000 participants yearly (U.S. Department of Education, 2015d).

Upward Bound Efficacy

Knapp et al., (2008) and Seftor and Calcagno (2010) suggested that participation in TRIO programs, specifically Upward Bound, has a positive impact on students' post-secondary persistence and graduation rates. These two seminal research studies were sponsored by the U.S. Department of Education. Knapp et al. (2008) followed a cohort of 220 graduates from high school that participated in an Upward Bound or Upward Bound Math & Science program. Findings from this study, which used data from The National Clearinghouse database, indicated that one consistent predictor of post-secondary enrollment is *duration* in the Upward Bound program. In addition, the researchers found that those who participated in an Upward Bound program were more likely to continue on to post-secondary education than those who participated for a shorter length of time. Additionally, the researchers suggested that the more successful students in post-secondary education were those that entered Upward Bound in their high school freshman year as opposed to those who may have entered later in their high school careers Knapp et al. (2008).

Seftor and Calcagno (2010) conducted a study that documented in detail how Upward Bound Math & Science affected the types of institutions participants attended both in level and selectivity. For this study, the researchers contacted 62 operating Upward Bound Math & Science programs in 1998 to request the list of participants and also collected data from comparison groups such as those that applied to enroll in the regular Upward Bound program in the 1990s, never participated in an Upward Bound Math & Science program, and those tracked by Mathematica as part of a national evaluation. The researchers used the *propensity modeling* system to make

sure that the non-Upward Bound Math & Science participants had similar characteristics to those Upward Bound Math & Science participants. The researcher found that Upward Bound Math & Science program participation increased the participants' persistence and completion rates in higher education.

Seftor, Mamun and Schirm (2009) made available reports showing data they obtained through a national evaluation of the Upward Bound program. The researchers' method of evaluation followed an implementation study to measure how the program was being implemented as well as a longitudinal study. Seftor, Mamun and Schirm used a random assignment design and selected 67 Upward Bound programs across the nation hosted by four-year and two-year institutions of higher education. This study took place from 1992 to 1994 and had approximately 1500 students that were randomly selected for the treatment group. An additional group of 1300 students were also randomly assigned to the control group. The findings of this study suggested that the Upward Bound program produce no effect on the post-secondary enrollment rate of the *selectivity* of the institution attended for the average applicant. The results showed that there was only 2% difference in post-secondary enrollment between the treatment and control group. This result made the researchers suggest no significant differences.

Understanding first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic students is important since their perceptions and experiences could help college preparatory programs like Upward Bound to better serve the targeted student body (Ostrove & Long, 2007). Federally funded programs are in constant evaluation in order to determine their renewal eligibility and to continuously improve them. Furthermore,

systems that provide adequate support to increase student success must be constantly evaluated since the majority of them are primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Education and, in the event a program no longer meets renewal eligibility, those funds should be allocated to other federally funded programs (Council of Opportunity in Education, 2016). Tierney, Colyar, and Corwin (2005) suggest that providing access to college for all qualified individuals has long been considered a critical component of a strong public higher education system, and is necessary for a strong and viable individual state and national economy.

Over the years, studies have shown that those students that participated in an Upward Bound program have achieved college success which relates to the purpose of the program that is to develop the skills and motivation in students necessary to complete a program of secondary education and a college degree; however, there clearly appear to be gaps in the overall consensus from legislators and practitioners on the overarching positive degree of effectiveness these programs produce (e.g., LeBlanc, 2003; McElroy & Armesto, 2003). These gaps present themselves in the form of questions regarding how much money should be allocated to these programs. The U.S. Department of Education is the entity that oversees and administers these programs, but has not required studies to identify best practices of individual programs across the U.S.. In 2008, as part of the re-authorization of the Higher Education Act of 1965, the U.S. legislature required that TRIO programs, including Upward Bound, participate in national surveys to identify best practices that correlate to higher education persistence and completion (U.S. Department of Education, 2016c).

Summary

The focus of student success in minority students has been placed on the number students enrolled in institutions of higher education. Majority of the time students that lack of the access to higher education are classified as first-generation, low socio-economic. In order to reduce the lack of access to higher education for minority students, the U.S. Department of Education created a series of federal outreach and student services programs designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantage backgrounds and they were name as TRIO (Pub. L. No. 89-239). Within TRIO, Upward Bound is considered a college transition program that serve first-generation, low socio-economic students and its purpose is to bridge the gap between high school and college (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). This study focuses on first-generation, low socio-economic students Hispanic college going students since population data shows that the representation of Hispanics in higher education is growing. Therefore, the impact of reduced federal funding for programs like Upward Bound could close the doors to opportunities for equal educational access for first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students. The Council for Opportunity in Education and TRIO programs across the country, continue to stress the importance of Upward Bound programs, and are lobbying to maintain access and services for all the students that they serve. Chapter III discusses the methodology and research design that this study utilized including data collection, data analysis and a discussion of steps to assure trustworthiness.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III presents the methodology and research design used to conduct this study. The topics presented in this chapter include: 1) restatement of the purpose of the study; 2) restatement of the research questions; 3) research design; 4) data collection; 5) data analysis; 6) trustworthiness of the study; and 7) the context of the study and the researcher.

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants about the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Of specific interest in this study were the perceptions of former participants and how their participation in the program affected their college success, what services provided by the program were the most beneficial or detrimental to their success, and what recommendations they have to improve the services provided by the program. For the purpose of this study, success was defined as enrollment in a postsecondary institution in the fall after high school graduation (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015a; U.S. Department of Education, 2015e).

Restatement of the Research Questions

The following four research questions guided the study:

1. How do former Upward Bound participants perceive their participation in the program affected their college success?

2. What are the perceptions of former Upward Bound participants about how the program supports low socio-economic students?
3. What Upward Bound programming do former participants perceive was the most effective in supporting their college success?
4. What recommendations do former Upward Bound participants have for improvements to the support services provided by the program that they perceive will have the most effect on the success of low socio-economic Hispanic students?

Research Design

Establishing the Paradigm

Qualitative research explores the meanings individuals or groups give to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2014), and attempts to understand how people interpret, construct, and attribute meaning to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). Qualitative researchers use a meaningful inductive style, starting with specific themes and then drilling down to general themes as they make interpretations of the data collected (Creswell, 2014). In addition, they collect and conduct research at a field site where the participants actually experienced the issue being studied (Creswell, 2014). Qualitative inquiry assists a researcher in gaining access to the perceptions and interpretations of others in a particular context in order to make meaning out of those perceptions (Glesne, 2011).

In qualitative research, the researcher's paradigm is the assumptions he or she holds about the construction of knowledge (Creswell, 2013). A paradigm is a

perspective, with assumptions that directly or indirectly provide a method for a reader and the researcher to understand complex situations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

According to Guba (1990), paradigms are basic belief systems or worldviews that give a researcher a focus or starting point on what inquiry is necessary and how it is to be practiced; the paradigm guides or drives a study (Lincoln & Guba, 1994). According to Creswell (2013), the paradigm serves as an approach for solving or understanding a problem. Researchers must present their own perception of reality and background in their research, allowing a framework for the reader to use in understanding the researcher's interpretation of the multiple realities examined and, ultimately, the resulting combined reality (Creswell, 2013). Creswell (2014) notes that every researcher brings a worldview to inquiries that shape the strategy for the research design, as well as the specific research methods that translate this approach into practice.

Paradigms also carry threads that serve as a foundation for an entire research process, such as epistemology (the nature of knowledge), ontology (the nature of reality), and methodology (how we gain knowledge of the world) (Krauss, 2005). A consideration of these threads is essential in any discussion about the nature of social science research because of the importance of these elements as they control the conduct of an inquiry (Popkewitz, Tabachnick, & Zeichner, 1979). The paradigm chosen for a research study influences the research process and the choices made in establishing the methods used, as well as reflects the researcher's ontology and any knowledge that is attained through the research collection (Creswell, 2013).

Consequently, varying interpretations and perceptions of an inquiry help the reader

make more meaningful interpretations of a phenomenon or an event (Creswell, 2014; Glesne, 2011). This study sought to construct knowledge of multiple former Upward Bound participants by constructing the meaning of their perceptions and experiences within an Upward Bound program regarding its effectiveness in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students.

There are several paradigms in qualitative research, including post-positivism, positivism, interpretivism, pragmatism, and constructivism. The post-positivism paradigm emphasizes meaning and the creation of new knowledge, with its main characteristic being research is broad and not specialized (Ryan, 2006). The positivism worldview assumes that a reality exists and that it can be observed, is stable, and is measurable (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe interpretative paradigms in qualitative research as those that perceive only one reality that can be interpreted in multiple ways. Pragmatism in qualitative research suggests thinking of all the practical consequences that come after the acceptance of a belief (Rylander, 2010). The constructivist paradigm assumes that multiple realities exist that must be studied holistically (Creswell, 2003), and this is the paradigm that was used to conduct this study.

Multiple realities can be studied individually and then compared to create a generalization (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1994) identify constructivism as the major paradigm that frames social science research. The five philosophical and epistemological assumptions of constructivism are: 1) there is a factual world that sets limits to what we can encounter, but reality is local and multiple realities exist; 2) the structure of the world is shaped in the mind through contact with

the world and is based on interpretation; symbols are products of culture and they are used to build reality; 3) the mind makes symbols by perceiving and translating the world; 4) human thought is imaginative and develops out of perception, sensory experiences, and social association; and 5) meaning is a result of an interpretive and dependable process of the knowers' experiences and understanding (Cobb, 1994; Jonassen, 1992; Phillips, 1995). Since this study was based on the philosophical assumption that an objective reality does not exist, constructivism was the appropriate paradigm through which to conduct this study as it assumes reality is socially constructed (Merriam, 2009).

Type of Study

Qualitative research seeks to determine the participants' and researcher's understanding of a complex problem through an inductive and emerging process (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It utilizes a natural approach that seeks to understand the phenomena in a context-specific, or real-world setting, where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2002). Further, qualitative research is "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4).

Creswell (2013) identifies five approaches to qualitative research that can be used to answer the research questions of a study: 1) narrative study, 2) phenomenology, 3) grounded theory, 4) ethnography, and 5) case study. Creswell (2014) describes the narrative approach as analyzing the story of one or more participants to determine the underlying reality. In phenomenology research, differing

forms are used to study a particular phenomenon. The phenomenological approach describes the lived experiences of a phenomenon (Langdrige, 2007). Grounded theory research seeks to formulate a theory regarding a process. Strauss and Corbin (1994) define grounded theory as “a general methodology, a way of thinking about and conceptualizing data” (p. 275). An ethnographic study looks at shared patterns of behaviors that may be found in grounded studies or large groups that share an ethnicity. Case study research explores real life situations and can be conducted on multiple sources (Creswell, 1998).

Qualitative case studies are units of analysis that are subsequently analyzed (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Units of analysis can range from concrete (e.g., individuals, organizations, schools, and partnerships) to the more abstract (e.g., communities, relationships, decisions, and projects) (Yin, 2009). The case study research design is found in many fields, especially evaluation, in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case (Creswell, 2014). These cases can be a program, an event, an activity, or a process that involves one or more individuals (Creswell, 2014). In addition, case studies are bound by time and activity, and researchers can collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). The case study approach allows for an understanding of complex social phenomenon (Yin, 2009). It is also an appropriate research design to use when the research is focused on questions of *how* or *why*, as well as when the researcher has an interest in “insight, discovery, and interpretation rather than hypothesis testing” (Merriam, 1998, p. 10), as in this study.

Stake (1995) identifies three types of case studies: 1) intrinsic, 2) instrumental, and 3) collective. Within an intrinsic case study, a particular case is the focus as it is of primary interest. An instrumental case study attempts to understand a theoretical question or problem better, and is used when a greater insight and understanding of the theoretical basis of a practice or issue is the intent of the study (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). A collective case study is one that uses multiple cases that are being examined by the researcher (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2012). Based on the purpose of the study and the research questions, it was conducted using an intrinsic case study approach in order to develop an in-depth analysis of the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants. The intrinsic case study research design provided the researcher with the opportunity to identify unique characteristics of the Upward Bound program at the study institution (Merriam, 2009).

Study Setting

The setting of this study was at a large, public, four-year research university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S. (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.). According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ([THECB], 2015a), the institution had over 30,000 students in the Fall 2015 semester, and had a combined enrollment of just over 50% first-generation, low socioeconomic students. The study institution has a large Hispanic population at 24% (College Board, 2017). The study institution has had a federal TRIO Upward Bound program since 1967 (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Participants

Qualitative inquiry typically focuses on relatively small samples, yet even simple cases can be used to discover, capture, present, and preserve the stories of organizations, programs, communities, and families (Patton, 2015). Qualitative research is also pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in people's lived or shared experiences (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). The participants in this study were 10 former Upward Bound participants who were chosen based on their successful completion of the Upward Bound requirements and who have persisted in college. According to Crouch and McKenzie (2006), "this will facilitate the researcher's close association with the respondents, and enhance the validity of fine-grained, in-depth inquiry in naturalistic settings" (p. 1).

Inclusion criteria for the study's participants were that they were currently enrolled at the study institution and had not completed an undergraduate degree at the time of this study. Further inclusion criteria were that the participants are Hispanic and first-generation, as well as considered low socio-economic as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. The U.S. Department of Education defines first-generation and low socio-economic college students as those who neither parent has a college degree, and who fall below the federal poverty guidelines (Department of Labor, 2015).

Sampling

Merriam (2009) describes a sample as the unit of analysis that helps the researcher discover more about a case or phenomenon being studied. Lincoln and Guba (1985) claim that sampling is done with the purpose of the study in mind, in

order to collect all of the information that is pertinent to a particular study. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. Purposive sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling strategy based on a specific purpose rather than a random one (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003). Purposive sampling in qualitative research is a tool to find participants that can provide specific information, and from whom the researcher can learn about issues of main importance to the purpose of the research (Merriam, 2009).

Data Collection

Data collection is the process in which the researcher questions, observes, and reviews the information gathered from the population sample determined by the interests of the researcher (Merriam, 2009); and involves many facets, with differing processes that when combined can be both effective and informative (Creswell, 2013). There are multiple instruments that can be used to collect data in qualitative research, including the researcher, interviews, observations, field notes, and documents. The researcher is considered the primary data collection instrument in a qualitative study due to his or her involvement in the process, his or her nearness to the setting being studied (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Orcher, 2005), and that he or she is the lens through which all data is collected and analyzed.

Interviews are also a primary data collection instrument in qualitative research. The qualitative research interview is an attempt for the researcher to obtain information about the topic of study from the participants (Creswell, 2014). The interview process has a structure, purpose, and a systematic approach that lends itself to the *narrowing* or *drilling down* of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Interviews

can be conducted through a structured, semi-structured, or an unstructured process, which can have varying stages. Structured interviews are administered with a predetermined list of questions (Foddy, 1993; Kvale, 1996). In the structured interview format, there are no variations in the questions asked and no opportunities for probing on the participant's responses (Kvale, 1996). The semi-structured interview is comprised of key questions that not only help define the area to be explored, but also allow the researcher and participant to pursue an idea or response in more detail as needed (Foddy, 1993; Kvale, 1996). The unstructured interview has limited organization and does not follow any preconceived set of questions (Kvale, 1996). Qualitative interviews are a good tool to use for data collection when the participants cannot be directly observed. In addition they allow the participants to provide historical data and the researcher has control over the line of questioning (Foddy, 1993; Kvale, 1996). Qualitative interviews do have some limitations, including that participants may have difficulty verbalizing their responses, the researcher's presence may influence how the participants respond, or the information received is filtered through the viewpoints of the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Semi-structured interviews are a primary data collection method used in social science and qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews follow a well-developed protocol, but are designed to be flexible. Interview questions tend to be a mixture of structured and semi-structured questions (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). The interviews focus on the issues being explored and the wording of the questions and their order may be pre-determined; however, the questions are structured as open-ended in order to gather as much data and information from the participants as

possible (Merriam, 2009). This semi-structured process allows for a researcher to pose questions, evaluate them and subsequently follow-up with participants to either clarify and/or seek clarification on responses (Creswell, 2013).

Observations are another data collection instrument that can be used in qualitative research. Creswell (2014) states qualitative observation happens "when the researcher takes field notes on the behavior and activities of individuals at the research site" (p. 189). In a more structured practice of observation, the researcher records a detailed, non-judgmental, concrete description of what was observed including artifacts, non-verbal communications, events, and behaviors at the research setting (Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

Field notes are also a data collection tool used in qualitative research. Field notes are a description of observations made at the study setting and during the interview (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Erlandson (1993) perceives that taking field notes and making observations during the interview process is important as they help to provide insight to the decisions made by the researcher. They also provide readers with a background and understanding into the process that lead to the findings of the study. In addition to field notes, researchers use reflexive journaling during the data collection process to document any biases or opinions they may have during the processes. A reflexive journal is a type of diary where a researcher makes regular entries during the data collection phase reflecting on each interview session (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This flexibility or *reflective* style of journaling during the data collection process is used to record observations while providing personal credibility for a study through the researcher's observations (Erlandson, 1993).

Along with semi-structured interviews, observations, and field notes; relevant documents related to the study topic are useful instruments for data collection (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). Documents that could be used are primarily institutional and include such items as the policies and procedures for the institution or specific programs, such as for the Upward Bound program at the study institution for this study. These documents can provide richness to the data since in the hands of a skillful investigator, useful data from the documents can support the findings (Merriam, 2009).

The instruments used for data collection in this study included the lens of the researcher, semi-structured interviews, field notes, and documents. The researcher developed the semi-structured interview protocol for the study following the pattern described by Creswell (2014), as well as Jacob and Furgerson (2012), which stress that the use of a proper protocol is required when conducting interviews. Establishing a protocol guide ensures the use of a consistent interview format for each individual and a follow-up necessitated for clarity purposes. The semi-structured interviews and follow-up protocol guide for this study consisted of an introduction, purpose of study, interview structure, open-ended questioning, and closing statements regarding any follow-up if required and a thank-you statement (Creswell, 2013). To prepare for the interviews and possible follow-ups, a number of mock sessions were conducted with current Upward Bound students. The purpose of conducting mock sessions was to test the validity, flow of the questions to be asked, and the researcher's knowledge of the questions (Mack & Woodsong, 2005).

Field notes were also used as a data collection tool in this study and were used to ensure accuracy of the data collected. The researcher took field notes when in the natural setting of the participants and during the interviews. The researcher also kept a reflexive journal, which was used to record his reflection of the session after each interview. Observations made during interviews were recorded in the field notes and the reflexive journal.

In order to collect and transcribe the data accurately, the interviews were recorded using an audio recording device after obtaining permission from the participants. Both Creswell (2014) and Merriam (2009) suggest the use of audio recording devices when conducting interviews. Recording the interviews and taking notes during the interviews have disadvantages contributing to inaccuracies (Merriam, 2009); therefore, care was taken to make sure data were collected accurately by reviewing transcripts multiple times and crosschecking.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is the process of interpreting the data and resulting themes to gain an understanding of the situation or topic being studied (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 1998). The data is taken apart and put back together to formulate categories and themes (Stake, 1995). It is through the analysis of the data that themes are formed and from which the researcher interprets the findings (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009). In qualitative research, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously; data analysis begins with data collection and then becomes intensified after all of the data are collected (Merriam, 2009). This is due to the

emergent nature of qualitative research, which predisposes some levels of data analysis to happen while the process of data collection is in progress (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell (2009) suggests that there are six steps that must be considered when analyzing qualitative data: 1) the data must be organized prior to analysis; 2) the data needs to be assessed to gain a better understanding of the information; 3) the data needs to be analyzed following specific theoretical approaches and methods; 4) the setting of the study and the participants; as well as the identified themes from the coding process must be described; 5) the data must be reported; and 6) the researcher must interpret the complete meaning of the data.

The process of data analysis in qualitative research begins with organizing the data. After organizing the data, the researcher begins reading through the data and taking notes to begin the process of identifying major themes and organizing ideas (Creswell, 2014). Due to the nature of data collected during qualitative research being *thick* (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012), researchers must “aggregate data into a small number of themes” (Creswell, 2014, p. 195), allowing them to make sense of the data (Merriam, 2009). Data analysis methods used to this this may include taking and summarizing field notes, identifying and counting codes, identifying and relating categories as well as relating them the contextual framework, and presenting the data (Creswell, 2013). These strategies are often interrelated and lead towards the display of the data for comparison.

There are various qualitative analysis strategies that can be used to analyze and interpret qualitative data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014). The constant

comparison method is a data analysis technique in which any newly collected data is compared with previous data that was collected (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). It is described as a process of taking the information obtained as a study progresses, and analyzing that information to further shape the study (Creswell, 2013). Using the constant comparative method, a researcher determines major themes or chunks found in the data using open coding (Creswell, 2013). To synthesize the data, open coding is used to name and classify themes to determine differences and similarities regarding participants' experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Aligning participants' statements can help provide a deeper understanding of their experiences. This process is identified as horizontalization and is used to place data into emerging themes or categories of meaning (Creswell, 2013). This allows researchers to develop the textural descriptions about what participants' experienced regarding the topic of study, and also the structural description of how it was experienced (Creswell).

Following identifying the textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences, axial coding is used to make connections between themes of data identified in open coding based on similarities or differences (Creswell, 2013; Corbin & Strauss, 2007). After constantly comparing the data and subsequently coding it through the processes of open and axial coding, the researcher interprets and represents the data to demonstrate the findings to answer the research questions (Creswell, 2014).

Trustworthiness of the Study

Creswell (2013) describes trustworthiness or validation of a study as the accuracy of its findings and the methods of the collection of data. Merriam (2009)

refers to trustworthiness in a qualitative research study as the rigor employed in the study and describes it as similar to validity and reliability methods used in quantitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the trustworthiness of qualitative research studies can be developed by incorporating strategies to ensure the findings are credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable.

Credibility in qualitative research refers to the congruence of the findings with reality (Merriam, 2009), and is defined as the level of confidence the participants and the readers have in the study and its resulting findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility is also described as whether the study participants' perceptions and answers mesh with the researcher's portrayal of them (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). A strategy that can be used to establish the credibility of a qualitative research study is member checking. Member checking involves allowing participants to review their interview transcripts to verify their accuracy and to make any needed changes (Creswell, 2014). Another strategy to ensure the credibility of a qualitative study is having prolonged interactions with the participants, in order establish a rapport and trust (Creswell, 2013). In addition, the triangulation of data sources adds to the credibility of a study. Triangulation is a method used to establish the validity of the answers to the research questions by using multiple data sources to cross verify the findings from two or more sources (Patton, 2015). In this study, the data sources that were triangulated were the interview transcripts, field notes, and documents (Upward Bound internal documents). The goal of triangulation is not to arrive at consistency across the data sources, but to discover any inconsistencies as these are viewed as opportunities to uncover deeper meaning in the data.

Transferability in a qualitative study means that the findings of the research can be applicable to other situations and populations if the contexts are similar (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Strategies to ensure that the findings of a qualitative study are transferrable include the use of explicit, detailed descriptions of the situation under study and of the methodology of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). According to Lincoln and Guba, this is accomplished by the researcher providing rich, thick descriptions, which allow readers to compare the findings to situations they are more familiar with. The degree of transferability of the research is dependent on the reader and his or her context.

Dependability refers to how well a researcher can track procedures used to collect data (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). In any research effort, evidence must be sufficient, representative, accurate, authoritative, and relevant (Booth, Colomb, & Williams, 1995). The dependability of the research study can be enriched by the researcher taking field notes, audio recording participant interviews, transcribing the recordings, and allowing for member checking (Creswell, 2013). The researcher used reflexive journaling throughout the research process, which strengthened the dependability of the study as it increased its trustworthiness by ensuring neutrality of the findings and helped to monitor and maintain researcher bias (Creswell, 2013).

Confirmability is defined as the means used to ensure the research is objective, and the researcher's biases and preferences have limited influence on the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To ensure that the results and findings are supported by the data and not influenced by the researcher's personal biases, a reflexive journal can be used to maintain a detailed journal of the interviews throughout the study to document

how each decision in the analysis of the findings was made (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Peer debriefing is also a strategy that can be used to ensure the confirmability of the study's findings. This process uses another person to review and ask questions about the study so that the accounts of the study will resonate with someone other than the researcher (Fitzgerald, Sanders, & Worthen, 2011).

Context of the Study and the Researcher

Context of the Study

This study was conducted at a large, public, four-year research university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S. The study institution is located in a state that has a large population of Hispanics, but does not have the same large representation enrolled at the institution. According to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ([THECB], 2015a), the study institution had an annual budget of \$648 million and an enrollment of 34,843 students in 2015. Student enrollments during this time period was 67% Anglo, 23% Hispanic, 8% African American, and 2% other. The most recent data in 2017 suggested that the total student undergraduate population was 29,963, with 24% Hispanic (College Board, 2017).

Upward Bound has been sponsored by this institution for over 49 years, and has been part of student services, outreach, and institutional diversity initiatives over those years. The study institution's Upward Bound program recruits and accepts 220 students annually, and of those 220 students, approximately 75% are Hispanic, 20% are Anglo, and 5% are African American. The goals and objectives of the Upward Bound program are to assist low socio-economic and potential first-generation college-going students with preparation and access to institutions of higher education.

First-generation, low socio-economic students, as defined by the U.S. Department of Education, are students neither of whose parents have a college degree and who fall below the federal guidelines of poverty level (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). The ultimate goal of the Upward Bound program is to have students matriculate, persist, and graduate with a college degree. The large, geographically rural area that is served by the study institution has a high rate of low socio-economic, first-generation college-going students who are also Hispanic, and who are representative of a high percentage of Upward Bound students served (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015).

Context of the Researcher

Qualitative research is conducted through the lens of the researcher, who is the primary investigative instrument. The researcher interprets the perceptions of participants (Creswell, 2014). This is important to note because any training and context of background that the researcher brings to the research is bound to prove influential toward the findings of a study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

I am of Hispanic background and the institution where the study was conducted currently employs me. I hold a Bachelor of Arts in Spanish, with a minor in Marketing; and a master's degree in education, with an emphasis in instructional technology. I also hold a mid-management certification as a Texas administrator, a lifetime teacher's certificate from the state of Texas, along with numerous other educational certifications. At the time of this study I was the managing director of the Upward Bound program at the study institution. I have firsthand knowledge of the grant writing process, federal regulations mandated from the U.S. Department of Education, and student information. My prior experience and background include K-

12 teaching and administration, as well as being a staff member in administration at a large, four-year public research university in Texas. I have also written for and have been awarded four federal grants from the U.S. Department of Education that were in excess of \$5.9 million dollars.

Prior to my career in K-12, I was a United States Marine with many awards, commendations, humanitarian relief efforts around the world, and a combat veteran. I am also a former Upward Bound participant of this same program at the study institution. In addition, I was a first-generation, low socio-economic college-going student, who required the services of a program like Upward Bound to provide me access and familiarity to higher education.

This research study was conducted through my lens of current and prior knowledge, as well as my experience with this program, having served for six years as the Managing Director for the TRIO Programs at the study institution. During this time, two Upward Bound Math and Science (UBMS) programs have been established. Additionally, I have participated in the development of a new TRIO Program at the institution, Student Support Services.

Summary

The intent of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to gain insight from former Upward Bound participants' perspectives and experience about what effective mechanisms were used by the program that have positively impacted their persistence in higher education. Data collection used in this study included the lens of the researcher, semi-structured interviews of purposively selected participants, field notes,

and documents. The researcher utilized a reflective journal as a means to gather information from participants that was observed but not recorded on the questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed through the use of the constant comparative method, and open and axial coding. The trustworthiness of the study was ensured through reflexive journaling, member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and rich, thick descriptions that allowed readers to interpret the participants' perceptions and experiences of the Upward Bound program at the study institution.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. The topics that will be discussed include: 1) a summary of the research design; 2) study institution and participant profiles; and 3) the findings of this study. The purpose of this qualitative intrinsic case study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants concerning the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Of specific interests were the perceptions of former participants' preparation for college success, what services provided by the program were the most beneficial or detrimental, as well as what recommendations they had to improve the services provided by the program, based on their experiences. For the purposes of this study, success was defined as enrollment in a postsecondary institution in the fall after high school graduation and completion of post-secondary education in the form of a bachelor's degree within six years (National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2015a; U.S. Department of Education, 2015b).

The following four research questions guided the study:

1. How do former Upward Bound participants perceive their participation in the program affected their college success?
2. What are the perceptions of former Upward Bound participants of how the program supports low socio-economic students?
3. What Upward Bound programming do former participants perceive was the most effective in supporting their college success?

4. What recommendations do former Upward Bound participants have for improvements to the support services provided by the program that they perceive will have the most effect on the success of low socio-economic Hispanic students?

Summary of the Research Design

This qualitative research study was conducted through the lens of constructivist inquiry, with the intent of obtaining the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants and construct meaning among their personal experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An intrinsic case study research design was used to concentrate on the perceptions and experiences of the participants of the effectiveness of the Upward Bound program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students (Creswell, 2014). The theoretical framework for this study was based on social cognitive theory and the tenet of self-efficacy. Bandura's (1999) social cognitive theory proposes that individuals do not simply respond to environmental influences, but rather they actively seek and interpret information. Additionally, Bandura (2005) described the social cognitive theory as an agent-like which has the potential to change something or someone and helps with development and adaptation. The tenet of self-efficacy states that goal attainment is sufficient motivation in itself, and can denote to how people have predetermined opinions about how they are able to complete certain tasks (Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 1989).

Participant Selection

Before collecting data for this study, approval was sought from the Texas Tech University Human Subjects Review Board. After approval was received, the study

began (see Appendix A). The second step was to contact the Executive Administrative Associate to the Senior Vice President and Vice Provost, requesting her assistance by serving as the gatekeeper of this study. An email introducing the study and the participant inclusion criteria was sent to her (see Appendix B). In this same email, an email template for potential participants (see Appendix C), and a consent form for potential participants that outlined the specific details of the study (see Appendix D) were attached. Additionally, the gatekeeper was provided with a list of tasks that she would be requested to do.

Inclusion criteria for the study's participants were that they were currently enrolled at the study institution and had not completed an undergraduate degree at the time of the study. Further inclusion criteria were that the participants were Hispanic and first-generation, as well as considered low socio-economic as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. Once communication was received from the Executive Administrative Associate to the Senior Vice President and Vice Provost, accepting the role of gatekeeper, she was asked to send the study information to prior participants in the study institution's Upward Bound program who she perceived met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study. The information sent included the invitation to participate and the consent form that provided the details of the study. In addition, the contact information of the researcher was provided so that potential participants who had any questions or wanted to volunteer to participate in the study could directly contact the researcher. The gatekeeper identified 25 participants who met the inclusion criteria to participate in the study and proceeded to email them. Of the 25 eligible participants, 13 contacted the researcher to express their interest in the study

and discuss their availability. From this pool of participants only 10 of them agreed to participate. The three participants that did not agree to participate declined their participation due to scheduling conflicts. Next, interview dates and times were arranged through email with all the participants, and interviews were conducted at the study institution library. All of the participants received the interview guide at least one week prior to their scheduled interview. This guide contained the a copy of the consent form (see Appendix D) which was to be signed prior to beginning the interview as well as the interview questions (see Appendix E).

Data Collection

Data collection for this intrinsic case study occurred primarily through the lens of the researcher, as well as through semi-structured face-to-face interviews, field notes, reflexive journaling, and documents from the Upward Bound program such as annual performance reports, student data, and program reports. A semi-structured process for interviewing allowed the researcher to gather additional notes and information not specifically stated in the questions. Using a semi-structured process helped the researcher in achieving optimum use of the time set for the interviews and keeping the interviews focus on the line of action set by the researcher (Creswell, 2013).

After potential participants contacted the researcher to express their interest and discuss their availability, the researcher arranged a convenient day, time, and location for the interview, based on the preference of the participants. Each interview lasted no more than 60 minutes and took place in a quiet, comfortable, and non-interruptive environment at the library of the study institution library. This setting

allowed the researcher to establish a positive rapport with participants and lent itself to gaining their trust (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007).

Prior to beginning any interview, the researcher ensured the participant had signed the consent form and requested the participants' permission to audio record the interview. If permission for audio recording was not granted, the researcher would take detailed notes. However, 100% of the study participants granted permission to be audio recorded. Interview questions began with basic introductions, setting of the study, demographic background of the participants, which then led into the opinions and perceptions about Upward Bound programming. Open-ended questions were asked in an attempt to find similar categories. These categories were later used to code major topics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Prior to ending any interview, the researcher requested the participants' permission to be contacted for a follow-up phone call in order to clarify or add information. All 10 participants agreed to be contacted for a follow-up phone call. Within two weeks of the interview, participants were provided with a complete transcript of the interview to verify the information provided, and the follow-up phone call was conducted to offer an opportunity to clarify any information provided during the interview and/or to provide additional information perceived to be pertinent to the research study.

Data Analysis

All data analysis for this research study was conducted manually without the assistance of a computer software program. The constant comparative method was used to analyze the data collected to provide insight, understanding, and direction

using the coding and all other information collected during the interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The researcher constantly compared the information obtained from new interviews with previous ones. All the data obtained including information from transcriptions and field notes was continuously compared.

During the data analysis process, the researcher formed a more thorough understanding of the data collected. In order to form this understanding, the researcher compiled the responses to the main questions of the interviews, as well as some demographical information. Then, the researcher narrowed the focus of the study into the four research questions and compiled short responses to these. Once, the researcher formed understanding, the data was coded using open coding. Using line-by-line evaluation, the researcher reviewed the interview transcripts (Creswell, 2014).

All the data, including interview recordings, interview transcripts, field notes, and Upward Bound reports was evaluated multiple times which helped to assign the data in general groups and united into broad categories (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The general groups were then analyzed by the researcher to discover distinct themes and categories (Creswell, 2014). Finally, the data obtained from the interviews, field notes and Upward Bound reports were triangulated to certify the establishment of valid and comprehensive themes.

Study Institution and Participant Profiles

Study Institution Profile

The setting of this study was a large, public, four-year, highest research-intensive university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S. The study institution has a large Hispanic population. According to College Board (2017), the

study institution's total student undergraduate population was 29,963, of which 24% were Hispanic. The study institution has had a federal TRIO Upward Bound program since 1967, making this institution an ideal setting for the study because of the longevity of its Upward Bound program.

Participant Profiles

The participants in this study were 10 prior Upward Bound participants who were current students at the study institution. All of them identified as first-generation, low socio-economic status, which was an inclusion criteria for their participation in the study. Their profiles follow:

Adrienne was a junior majoring in Architecture. Her cumulative GPA was 2.8. Adrienne participated in Upward Bound for three years and graduated from the program in 2013. She enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after her high school graduation, and she is expected to graduate from college in 2017.

Betty was a sophomore majoring in Kinesiology. Her cumulative GPA was 3.2. Betty participated in Upward Bound for three years and graduated from the program in 2016. She enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after her high school graduation, and she is expected to graduate from college in 2019.

Fred was a sophomore majoring in Kinesiology at the time of this study. His cumulative GPA was 3.4. Fred participated in Upward Bound for three years and graduated from the program in 2015. He enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after his high school graduation, and he is expected to graduate from college in 2018.

Logan was a freshman majoring in Business Administration at the time of this study. His cumulative GPA was 3.6. Logan participated in Upward Bound for four years and graduated from the program in 2016. He enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after his high school graduation, and he is expected to graduate from college in 2020.

Marie was a junior majoring in Biochemistry at the time of this study. Her cumulative GPA was 3.3. Marie participated in Upward Bound for three years and graduated from the program in 2015. She enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after her high school graduation, and she is expected to graduate from college in 2020.

Mark was a freshman majoring in Chemistry at the time of the study. He stated that his cumulative GPA was 3.4. Mark participated in Upward Bound for four years and graduated from the program in 2016. He enrolled at the study institution in the first fall semester after high school graduation, and he is expected to graduate from college in 2020.

Megan was a freshman majoring in Biology Pre-Med at the time of the study. Her cumulative GPA was 3.0. Megan participated in Upward Bound for three years and graduated from the program in 2016. She enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after her high school graduation, and she is expected to graduate from college in 2020.

Pablo was a junior majoring in Kinesiology at the time of the study. He stated that his cumulative GPA was 3.8. Pablo participated in Upward Bound for four years and graduated from the program in 2014. He enrolled at the study institution in the

first fall semester after his high school graduation, and he is expected to graduate from college in 2018.

Randy was a freshman majoring in Pre-Veterinary Science at the time of this study. His cumulative GPA was 3.0. He took part in Upward Bound for four years and graduated from the program in 2016. Randy enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after his high school graduation, and he is expected to graduate from college in 2020.

Teresa was a sophomore double majoring in Spanish and Chemistry at the time of this study. Her cumulative GPA was 3.93. Teresa participated in Upward Bound for four years and graduated from the program in 2015. She enrolled at the study institution the first fall semester after her high school graduation, and she is expected to graduate from college in 2019.

Findings

Perceptions with Regard to How the Program Affected College Success

Research question one sought to understand how former Upward Bound participants perceived their participation in the program affected their college success. The analysis of the data collected to address this research question produced three major themes: 1) summer bridge programs are important to student success; 2) tutoring is a factor in college readiness; and 3) college tours expose students to other options for college.

Summer bridge programs are important to student success. The summer bridge component of the Upward Bound program was identified as important to the success of the participants. The participants identified that it had helped them to close

the gap between high school and college. Mark identified that the academic instruction they received during their participation in the summer bridge program, prepared them for their first summer semester in college and was very valuable. Mark stated:

The summer bridge program provided a lot of information that I didn't have before. As a first-generation college student, everything was new and there were a lot of new words I was hearing from the first time...The summer program was of great help to start college.

All the participants mentioned that as *first-generation college students*, the information that they had access to outside of the Upward Bound program, was limited to that provided by their high school counselors. A majority of the participants mentioned that without Upward Bound they could not have gotten information pertaining to college, and most considered the completion of the summer bridge program as the most important achievement in their academic life to date.

The participants shared that they perceived that being involved in actual college classes during the summer bridge program was beneficial to them once they attended college full time. They perceived that they were already used to the college setting and some of the challenges that were to be expected, such as getting to class on time, keeping up with assignments without the need of having their professors remind them about upcoming deadlines, and allocating their time effectively to the classes in which they were struggling the most.

Fred stated:

The summer program helped me a lot by getting me involved in actual college classes that taught how to behave in class....UB also helped me to become more responsible and keep up with my work.

Teresa stated:

The program made us bridge and take classes at [the study institution] during the summer and it helped in learning how college works...Personally it helped me to know more about being a college student and stay on top of my homework...during the summer we had homework every day.

Pablo stated:

I spent the summer after I graduated from high school at [study institution] doing the bridge program and like it was a very intensive month because I had to go class every day and do homework almost every day...I think doing that helped me to be a better student now.

The summer bridge component of the Upward Bound program goes beyond the college classes sponsored by the program during the summer semester after high school graduation. This theme also suggested how the preparation for the summer bridge program was valuable for the recent high school graduates. Students participating in the summer program also were taught how to prepare for college including how to fill out the college application, filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and register for classes. Some participants suggested that learning how to prepare the FASFA was one of the most significant lessons they learned during the bridge program. Marie explained that in her high school or home,

she had not been exposed to information about how to apply for financial aid. Marie shared her experience at her high school:

The counselors at my high school never talked about how to complete the FAFSA until it was around January when I was graduating in May... The only thing they said was ‘there is a process called FAFSA’ but did explain how to do it...Fortunately, my mom and I already knew what it was from the Upward Bound program and we took preparations to get it done and I got financial aid.

The knowledge that the participants had gained through their participation in the Upward Bound program became what they depended on as they transitioned to college as full-time students.

Randy also perceived that the assistance received by the Upward Bound staff during the time they participated in the Upward Bound program was beneficial to their future success as a college student. Randy stated:

The people at Upward Bound always were there for us...On Saturdays they were always ready for ask like answering questions and if we needed advice in something we saw at our high schools and didn’t know what it was they explained it to us and like made sure we had our questions answered and we were in the right track.

Most of the participants discussed that having actual college students as their residential advisors, who were also their mentors during the summer, helped them in bridging the gap between high school and college. This enable them to become more confident to ask questions or share concerns about college with faculty and staff. In addition, Logan mentioned that the summer activities planned by the staff helped him

in learning more about the college setting. Megan recalled when she and the other students from Upward Bound visited different buildings on campus such as the study institution's library, the different colleges, on-campus bookstore, different dorms, among others. Additionally, Megan mentioned that learning that the study institution was focused on diversity was a factor that led her to decide to attend it after high school graduation.

In addition to learning about the different buildings on campus, the participants also discussed that one of the events that prepared them for their later success in college was spending a summer semester living at the study institution's residence halls. Adrianne, Betty, and Pablo mentioned that staying in the residence halls gave them an opportunity to experience being a college student. For Adrianne, staying in the dorms was very helpful because she said she was able to develop management skills. Betty mentioned that she had to be wise in the amount of money she allocated daily to her food expenses so that she did not run out of money at the end of the week. Betty noted that leaving in the dorms gave him an opportunity to improve his people skills since he had to cope with his roommates' cultures and he learned to respect them. Pablo said that leaving in the dorms helped him to develop management skills because he took the lead in his dorm and develop a plan with his roommate to replenish essential items such as tooth paste or toilet paper before these run out instead of waiting and had to buy them at a higher price.

Tutoring is a factor in college readiness. A second major theme that emerged to address this research question was that the participants identified tutoring as a factor in ensuring their college readiness. The participants noted that having

tutoring available was an important factor when trying to achieve college-level readiness. Fred, Logan, Randy, Teresa discussed that having access to academic tutoring significantly affected their academic development while they were in high school, and helped to prepare them for their college admittance examinations such as SAT, ACT, and TSI.

Fred stated:

The help I received from the tutors was very helpful because it let me sometimes finish homework in my first years of high school...The tutors also helped me out when I was getting ready for college because they helped me prepare to get a high score in my SAT and receive more scholarships.

Logan stated:

Before Upward Bound I didn't have any tutoring help because my parents couldn't afford to pay one...I started working with the tutors from the program in my sophomore year all the way through senior year and they also help me prepare for my exams...I took the ACT the first time and didn't score a good score and worked with the tutors and I was able to score a higher score.

Randy stated:

I received tutoring from college students who gave actually taught easier ways to learn the material I was learning in high school...The tutors shared their experiences with me and taught very well so my grades in high school and the exams for college were high so I didn't have to take TSI classes.

Teresa stated:

Tutoring was very important and helped me to have higher grades and score high on my exams for college and that helped me a lot because I was able to receive merit scholarships.

The participants also mentioned that the tutoring services provided by the Upward Bound program helped them in learning how to explain to their parents the path they needed to follow to attend college after their high school graduation.

In addition, some participants noted that the Upward Bound staff were mainly composed of people who were also first-generation and low socio-economic status, so it was easier to relate to them and to try to replicate their success. When referring to the Upward Bound staff, the participants all clarified that they were speaking of everybody involved in the administration of the program from the director to the student assistants. Additionally, they mentioned that the academic tutoring received was, in most cases, the last resource they had to be able to complete homework assignments or pass a class. All of the participants stated that as first-generation, their parents did not attend institutions of higher education and in several cases, they had not received a high school diploma, limiting the help available to them at home related to going to college.

Teresa shared her experiences with tutoring through the Upward Bound program and discussed how it has affected her success as a first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college student. She discussed that the tutoring provided by the Upward Bound program helped her to better understand how rigorous college was going to be and also assisted her in her classes. Teresa stated:

The program helped me to become more confident...As the first person to go to college in my family I was worried I was not going to success in college...Also, low income students like myself somethings don't have access to all the academic and monetary resources needed for success in college...I was very lucky to be enrolled in UB because I received a lot of help.

The findings indicated that the tutoring provided by the Upward Bound program helped the participants in multiple ways. Some of these included that they had been able to complete homework assignments, pass the STAAR exam, graduate from high school, scored high on the ACT or SAT exams, attained college-level readiness in core subjects, among others. In addition, a majority of the participants also identified that the tutoring component of the Upward Bound program helped them to overcome their parents' inability to coach them in regards to college. This specific point was addressed by Randy who discussed how tutoring prepared him for the challenge of being the first in his family to attend college:

Tutoring always helped with academics...and with what we are going through right now in college...As a first-generation student I had to always study and be on top of my grades, you know you can't mess around; I had to always be on top of what was important and be a responsible student because I lacked of help at home.

Logan mentioned that the tutoring provided by the Upward Bound program helped him not only with the classes in which he was struggling, but also in the long term. He shared that Upward Bound helped him with tutoring, especially during the times he struggled in classes and needed help. Logan further stated that he needed to graduate.

The participants discussed how receiving tutoring increased their opportunities to be admitted into an institution of higher education post high school graduation.

Megan explained how tutoring affected her future college career:

I enjoyed the tutoring part [of the Upward Bound program] because it [helped me] raise my GPA and my rank, which made a big difference. The staff would make you stay in tutoring or every Saturday to do tutoring to challenge you to get a higher grade.

Mark stated:

Sometimes I received tutoring during the Saturdays with UB and that tutoring helped me to understand things my teachers explained well...Tutoring was a great resource that helped me get ready to apply for college and have good grades.

Marie stated:

My high school was very small and didn't have tutors so if I didn't understand or learn something I didn't have anyone else to ask because my parents couldn't help me so I had to use the tutors at Upward Bound and they helped me...Sometimes I could've not been able to pass a class if I didn't have help from the tutors.

Teresa stated:

High school was hard for me and being the first person of my family trying to go to college I didn't have much help from my parents and at my high school the tutors weren't very good...I remember asking the tutors for help at a

Saturday at UB and since then I started working with them and that helped my grades to go up.

College tours expose students to other options for college. The third theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that college tours exposed them to other options for college that they may not have known about. The importance of this resource for students from low socio-economic families, who are most of the time unable to afford the cost of traveling to visit different college campuses prior to making a decision, proved to be of high importance the participants. The participants addressed that during the campus tours, they were able to speak with representatives from different institutions and were able to gain a better understanding of their chances to attend the institution they wanted to attend. The participants recognized that the campus tours the Upward Bound program made available for them were a fundamental factor in educating them that there were more opportunities beyond the city, county, and state they lived in. A majority of the participants shared that they perceived that the college tours sponsored by the Upward Bound program had allowed them to learn more about other colleges. Logan stated:

The college tours let me explore my options regarding what university I could attend. I wanted to explore my options and it was one of the most significant resources that really helped me out.

Pablo stated:

Going on college tours was very important because it let us learn about other places and how they fit what we were looking for...In my case I was looking for an affordable place where I feel like at home.

Fred stated:

As a low income student, my family didn't have the money to afford the trips to different universities...Upward Bound helped me to travel to different schools for free and made me unaware of institutions different from [the study institution].

Adrienne, Betty, and Randy also shared that the Upward Bound staff never led them to perceive that the only institution of higher education available to them was the study institution. Instead, the Upward Bound staff always advised them to explore more options, which at the end allowed them to make a more informed decision about what college to attend. Megan identified the campus tours as being beneficial even though she had not taken part in them for different reasons. Megan referred to campus tours as "beneficial" for the participants who were selected. She said that "I guess what wasn't helpful was maybe the days when the other students would go on campus tours because I was never selected and there was nothing prepared or planned for the students staying back."

Fred, Betty, Logan, Pablo, Randy, Teresa, and Marie noted that as Upward Bound participants, they considered the campus tours to be rewards and that gave them extra motivation to continue to work hard while in the program. Some of them also acknowledged that they had perceived that the campus tours were vacations or get-away trips, since in the majority of the cases, their families could not afford traveling outside of their city of residence.

Perceptions with Regard to How the Program Affected Low Socio-economic Students

Research question two sought to understand how the Upward Bound program affected the college success of low socio-economic students. The following three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected to address this research question: 1) self-efficacy is an important factor for student development; 2) it is very important to guide students in achieving their goals; and 3) equity is very important in higher education.

Self-efficacy is an important factor for student development. The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that self-efficacy is an important factor for student development. Based on the analysis of the data, the majority of the participants mentioned that the program helped them to form their self-efficacy by letting them engage in activities or tasks, such as applying for scholarships, preparing for exams, completing a college application; activities that through the years formed their self-efficacy and their confidence. Logan stated:

When I first got to Upward Bound, I didn't know anything about the college application process or financial aid, but with the help of the program I became confident and secure in myself. I now also feel like I can do anything.

Mark stated:

What UB made us do really helped me to understand the stuff I was learning in high school and gave me the confidence to start college. And now I can concentrate in the classes and get better grades.

Randy described the way he perceived the program affected his college success as “invaluable.” Based on his comments, he explained that the program taught him to believe in himself and that objectives can be accomplished if one has confidence in himself and dedicate the time and effort to them.

Randy stated:

I believe that, without Upward Bound, I would not be as successful this far in college. My motivation is very high thanks to UB and now I am confident I can continue being successful in college and finish my degree.

The study participants agreed that, now that they have successfully mastered these activities or tasks, they realize that the program positively affected their college success. Many of them mentioned that, without the program, they probably would never have been able to attend an institution of higher education. Some participants noted that as first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students, they lacked resources to help them prepare for their journey in college. Most of the study participants perceived that when they were accepted into the Upward Bound program, their life changed completely. This change was mainly noticed in the amount of college preparatory information they started receiving from the program. Further, the study participants said that the information session provided by the program made them believe they could achieve their dreams. Fred mentioned that the program assisted him by providing an environment where he perceived that what he was doing was right and that he could accomplish his goal even though he was from a different background than other students in his school.

Fred stated:

Before UB at my high school, it seemed like they really didn't care about us [Hispanics] but at Upward Bound the majority of the students were Hispanics and it gave me a sense of belonging and all of us were equal.

Adrienne stated:

Upward Bound helped me to think beyond high school and I was able to attend college...I received a lot of information about college that I didn't have before and that affected me to realize that college was possible.

Marie stated:

All the activities the UB program had us do helped me and the other students to know everything that was needed to enroll in college...The staff made us learn how to complete the application process and financial aid.

Additionally, a majority of the study participants noted that Upward Bound helped them in understanding the material they were covering in high school. Several participants mentioned that mastering the material they were seeing in high school gave them confidence to take on bigger challenges and prepared them for college. Further, the study participants noticed that, now in college, they could concentrate in their classes and get better grades because of the preparation they received from the Upward Bound program. Additionally, the participants perceived that the Upward Bound program taught them to believe in themselves and that anything they set their minds to could be accomplished if they had confidence in themselves and dedicated the time and effort to achieving their goals.

An example of the participants' comments is one by Randy who stated:

I believe that, without Upward Bound, I would not be as successful this far in college. My motivation is very high thanks to UB and now I am confident I can continue being successful in college and finish my degree.

It is very important to guide students in achieving their goals. The second major theme that emerged was that the participants perceived that it is very important to guide students in achieving their goals. Participants described goal attainment and goal setting as two very important factors for their success in college. They all agreed that the program instituted in them the need for knowing what their ultimate goal was and to inform themselves on how to reach or attain this goal. For many, the goal was to get accepted into an institution of higher education and, subsequently, to obtain the necessary monetary aid to pay for their education. Some of the participants of this study mentioned that the program guided them on how to set up their goals even beyond the college admittance. In other words, they said that the program helped them not only to set their goal of getting into college but also to plan how or what they needed to do in order to persist and complete their degrees. Several participants of this study noted that the biggest fear coming from a low socio-economic background was acquiring the money to pay for their academic expenses. Majority of the study participants perceived that the Upward Bound program guided them correctly on how to set up their goals and that the program gave them the resources to attain these goals. Additionally, the study participants mentioned that the program helped them, for the first time in their lives, to consider pursuing a college education, which could later lead to a job. They also stated that, by listening to the guidance of the staff at Upward

Bound, they could be able to help their families in the future. In regards to goal setting, Adrienne stated:

Being that I came from a low socio-economic background, the biggest concern I had was money. Once UB taught us how to get on that huddle, I could then set goals of what job or degree I wanted.

Further, a great number of the study participants perceived that the program positively affected their college success and, despite having disadvantages that made them struggle through high school and sometimes made them want to quit, the strong establishment of their goals was what kept them dreaming about going to college. Additionally, most of the study participants found that the deadlines the program set for submitting documentation, for example, improved their time management skills and allowed them to set up and achieve short-term goals. The study participants reinforced that these small achievements helped them in forming their self-efficacy as well. For instance, Pablo stated:

The Upward Bound program was very helpful in providing me with resources like academic supplies, technology, and how to use them. They also taught us [Upward Bound Participants] time management skills.

Finally, some participants stated that the program helped them in allocating the right amount of time in order to not miss any deadline. Several participants of this study said that they applied this lesson to their academic assignments and it has proved to be “beneficial.”

Marie stated:

I think the program was very beneficial for my college career because more than providing resources, it gave us the confidence we needed to accomplish our goal of going to college.

Teresa stated:

Thanks to Upward Bound I became more confident in myself and I started thinking that I was able to graduate from high school and attend college...The confidence I got while I was in UB benefit later when I enrolled at [the study institution].

Mark stated:

I believe UB benefited all of us because before we didn't think we could go to college because no one in our families had gone but the program taught us to believe in ourselves and set targets and they gave us the tools to achieve them.

Equity is very important in higher education. The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that equity is very important in higher education. As low socio-economic students that come from underrepresented backgrounds, Upward Bound participants usually feel inferior to other students in their high schools. A number of the study participants agreed that, before joining the Upward Bound program, they perceived they were at a disadvantage for multiple reasons. All the study participants were first-generation college going students, and as such, they could not seek their parents' help. In addition, they said that Upward Bound made them feel like they were valuable. Based on the comments from the study participants, just the *hope* the UB staff provided was a tremendous

help. The students then paved their own way to college through motivation to pursue their dreams. Participants thought the program affected them positively by providing them with all the necessary resources to not only succeed in college, but also in life.

Teresa stated:

UB provides so much help to first-generation college going students and, without UB; I truly believe I would not have pursued my dream of being involved in science. As a female, I feel we are underrepresented in science fields.

Most of the study participants noted that the Upward Bound program made all the participants believe they were equal to any other student in their high school and so they were capable of achieving any goal they could set. Betty stated:

The program provided support for first-generation college students and that helped develop my confidence since my first year in the program. I doubt that, without UB, I would know so much about college.

Further, all the study participants agreed that the work done by the Upward Bound program for their graduating class was reflected in the bridge class of that year. Over 40 students registered at the study institution and attended college classes for the first time. Mark said:

The bridge program served as a motivation for us to feel that we were equal to the other rich students...Enrolling in college for a long semester made me realize how important higher education is...The mentoring I received during my time in Upward Bound is what made me very confident.

Fred stated:

UB made me feel equal and I was able to accomplish my dream of going to college...When I was in Upward Bound if I didn't have the resources or didn't know how to do something I knew I could talk to my coordinator and ask for help.

Betty stated:

Sometimes I didn't feel the same as other students in my high schools maybe because I felt like I didn't have much resources but when that happened I always ask the people at UB to guide me.

Perceptions Regarding the Most Effective Programming

Research question three sought to discover what former Upward Bound participants perceived as the most effective programming. The following three major themes emerged from the analysis of the data collected to address this research question: 1) Academic Saturdays are effective in supporting students; 2) motivational speakers are positive role models; and 3) mentoring and advising is fundamental to student success.

Academic Saturdays are effective in supporting students. The first major theme that emerged from the data was that the participants perceived that Academic Saturdays were effective in supporting students. From the analysis, it can be drawn that the Saturday sessions complemented the preparation of the participants in getting them ready for college. The study yielded valuable information that suggested that this programming positively affected Upward Bound participants. Some participants

perceived that, during Academic Saturdays, the Upward Bound program provided its participants with valuable information regarding college. Randy stated:

What we did during Academic Saturdays taught me how college life was going to be including academics, financials and the college setting overall.

The study participants mentioned that this information was not limited to the college application process. Fred, Betty, Marie, Teresa, Adrienne, and Mark perceived the quality of the Upward Bound personnel to be significant. They all agreed that, from the student assistants to the director, they all showed they were prepared to address the questions or concerns of the participants. Fred noted:

The quality of the teachers or coaches and coordinators on Saturday sessions was very good and they connected with the students and made learning fun... Every time we went to class on Saturday, it was a different lesson, which helped to learn new concepts about academics and college life.

Megan stated:

The UB staff helped me out preparing for college especially when I was a senior and was getting ready for college...They believe that the activities done during Academic Saturdays were very well planned because they all helped.

Several participants perceived that the sessions held every other Saturday of the month were “beneficial” because of the college preparation the program participants received when they were in their senior year. Megan, Pablo, and Logan indicated that the Upward Bound staff went above and beyond on Saturdays to make sure the program participants were complying with the college application process, as well as the application for financial aid. Additionally, Betty, Teresa, Adrienne, and

Pablo agreed that, although the attendance to the Academic Saturdays was not obligatory, they thought that attending the Saturday sessions increased their chances to succeed in the program. Further, the study participants mentioned that the Academic Saturdays allowed them to make relationships with other participants.

Betty stated:

Academic Saturdays weren't mandatory so it was more if you wanted to succeed you can go...Freshman through junior year we did a lot of math and science core classes and that helped a lot not only with my high school GPA, but with the transition into college. And it also allowed us to break out of our shells a little more.

Teresa stated:

Even though we were not required to go to all the Saturdays, I thought that if I didn't go to the Saturday sessions I could be missing out a lot of things that I could need in the future...I always tried to go to all the sessions because they were very beneficial.

Adrienne stated:

My parents and I did everything to attend all the Academic Saturdays because the UB people always had something interesting for me to do...I liked the math and science classes because they helped preparing to take hard exams.

Mark stated:

When I was in high school I remember that I had to be reminded of things to not forget but I usually didn't miss a Saturday because I saw friends and also

most of the times I had questions from my classes and I was able to ask the tutors of whoever from the staff.

Motivational speakers are positive role models. The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that motivational speakers are positive role models. Several participants that they perceived the idea of bringing motivational speakers as “significant” because they could relate to the speakers, especially considering that the speakers shared the same background as program participants. Further, the participants noted that the speakers Upward Bound brought to share their experiences motivated the program participants to continue working hard and accomplish their goal of pursuing a college degree. Some study participants found that listening to people who have gone through the same situations they were experiencing as first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students was beneficial because they developed a feeling of belonging with the speakers, therefore making it easier to picture themselves succeeding in college.

Logan stated:

Bringing motivational speakers on Saturdays was the most significant programming that really helped me out because I am a first-generation college student and I am glad Upward Bound brought speakers that motivated us to pursue a college degree.

Betty stated:

The people that UB had talk to us were really inspiring because we could somehow see ourselves in them...I think they had gone through the same challenges we were facing and that help to connect with them.

Adrienne stated:

The motivational speakers that came to UB helped me to see that even if people had problems they could overcome those and be successful...Most of the time the speakers were from minority backgrounds making it easier to relate to them.

Additionally, the participants of this study thought that bringing motivational speakers was one the most significant programming efforts because it allowed the Upward Bound program to successfully transmit the message of the importance of pursuing a college education across the program participants. Further, a number of the study participants found that the speakers brought by the program made them believe that, regardless of the situation they were experiencing, if they had the determination to progress, they could accomplish anything. Lastly, Teresa, Mark, and Randy mentioned that using the motivational speakers was a very effective way to transmit the importance of attaining a college education.

Teresa stated:

Bringing motivational speakers was the most effective way to communicate the message of the importance of going to college...I think that sometimes we as a group listened more to the external speakers than to other school officials.

Mark stated:

I think I learned a lot from the motivational speakers that came to [the study institution] because of the way they approached us to explain us why we should go to college and how we needed to face challenges.

Randy stated:

There were Saturdays where people came in to talk to us and cover topics in different ways than the traditional way... Like instead of just showing us a power point these people shared experiences and it was easier to understand them.

Mentoring and advising is fundamental to student success. The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that participants perceived that mentoring and advising is fundamental to student success. The participants mentioned that the mentoring and advising they received from the Upward Bound program came from the program staff going above and beyond their responsibilities to always provide participants with high quality service. The study participants also commented on the fact that most of the Upward Bound staff were of Hispanic background and participated in the program when they were in high school. Betty, Marie and Megan noted that being mentored by people who they considered role models was significant. All the participants mentioned that the staff always advised them on what they needed to do to make good decisions in regards to the kind of advanced classes they needed to take in high school. They also noted that the recommendations given to them in regards to the college application process proved to be significant since they could succeed in college. Additionally, the participants of this study said that the Upward

Bound staff members were always available to answer any question from the program participants. Teresa said:

Being able to ask people what I do in a situation regarding college was really helpful because I know that I was always emailing America [UB staff member]: What do I do for this? Does this count for college? Does it matter? And she was always really quick to respond to me and to get those answers back.

Additionally, the participants of this study stated that they received valuable lessons from the Upward Bound staff. They mentioned that the staff always encouraged them to develop relationships with different people in different departments at the study institution, so that the participants would know who to speak to in the event they needed any help. Several study participants perceived that this lesson was carried throughout their college career and helped in making connections with their professors and other fellow students. In regards to how to establish communication with people in their surroundings, Teresa stated:

The staff at UB taught me to reach out to my professors if I ever had a question and not hesitate in contacting them and I think that was really helpful for me since coming in as a first-generation college student, I was unsure, uneasy and not confident enough in that manner.

Megan stated:

UB provided me with academic advising and always motivated me to pursue my dreams...One of them when I was in UB was to actually go to college and be the first in my family.

Pablo stated:

On Saturdays during my senior year, I was advised on how to prepare scholarship applications, how to read school catalogs and learn about more schools other than [the study institution]. The student assistants always helped us by explaining all the different majors and what they were about.

Further, the participants commented that they were advised during the Academic Saturdays' general meeting on how to prepare scholarship applications, how to read school catalogs and learn about more schools aside from the study institution. Finally, a great number of the study participants noted that, even though not advisors, the student assistants always advised them to explore the different majors and what they meant.

Recommendations for Programming Improvement

Research question four sought to gather any recommendations former participants had that could help the program improve its service. The following three major themes emerged through the analysis of the data collection to address this research question: 1) implementation of new programming during Academic Saturdays; 2) the format of tutoring; and 3) Forming Self-esteem and confidence.

Implementation of new programming during Academic Saturdays. The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that Upward Bound should implement new programming during Academic Saturdays. From the study participants' responses, Academic Saturdays provide an opportunity for program participants to receive help in many ways. According to the majority of the study participants, Upward Bound participants received help in

academics, as well as personal development. Mark, Randy, Megan, and Marie mentioned that they would like for the Upward Bound program to offer more opportunities to engage in STEM projects during Academic Saturdays.

Mark stated:

I really liked when we did hands-on projects. I enjoyed building computer parts. At the time, I was interested in pursuing a science degree and I would've liked to see more of that...I think it would be great for the program to add more projects for the students who want to be in these kinds of fields.

Randy stated:

I would recommend Upward Bound to add more hands-on and science projects to the Academic Saturdays because sometimes there are some students that like science but since they never explore it they decide to do different minors.

Megan stated:

UB should add more science experiments in the instructional classes offered on Saturdays...Sometimes in high school we didn't have the opportunity to engage in science projects so I think it would benefit a lot of students.

Marie stated:

My recommendation would be to have more experiments during Saturdays because it can help students to discover a new field...I didn't know I wanted to do Biochemistry until I was actually doing a science project in my high school during my senior year so I believe that having more of these projects could help.

Logan, Betty, and Teresa agreed that the Academic Saturdays should become more interactive because although the Saturday sessions provided a great amount of

information to the participants of the program, some were not interested in receiving the information and they tended to distract the participants who were.

Logan stated:

Saturdays were helpful and precise but the people that I've been surrounded with, said it got a little bit boring after a little while and stopped paying attention... I would recommend adding a little activity maybe after the lectures, just to make it seem like it's not boring and more people would be excited to attend.

Betty stated:

I think maybe an ice-breaker should be added before each class on Saturdays, the students would be more engaged and have a better relationship with the instructors.

Teresa stated:

Sometimes the general meetings were a little boring because they were long so I think they should have like an activity to engage the students and also sometimes people don't know each other so I can be a good way to introduce themselves.

Further, the study participants mentioned that they would like for Upward Bound to schedule more Saturday sessions during the month. They also said that, once they got used to the routine of waking up early on Saturday mornings, it became part of their life and they perceived that something was missing when Upward Bound did not host a Saturday session on a specific day.

Fred stated:

I remember there were times when I'd get up and then there was no Upward Bound on that day, I was pretty upset because I liked the UB environment and also seeing students from other high schools.

Adrienne stated:

I would recommend to host more Saturday sessions because I think they will benefit students who are very committed to the program by receiving more valuable information and better prepare for college.

Additionally, the participants of this study expressed their desire to make the Saturday sessions last longer so the program participants who were seniors in high school could spend more time working on their preparation for college. Finally, Teresa suggested to change the starting time of the Saturday sessions. Teresa recommended the Upward Bound program move Academic Saturdays to 9:00 AM instead of 8:00 AM and end later or make it last longer.

The format of tutoring. The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that tutoring could be more useful if the format of tutoring would change. Tutoring was also mentioned before in the findings as a very helpful resource provided by the program. Randy, Marie, and Pablo suggested that it would be beneficial to add after school tutoring at the high schools. Randy stated:

Tutoring always helped me out with homework or preparing for tests.

Sometimes it wasn't enough so I would like to recommend the addition of after

school tutoring at the high schools because sometimes it was complicated to get to [the study institution] for tutoring.

Marie stated:

I think I would recommend to offer tutoring at the high schools because for example I had friends that didn't have a car or didn't have somebody to drive them to [the study institution] to receive help.

Pablo stated:

Having after tutoring being offered at the high school could actually motivate more people to use it so I would recommend to send a tutor to the main high schools that UB work with...I think this will help a lot of students.

A large number of the study's participants acknowledged that, although the program gave the option to use online tutoring, in-person tutoring helped them more because they could clarify any doubts right there in that moment. Most of the study participants suggested that the Upward Bound program should implement after school tutoring in that actual college students travel to the high schools and be there as a resource for the program participants. As a whole, the participants of this study agreed that it could be difficult for the Upward Bound program to send tutors to all the schools the program serves but they suggested that it would be a good start to begin sending tutors to the schools closer to the city where the study institution is located. Further, the study participants also mentioned that, being tutored by current college students, the program participants might assimilate the help in a different way since the tutors would be closer in age and the program participants could relate to them.

Megan stated:

I would recommend adding tutoring for students in different places because it was only offered in Lubbock...It would be great if an actual college student could go to the high schools and do one-on-one tutoring.

Adrienne stated:

I think it would be easier to relate to the tutors if they were college students close in age to the program participants...I would recommend to send college students to the high schools to help Upward Bound students after school hours.

In addition to adding after school tutoring, the participants of this study suggested to add more opportunities for the program participants to get tutored. They agreed that Saturday and online tutoring was not enough. Teresa, Logan, Megan, Betty, and Pablo mentioned that tutoring helped them in getting good grades and passing difficult exams and they said that was the main reason to add more tutoring opportunities.

Betty suggested that the program should use the results of the pre-test administered at the beginning of the academic year to see what areas the program participants were weak in, and based on that, assign tutoring. Betty said that tutors should be assigned to students based on the initial test called pre-test and not on the students' performance during the school year.

Forming Self-esteem and confidence. The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that students perceived that Upward Bound should continue forming self-esteem and confidence in the students. participant recommendations was forming self-esteem and confidence. The participants suggested the creation of a program within Upward Bound to focus on getting all the

incoming high school freshman students engaged in the program and teaching them interpersonal skills to network with other students that will make them feel more secure and confident when transitioning to college. Additionally, some participants noted that, since the other participants of the program were strangers to them, they did not feel confident enough to approach them during the activities programmed by the Upward Bound program. Pablo stated:

I was shy when I first started Upward Bound and every summer I had to go the non-bridge classes I didn't talk much because I didn't know the other participants, so I would recommend to have a program for all the freshman so they can make friends.

Adrienne stated:

I think they should have a way to have students that just enrolled to UB interact with other students and get to know more people...I think that by having students make friends since the beginning could benefit the seniors when bridging.

Marie stated:

I would recommend an introductory program because it would be a great addition to UB and also this program could provide personal and academic advising to freshman students who are just entering high school and are unaware of the different classes they can take to prepare for college.

The participants also suggested that the Upward Bound program should add activities in its sessions to increase the self-esteem of the program participants. They all mentioned that the program should improve communication among the participants of

the program since they all come from different high schools and do not know each other.

Mark stated:

I wasn't very confident before UB and didn't talk to many participants and didn't make many friends...This is why I would like to recommend that they should do more activities to mix the students and help them lose the fear of talking to other students.

Teresa stated:

I would recommend the UB to have more activities where the participants can gain more confidence and be able to approach other students at first but later can help them when approaching faculty or staff in college.

Further, the participants shared their experiences during the summer programs, both non-bridge and bridge programs. Teresa, Megan, Adrienne, Mark, and Randy mentioned that the activities of the program should be more inclined to letting the program participants break out of their shells and form the necessary confidence to explore the world on their own. They also agreed that if the program could get participants to develop their confidence, these participants would build their self-esteem and accomplish any goal they set. Finally, the participants of this study suggested that, along with the creation of a first-year introductory program, the Upward Bound program should also incorporate high school course recommending so the program participants make educated decisions with regard to what advanced classes they should take while in high school. Marie mentioned that if the program

participants make good decisions early in high school, they would be more confident about transitioning to college. Marie stated:

I took two dual credit classes and I don't really feel like they were effective and, looking back, it would've been helpful if there was a program that could teach students about the different advanced classes they can take in high school.

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings of this study and the themes that emerged during the data analysis process. Research question one sought to discover the perceptions of former participants of the Upward Bound program in regards to how the program affected their success in college. Research question two sought to understand the perceptions of these former participants about the support provided to low socio-economic students. Research question three sought to find the most effective programming for former participants and how this affected their college success. Research question four sought to collect recommendations from successful former Upward Bound participants on how to better improve the effectiveness of the program to continue serving first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic students. The combined objective of the four research questions was to learn how the Upward Bound program affected first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students in forming self-efficacy and the effects of this on their person, behavior, and environment.

Chapter V will present a discussion of the findings of this study. Also, recommendations and implications for higher education institutions will be provided

based on the results of the study. Lastly, future research opportunities will be suggested based on the themes found in the study.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Chapter V presents an overview of the study and a discussion of the study's findings. Implications and recommendations for higher education practice are discussed, followed by suggestions for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants concerning the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Of specific interests in this study included the perceptions of these former participants and how their participation affected their college success, what services provided by the program were the most beneficial or detrimental, as well as what recommendations they might have to improve the services provided by the program to better support Hispanic undergraduate students.

The conceptual framework used in this study was based on social cognitive theory, intertwined with self-efficacy theory. social cognitive theory postulates that individuals do not simply respond to environmental influences, but rather they actively seek and interpret information (Nevid, 2009; Zimmerman, 1989). Bandura (1999) explained that individuals “function as contributors to their own motivation, behavior, and development with a network of reciprocally interacting influences” (p. 169).

The following four research questions guided the study:

1. How do former Upward Bound participants perceive their participation in the program affected their college success?
2. What are the perceptions of former Upward Bound participants of how the program supports low socio-economic students?
3. What Upward Bound programming do former participants perceive was the most effective in supporting their college success?
4. What recommendations do former Upward Bound participants have for improvements to the support services provided by the program that they perceive will have the most effect on the success of low socio-economic Hispanic students?

The study setting was a large, public, four-year high research intensive university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S., specifically in Texas. The study institution has hosted the Upward Bound program since 1967. This made the institution an ideal setting for the study because of the longevity of the Upward Bound program at this institution. Inclusion criteria for participants were that they were currently enrolled at the study institution and have not completed an undergraduate degree. Further inclusion criteria were that the participants were Hispanic and first-generation, as well as considered low socio-economic as defined by the U.S. Department of Education. The chosen institution had 25 participants who met the participation criteria and 10 of them agreed to participate. All the participants successfully graduated from the program and enrolled in college in the first fall after high school graduation. The 10 participants in this study included:

Table 2

Participants' profiles

Participant name	Major of Study	Academic Classification
Adrienne	Architecture	Junior
Betty	Kinesiology	Sophomore
Fred	Kinesiology	Sophomore
Logan	Business Administration	Freshman
Marie	Biochemistry	Junior
Mark	Chemistry	Freshman
Megan	Biology Pre-Med	Freshman
Pablo	Kinesiology	Junior
Randy	Pre-Veterinary Science	Freshman
Teresa	Spanish/Chemistry	Sophomore

Discussion of the Findings

Perceptions with regard to how the program affected college success

Research question one sought to understand how the Upward Bound program affected the college success of the research participants. The themes that emerged from data analysis included: 1) summer bridge programs are important to student

success; 2) tutoring is a factor in college readiness; and 3) college tours expose students to other options for college.

All 10 participants perceived that having the opportunity to participate in the summer bridge program allowed them to experience the college setting and expose themselves to actual college classes. The summer bridge program provided from Upward Bound rewards students who have recently graduated from high school and will enroll in post-secondary education in the fall immediately after high school graduation by paying the tuition and fees of the summer following high school graduation. The purpose of this program is to close the gap between high school and college by helping the students “bridge” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Several participants described how the classes they took while participating in the summer bridge program helped them to learn new skills, which have proved to be very useful in their college career. It is clear from the data obtained from the study results that the summer bridge program successfully prepared Upward Bound participants for the challenges that college presented to them. The perceptions of the participants demonstrated that giving access to higher education to first-generation, low socio-economic students is giving them an opportunity to depart from their socio-economic group and be successful. Additionally, the participants of this study agreed that experiencing the college setting before enrolling in college in a fall or spring semester was beneficial since they got to live on campus and were able to create relationships with other students and connect with the school community. Some participants also mentioned that in their high schools, they couldn’t receive the information regarding to college and financial because the high schools didn’t dedicate a lot of time to

inform them. The participants perceived that the preparation for the summer bridge program prepared them for the future and their college success. Participants mentioned that while participating in the summer program they were taught how to prepare for college including how to fill out the college application, filling out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), and register for classes. Some participants suggested that learning how to prepare the FASFA was one of the most significant lessons they learned during the bridge program. Additionally, a majority of the participants discussed that having actual college students as their residential advisors who were their mentors during the summer and helped them in bridging from high school to college and become more confident to ask questions or share concerns about college with faculty and staff. The participants' perceptions proved that the summer program help program participants to get the exposure to college they didn't have before as first-generation, low socio-economic students.

The second major theme that emerged to address this research question was that the participants identified tutoring as a factor in ensuring their college readiness. Majority of the participants perceived that receiving academic tutoring throughout high school contributed to their learning of core subjects, which the program participants needed to master in order to be prepared for when they took the college admittance examinations. Also, tutoring provided these participants with the opportunity to develop relationships with people who were familiar with their current situation. Additionally, the participants perceived that meeting with current college students gave them the opportunity to ask questions about their college experiences. From participants' perceptions, a well-structured tutoring program would help

program participants to understand the importance of tutoring and would also guide them to seek assistance when they need academic help (Pavlovna, 2012). The participants also perceived that the tutoring services provided by the Upward Bound program helped them in learning how to explain to their parents the path they needed to follow to attend college after their high school graduation. Some of the participants came from homes where the main language wasn't English and their parents needed help to understand the process to go to college. Additionally, some participants perceived that the academic tutoring received was, in most cases, the last resource they had to be able to understand a subject from their classes or even study to take exams. Furthermore, all the participants reiterated that, as first-generation, low socio-economic college going students, their parents did not pursue a college degree and in numerous cases, they did not receive a high school diploma, which limited the help that the study's participants could receive at home. In addition, first-generation, low socio-economic students find it difficult to seek academic assistance outside their high schools. Therefore, self-efficacy often improves for the participants of the Upward Bound program who involve themselves in after-school activities, in this case tutoring. In particular, as academic self-efficacy improved, participants also improved their educational achievement and were able to complete to enroll in college (Anthony & Jenson, 2005).

The third theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that college tours exposed them to other options for college that they may not have known about. A significant number of the participants of this study mentioned that the program gave them the opportunity to inform themselves about

different universities and, by taking them to different college campuses, Upward Bound allowed them to explore their options. Arellano (2002) suggested that students who participate in college tours and actively engage in the search for the university that best fit their interests tend to have higher degree attainment. The participants perceived that during the campus tours, they were able to speak with representatives from different institutions and were able to gain a better understanding of their chances to attend the institution they wanted to attend. The information these participants received were mainly about application process, financial aid application, scholarship, housing expenses among others.

Furthermore, several participants of this study mentioned that Upward Bound took participants on college tours to reward them for their diligent work and effort in program activities. The participants also noted that this served as motivation, knowing that the staff recognized their hard work and dedication. Low socio-economic students often do not have the means for the cost of traveling to different college campuses to get the exposure they need before making a selection, so it is fundamental for programs like Upward Bound to continue providing these students with this kind of opportunity that also motivates them into matriculating to college. Brown (2010) suggested that it is very important to provide low socio-economic students with the opportunity to explore more than one institution, so they could make educated decisions when selecting they school where they will go. In addition, the participants perceived that the Upward Bound staff never led them to perceive that the only institution of higher education available to them was the study institution. Instead, the Upward Bound staff always advised them to explore more colleges and universities.

Finally, the participants of this study noted that the college tours provided by the program helped them in expanding the search. In other words, they assisted the participants in expanding their college or university search beyond their place of residency. Location is considered a determining factor when future college students and their parents select a school (Kinzie et al., 2004). Over the years, this factor has significantly changed with the implementation of campus visits where the students and their families experience in-person the location and the atmosphere of the school (Kinzie et al., 2004).

Perceptions with regard to how the program affected low socio-economic students

Research question two sought to understand how the Upward Bound program affected the college success of the research participants. Three themes that emerged from data analysis included: 1) self-efficacy is an important factor for student development; 2) it is very important to guide students in achieving their goals; and 3) equity is very important in higher education.

The majority of the participants perceived the Upward Bound program helped them in building their self-efficacy by letting them participate in activities or tasks, such as applying for scholarships, preparing for exams, completing a college application, etc. While in the Upward Bound program throughout the years, participating in the activities helped the participants build and improve their self-efficacy and confidence throughout the duration of their time in the Upward Bound program. Bandura (1977) proposes that building a strong self-efficacy in individuals is a very important factor for their success.

Several study participants mentioned that their status as first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students led to the perception that they lacked the resources needed to prepare and, subsequently, be successful in college. First-generation, low socio-economic college going students usually tend to not be successful in college and, in some cases, drop out after the first semester of college enrollment (American Psychological Association, 2017).

Furthermore, the participants of this study suggested that the information they received from the Upward Bound program helped them in believing they were capable of achieving any goal they could set for themselves. Typically, first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students need some sort of validation from teachers, administrators, or staff from college preparatory programs they are part of in order to prepare them for any challenges they may face and to always believe they are capable of overcoming any obstacle (Lohfink & Paulsen, 2005). Majority of the participants perceived that when they were accepted into the Upward Bound program, their life changed completely. This change was mainly noticed in the amount of college preparatory information they started receiving from the program. Further, the study participants said that the information session provided by the program made them believe they could achieve their dreams.

Additionally, most of the participants perceived that, as low socio-economic students, they lacked the confidence and sometimes regarded themselves as inferior to other students because their focus was not solely on school. Low socio-economic students' families usually do not prioritize education and, most of the time, do not recognize the academic achievement of their family members, which brings their

morale down and decreases their confidence to continue with their studies (Worley, 2007).

Finally, all the study participants mentioned that Upward Bound provided them with an environment in which they perceived they were doing valuable things and made them believe that accomplishing their goals was possible. The environment future college students spend their time plays an important role in building their personal and academic self-efficacy (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2017).

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that it is very important to guide students in achieving their goals. All the study participants noted that the Upward Bound program instilled in them the importance for setting a long-term goal and to acquire as much information as possible that could help them in accomplishing their ultimate goal (Turkay, 2014). Several participants mentioned that the program guided them not only to set short-term goals, such as getting admitted to college, as well as guiding them to plan, but also how they will persist in college and subsequently complete their undergraduate studies. Well-structured goal setting skills can help students in improving their academic performance, as well as their academic behaviors (Ludwig & Geller, 2000). Additionally, the study participants said that, by instilling in them the importance of not only setting up goals, but also how to achieve them, the Upward Bound program gave them hope with regard to pursuing a college degree. They also noted they had never considered pursuing a college education prior to joining Upward Bound and that the program motivated them to do it.

Destin and Oyserman (2010) studied student behaviors with regard to their expectations to attend college. They found that, while setting goals was important, setting the right goal could be a determining factor to motivate high school students. Furthermore, the participants of this study mentioned that the program helped them by setting deadlines for submitting documentation. The study participants perceived that the deadlines helped them to improve their goal-setting and management skills. The perceptions from the study participants support the statement presented by Lunenburg (2011) in the study of goal setting, in which he suggested that the most effective performance comes from specific and challenging goals. Additionally, majority of the study participants perceived that the Upward Bound program guided them correctly on how to set up their goals and that the program gave them the resources to attain these goals.

The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that equity is very important in higher education. A great number of the participants of this study noted that, prior to joining Upward Bound, they perceived that they were inferior in their high schools because they came from underrepresented backgrounds. They considered Upward Bound to be very helpful because, as first-generation, low socio-economic college going students, they could not seek their parents' help when they had questions. The study participants noted that having the program on their side helped them in believing that they were valuable and equal to everyone else in their high school. College preparatory programs like Upward Bound seek to supplement first-generation, low socio-economic college going students with the information they need to matriculate, persist, and complete their

college degree (Russell, 2015). A majority of the study participants perceived that the program positively affected their college success and, despite having disadvantages that made them struggle through high school and sometimes made them want to quit, the strong establishment of their goals was what kept them dreaming about going to college. Lastly, all the study participants mentioned that seeing over thirty program participants bridging to college at the end of their high school senior year added extra motivation to continue moving forward with their education. They perceived that seeing others who experience the same challenges successfully bridge, made them believe that they did not have any disadvantage going into college and they perceived they were equal to the other incoming freshman. Closing the gap between high school and college makes first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students believe they have the same opportunities as other students. Also, first-generation, low socio-economic students gain confidence when they are admitted into institutions of higher education (Perna, 2015).

Perceptions regarding the most effective programming

Research question three sought to understand how the Upward Bound program affected the college success of the research participants. Three themes that emerged from data analysis included: 1) Academic Saturdays are effective in supporting students; 2) motivational speakers are positive role models; and 3) mentoring and advising is fundamental to student success. The first major theme that emerged from the data was that the participants perceived that Academic Saturdays were effective in supporting students. All ten participants of this study perceived that the program provided them valuable information regarding college during Academic Saturdays.

They also mentioned that the information they received was not limited to college. All ten participants suggested that the Saturday programming of Upward Bound was one of the most effective for them since it covered a lot of useful areas for them. Most high school students nowadays receive poor preparation for college from their schools. Participating in college preparatory programs seems to be beneficial for these students since the participants are able to receive additional information regarding the college application process, which their high school counselors do not usually share with them (Coleman, 2011).

A great number of the study participants perceived the sessions held every other Saturday of the month were beneficial because the Upward Bound staff went above and beyond their responsibilities to ensure the program participants were complying with the college application process, as well as the application for financial aid. All ten participants of this study mentioned that, from the Saturday instructors to the director of the program, everyone demonstrated they were prepared to address any questions or concerns from the study participants. The importance of having committed staff is paramount because they can make a difference in the lives of the program participants. According to the literature presented by Quinn (2015) in his study, the leadership style shown by the director of the program reflects the effectiveness of the program. Quinn (2015) also suggested that, if a different case study was performed with the rest of the staff, the program should show the effectiveness of the program. The participants perceived the quality of the Upward Bound personnel to be significant. They all agreed that, from the student assistants to the director, they all showed they were prepared to address the questions or concerns

of the participants. Several participants perceived that the Academic Saturdays held every other Saturday of the month were “beneficial” due to all the information they received in these sessions, especially during their senior year. Lastly, several study participants mentioned that, while attendance to Academic Saturdays was not mandatory, they perceived that attending could increase their opportunities to succeed in college. Redic (2014) suggested that if students are informed and well prepared for the college application process, the expectations of them matriculating, persisting, and completing their degrees is high.

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that motivational speakers are positive role models. Several of the study participants perceived that bringing motivational speakers was beneficial to their success. The study participants noted that it was easier for them to project what success felt like since they could relate to the motivational speakers, being that they shared the same background and had to overcome the same challenges.

Additionally, the participants of this study perceived that bringing motivational speakers in was one the most significant programming efforts because it assisted the Upward Bound program in transmitting the message of the importance of pursuing a college education across the program participants.

Motivational speakers tend to help high school students look at the overall, or bigger picture, by exposing them to their experiences and this sometimes may lead the students to discover things they never thought of before (Kane, 2014). Furthermore, most of the participants of this study perceived that the motivational speakers made them believe they could accomplish anything, regardless of the challenges they were

facing, if they show determination and commitment to their goal. Motivation is one of the most important factors that describe why low socio-economic students decide not to pursue a college education. Motivational speakers tend to inspire high school students by making them believe in their capabilities, as well as motivate them on a constant basis, which in the long-term, promote learning (Williams & Williams, 2011). Finally, the participants of this study perceived motivational speakers to be very significant to their personal development.

The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that participants perceived that mentoring and advising is fundamental to student success. Most of the study participants mentioned that the mentoring and advising they received from the program was of high quality due to the commitment of the staff who were always prepared to guide program participants into making the right decisions. Some participants perceived that being mentored by people who they considered role models was significant. All ten participants of this study agreed that the staff not only focused on academics or college preparation, but they also made sure to mentor and advise the program participants on any challenge they could face in life. First-generation, low socio-economic college going students usually experience a lack of role-models in their lives and they see Upward Bound staff as people whom they can regard as examples. Additionally, a great motivator for success emerged through Upward Bound participants' interactions with the program's staff (Carson-Warner, 2003).

Additionally, all the participants mentioned that the counselors at Upward Bound advised them on how to get informed before making important decisions in

regard to the kind of advanced classes they should take in preparation for college. The study participants also noted that, now that they are in college, they value those recommendations even more because they were what shaped their path of success. A pedagogical approach to academic success suggested that counselors should encourage students to have high, realistic expectations. Counselors are to provide information to students and give them all the resources to make very well educated decisions that, in the case of this study, led to college success (Rosenbaum, 1998).

Finally, the participants of this study mentioned that one of the best pieces of advice they received from the Upward Bound program was to apply for financial assistance in terms of FAFSA, scholarships, and institutional grants. A great number of students across the country pass by opportunities every academic year by not applying for financial aid and, unfortunately, is the fact that most of them do not complete their FAFSA applications because they consider it too long or too difficult and, in other cases, because they lack of guidance. Chandler (2014) suggested that a significant number of students nationally don't have all the information they need to successfully fill out their aid packets and end up losing what could significantly change their lives.

Recommendations for Programming Improvement

Research question four sought to understand how the Upward Bound program affected the college success of the research participants. Three themes that emerged from data analysis included: 1) implementation of new programming during Academic Saturdays; 2) the format of tutoring; and 3) Forming Self-esteem and confidence.

The first major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that Upward Bound should implement new programming during Academic Saturdays. Some of the participants of this study suggested that the program should add more STEM projects to the Academic Saturdays, so that participants interested in math and science could get more engaged with those fields. These projects will help to increase the confidence of the participants to partake in projects in the areas of math, science, and technology. Likewise, the number of females interested in STEM could increase by exposing program participants to new science projects (Pajares & Miller, 1994). Additionally, some participants recommended Upward Bound should incorporate more interactive activities during Academic Saturdays to get the participants engaged in the program and learn all the resources they can use. Some participants of this study mentioned that, even though the Saturday sessions contained valuable information, there were some participants that would get bored and start distracting others. A research study conducted by Bramlett, Murphy, Johnson, and Wallingsford in 2002, showed that the more a program participant was motivated to learn, the better the outcome from the participant.

Lastly, some study participants suggested that the Academic Saturdays should last longer, thereby giving the participants an opportunity to participate in more activities. Also, the participants suggested that the program should have extended hours on Saturdays. The participants mentioned that if the Academic Saturdays start later and last longer, more participants would attend. By increasing participants' attendance, college preparatory programs can increase the opportunity of the

participants to matriculate, persist, and complete their college degree (Karp et al, 2007).

The second major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that the participants perceived that tutoring could be more useful if the format of tutoring would change. Several participants of this study recommended adding after-school tutoring at their high school, which they perceived could help program participants more since they could obtain answers to their questions and have them ready for school. They also noted that they prefer after-school tutoring to the online tutoring service. Friedman and Bleiberg (2007) suggested that providing well-structured after-school activities could increase academic achievement in high school students. Additionally, the participants suggested that the program should keep hiring current college students as academic tutors since it is easier for Upward Bound participants to relate and communicate with tutors closer in age.

The participants also mentioned that having roles models in their age range gives them a more realistic view of what challenges college brings. College students usually tend to have more energy and patience when tutoring youth. It is easier for college students who are tutors to relate to youth when they do not understand a subject. Also, since current college students have recently exited the high school system, they are still savvy in the techniques high school teachers use and could benefit to the learning of the program participants (Baldwin, 2007). Finally, the participants of this study suggested that the Upward Bound program should use the results obtained from the pre-test, an examination taken at the beginning of every academic year, to determine the areas in which most of the participants of the program

obtained low scores and develop lessons around those scores and not based on the progress or report cards each participant received. The participants mentioned that, by anticipating the weak subjects from the participants, the Upward Bound program could structure academics to increase the number of students performing well on the standardized examinations. This recommendation could be taken into consideration by implementing group lessons for the Academic Saturdays. Usually, students who engage through group lessons instead of individual tutoring obtain better academic outcomes (Jitendra, Dupuis, & Rodriguez, 2012).

The third major theme that emerged from the analysis of the data was that students perceived that Upward Bound should continue forming self-esteem and confidence in the students. Several study participants suggested to create a program to focus on the incoming freshmen of Upward Bound. Having them take part in different social and academic activities could help these participants to develop their self-esteem and make them more resilient and confident in themselves. By increasing self-esteem in the program, participants could develop a belief in social equity, meaning that they are not at a disadvantage versus other students, so they can face academic and personal challenges with more confidence (Maiano, Begarie, Morin, & Ninot, 2009). Additionally, some participants of this study noted that sometimes they recognized people in their classrooms during Academic Saturdays by face, but did not talk to them because they did not know them. Because of this reason, the study participants recommended adding activities where participants could initiate conversations or take the initiative to establish relationships with the other participants. They mentioned that this would allow them to expose themselves to

situations they expect to face when in college. Studies suggest that students develop self-esteem through interaction with others. This concept makes the students' abilities to improve and also to learn new ones from the sharing of experience with their peers (Bandura, 1999; Caputo et al., 2002; Harter, 1999).

Lastly, most of the participants of this study agreed that Upward Bound should provide advising sessions with regard to what advanced classes they should take while in high school that will prepare them for college. The study participants noted that Upward Bound participants would find more confidence transitioning to college if they know that the advanced classes they took in high school were the most appropriate for them. Some participants perceived that the information about advanced classes in high school wasn't very helpful since they perceived that those classes didn't help them when they started college and in other cases they perceived that these classes didn't help in their preparation for exams like ACT or SAT. Planty, Provasnik, and Daniel (2007) proposed that student participation in advanced classes during high school is an important factor for future academic success, thereby the importance of implementing advising sessions pertaining to this.

Implications for Higher Education Practice

Several implications for higher education practice have resulted from the findings of this study. The findings indicate that the support Upward Bound participants receive from the program tend to be fundamental in their college preparation. In addition, different programming services were described as significant resources. According to Bandura (1977) the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory propose that individuals do not simply react to the influences of the

environment in which they live but instead, they actively seek and interpret information. Self-efficacy, which is the belief that goal attainment is sufficient motivation in itself, and can denote to how people have predetermined opinions about how they are able to complete certain tasks (Bandura, 1977; Zimmerman, 1989)

The first implication to higher education is that providing college preparatory resources to first-generation, low socio-economic high schools students increases the chances for this kind of student's enrollment, persistence, and completion of a degree within six years. Without these programs a significant number of students will not be ready to attend institutions of higher education when they finish high school. The number of first-generation college going students keeps increasing through the years (College Board, 2013b). In 2015, 24%, or 4.5 million, students whose parents did not complete a bachelor's degree enrolled in institutions of higher education and were classified as low socio-economic students (University Business, 2015). Future college students who do not receive enough or sufficient information regarding the college admittance process from their high school counselors and do not participate in college preparatory programs such as Upward Bound, tend to struggle when preparing for college and this may lead them to not enroll in college (Center for American Progress, 2009).

The second implication for institutions of higher education is that providing campus tours to first-generation, low socio-economic students could potentially help them in exploring opportunities and experience in-person different colleges and universities. Low socio-economic students usually do not have the monetary resources to afford traveling and visiting different universities across the country.

According to Safier (2015), one of the reasons college going students do not visit college campuses prior to starting the college application process is that financial barriers sometimes do not allow for traveling far distances. Sometimes, what makes it even harder is that some of the schools are located outside the state where the student resides (Garrou, 2016; Gordon, 2013; Safier, 2015). If low socio-economic students continue to lack of resources to visit multiple campuses across the nation, then these students are missing opportunities in terms of academics and also because they do not get to discover what financial aid packets other universities can offer.

The third implication for higher education institutions is that financial preparation allows first-generation, low socio-economic college students to continue believing that attending college is still a possibility (Kezar, 2010). The topic of financial preparation goes beyond assisting students with completing the federal application for financial aid. Instead, it provides knowledge to low socio-economic students to become financially literate. This means that students learn how to gain access to private loans, rent an apartment, build their credit score, save money, etc. (Harnisch, 2010). Learning how to plan to be able to pay for college expenses for first-generation college students is an important factor that can potentially lead these students to success. Most first-generation, low socio-economic students tend to stay longer in school because of their acquisition of such knowledge. If the number of students that graduate high school without a financial plan to be able to attend college keeps increasing, then the college enrollment for recent high school graduates will decrease.

The fourth implication for institutions of higher education is that college mentoring positively affects future college students. Specifically, first-generation, low socio-economic students find that being mentored by current college students or people who have success in their careers and have gone through the same obstacles is very helpful. These students tend to look for role models whose example they can follow (Gullatt and Jan, 2003). First-generation, low socio-economic students often benefit from mentors by having the opportunity to learn not only about their academic experiences, but also personal experiences (U.S. Department of Education, 1990). Most institutions of higher education nowadays have mentoring programs that focus on the academic, as well as personal growth of first-generation, low socio-economic students who are mostly underrepresented at the institutions. Without the proper personal and academic mentoring, underrepresented students such as first-generation, low socio-economic students will not be able to relate to others that have faced the same challenges and have a role model who they can follow.

The fifth implication for institutions of higher education is that SAT/ACT preparatory courses assist first-generation, low socio-economic students in obtaining the scores needed for college admission. These courses serve as supplemental instruction in preparing first-generation, low socio-economic students to pass the rank level required by different institutions for acceptance. Usually, students who engage in test preparatory courses tend to perform better in these college admittance examinations (Flores & Obasi, 2005). The time a student can spend before actually enrolling in college credit classes can depend significantly on the score students obtain in college admittance exams. In Texas, if a student doesn't meet a pre-determined

score, this student could require to take TSI (Texas Success Initiative) classes increasing the time the student would have to wait before taking classes that count toward her/his academic major.

Recommendations for Higher Education Practice

The findings of this study have produced several recommendations for higher education practice. Because Hispanics will represent 30% of the nation's population by 2050, how institutions of higher education prepare for this demographical change is pertinent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Self-efficacy impacts decisions, determination, perseverance, and in this case, academic achievement (Schunk, 2003). Self-efficacy also aids in sustaining motivation levels and promoting academic learning (Bandura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1989).

The first recommendation is that institutions of higher education should create first-year programs for first-generation, low socio-economic college going students to engage them in the college atmosphere and make them feel that they also count and are important (Engle, Bermeo, & O'Brien, 2015). These programs should not only be established to provide career mentoring, but also to assist first-generation, low socio-economic students in academic tutoring, financial literacy, and job placement (Klein, 2013).

The second recommendation is that institutions of higher education should allocate more resources in order to send admissions recruiters to visit high schools that are located in rural places, ensuring that high school graduates have an opportunity to learn more about different colleges and universities. There are more than 3,000 universities in the U.S. but not all of them get to connect to recent high school students

limiting the students the number of schools they can apply to (Garrou, 2016; Gordon. 2013). In some cases, higher education institutions that are considered *expensive* only focus on recruiting high income students, resulting in visiting low income high schools fewer times. Diversity is a topic that usually generates interest for institutions of higher education but institutions have the power to decide whether they want to fully become diverse or prioritize other aspects of education (Leonhardt,2015).

The third recommendation is that institutions of higher education should create alliances or partnerships with high schools to institute the importance of higher education and financial literacy early in high school students (MacDonald & Dorr, 2005). Teaching high school students how to plan to pay for their college expenditures after graduating from high school is paramount for low socio-economic students because it could help to increase the enrollment rates of this demographic (Berman, 2015; Flores, 2014). Currently, there are only five states that require to take a financial literacy course during a full semester as part of the high school curriculum (Champlain College, 2015). Within the objectives of teaching financial literacy among high school students is to reduce the dependency on students loans or use of credit cards instead of seeking for other alternatives such as grants or scholarships (Berman, 2015; Freeman, 2013).

The fourth recommendation is that institutions of higher education should encourage their faculty to participate in mentoring programs for first-generation, low socio-economic college going students. Ultimately, these efforts could provide the motivation students need to pursue college degrees (Chase, 2008; Givens, 2009; Challa, 2014). First-generation students usually tend search for role models that have

successfully mastered the area in which they would like to enter but without the proper guidance, these students will not be able to achieve their dreams. Having mentors from institutions of higher education commit to high school students could not only help them to achieve the ultimate goal that is to attend college but also in many cases it can help these students to skip from bad behaviors or avoid dropping out from high school and graduating (Jaimes, 2015; Klonsky, 1995; Sebenius, 2016).

The fifth recommendation is that institutions of higher education that currently host Upward Bound programs in their campuses continue developing the programs and expand the search for talent in high schools. The developing of the programs should consider adding courses to help high school students to better prepare for the national college admittance exams such ACT and SAT (Brand, 2016; McWilliams, 2013). Implementing these preparatory courses shouldn't be the only initiative with this regard. High school officials should also concentrate on advising students to make the best decisions when it comes to what advance classes they should take that could later benefit them as they prepare for college (Edwards, 2015; Hopkins, 2012).

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study on how former participants of Upward Bound perceive the way the program affected their college success illuminates the need for future research. Further, the Upward Bound program will be in existence at the study institution for 50 years, so it is highly important to continue the success of the program by taking into consideration the perceptions of former participants. A study that could provide further knowledge about the topic would be a collective qualitative study in

which former participants from different Upward Bound programs in the state report their perceptions of the program and how their participation affected or shaped their college success. This study will allow for comparing results from various institutions and provide an overall scope of the effectiveness of the program.

Another study that could further the knowledge of the perception of former participants about the effectiveness of the program is an instrumental qualitative study that focuses on participants who are now college graduates. In addition, a quantitative study that could be conducted to discover the success of former Upward Bound participants is a quantitative study to measure the college graduation rate of former participants. This study will help in determining the rate of participants who enrolled, persisted, and completed college. Data collection for this study could happen by analyzing internal documents of the program at the institution, or institutions, where the study is being conducted as well as providing a questionnaire with pre-determined answer choices in order to help the researcher in counting the responses.

Another area of research that should be conducted is a comparative qualitative study on the perceptions of current first-generation, low socio-economic students who did not participate in the Upward Bound program about the difficulties in preparing for college. This study will help in providing valuable information that could be used to compare the processes and services former students of the Upward Bound program received with those that only received information about college from their high school counselors. Further research could be performed by analyzing the success of students who participated in Upward Bound programs hosted by universities and those by community colleges.

Another way to obtain further information with regard to how former Upward Bound participants benefited from the program would be a quantitative study in which former participants are asked to answer semi-structured questions where they are presented with situations and a grading scale. This study will permit school administrators to classify the program by tiers.

Finally, a multiple-case study is recommended in which current high school senior Upward Bound participants are interviewed to obtain their perceptions about how they feel the program has prepared them so far to bridge to college after high school completion. This study could focus on the resources the program made available for participants every semester such as tutoring, financial aid workshops, college application assistance, etc. Conducting this study in rural locations where access to information regarding college is somewhat difficult to obtain will add relevance to the study by allowing the researcher to discover the effectiveness of the program in preparing students for college. Later this study could be compared with another study using the same study parameters but changing the study setting. For instance, the additional study could be conducted in urban and metropolitan areas.

Conclusion

Predictions indicate that Hispanics will represent 30% of the nation's population by 2050, so it is important for institutions of higher education to prepare for this demographical change (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012a). Programs such as Upward Bound provide college preparatory assistance to first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students. Therefore, it is of high importance for the effectiveness of this program to continue positively affecting the success of future

college students. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants concerning the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Of specific interests in this study were the perceptions of these former participants and how their participation affected their college success, what services provided by the program were the most beneficial or detrimental, as well as what recommendations they might have to improve the services provided by the program to better support Hispanic undergraduate students. A qualitative methodology and intrinsic case study design was utilized to address the four research questions that guided this study. The framework for the study was Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory and the tenet of self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1989). There were a total of 10 participants from a large, public, four-year high research intensive university located in the Southwestern region of the U.S.. Data was collected through means such as the researcher, semi-structured interviews, field notes, reflexive journaling, and institutional documents. The constant-comparative method and open coding were used to analyze the collected data. Additionally, trustworthiness was included in the research process. The overall findings of this study support that the participants of this study perceive that the Upward Bound program provided valuable mechanisms for success in higher education to support first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic college going students. Their perceptions were supported through their experiences gained while participating in the Upward Bound program and their recent college experiences.

The participants agreed that the Upward Bound program positively affected their college success and provided them with opportunity to achieve their goals. The

mechanisms described as what they perceived more valuable for their success was the summer bridge program which provided them with the opportunity to spend a summer semester at the study institution taking college classes and learning about the college setting. In addition, the participants were in agreement that the program helped them to visit other colleges and universities across the nation which helped them explore other options. The participants also perceived that receiving tutoring from the program benefited them in their academic careers because the help they received made them ready for college.

In addition, the participants perceived that the program helped them to increase their confidence making them able to take on new challenges and accomplish their goals. Additionally, participants perceived that the Upward Bound program taught them how to set up goals and follow the necessary steps to accomplish them in order to keep progressing not only academically but personally. Some participants mentioned that in their high schools, the counselors didn't pay much attention in providing them with the necessary information in order to be prepared to start the application for college but they relied in Upward Bound to receive this information because they knew the program would provide it for them. All participants agreed that having a program that cared for their success made them feel that they were equal to students from high socio-economic backgrounds even though they came from first-generation, low socio-economic backgrounds.

Similarly, the participants perceived that the Academic Saturday component of the program was one of the most significant programming of Upward Bound because it allowed them to engage in activities that helped them in their preparation for college

and also it gave them the opportunity to meet with counselors and tutors to clarify any doubts they had. In addition, participants perceived that the motivational speakers the program invited to present for the students was significant or important because it was easier for the participants to connect with people that shared backgrounds with them and have been able to succeed regardless of the challenges they faced. Additionally, the study participants perceived that while in program they were well mentored and advised. They mentioned that the staff at Upward Bound were always willing to assist them with any questions or concerns they had related to their college preparation process.

Lastly, the participants provided recommendations for the program. In majority they perceived that based on their experiences the program should make improvements in the Academy Saturday component which they mentioned is a great resource for all the program participants. They described that the Academic Saturdays should be more interactive in order to attract the attention of more program participants. In addition, the participants recommended to have more Academic Saturdays during the school year as well as reorganizing the schedule of these. Additionally, some participants recommended to add more ways to deliver tutoring such as after school tutoring at the high schools and also to have these sessions led by college students because it would be easier to make a connection with tutors that are close in age. Finally, the participants recommended to plan activities where the program participants could engage to build or improve their confidence and self-esteem.

As the enrollment rate for first-generation, low socio-economic students continues to decrease, it is paramount for institutions of higher education to prepare future college students to matriculate, persist, and complete a program of higher education. Upward Bound programs has proved to be a very helpful resource for underrepresented students specially for first-generation, low socio-economic Hispanic students. Therefore efforts should be allocated into preserving the continued funding of this program.

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APPENDIX A

IRB – Approval Letter



Dec 5, 2016 1:41 PM CST
Stephanie Jones
Educational Psychology Leaders

Re: IRB2016-1032 A Qualitative Study on the Perceptions of Former Upward Bound Participants of the Effectiveness of the Program in Supporting Low Socio-Economic Hispanic Students

Findings: This study is approved. Best wishes with your research!

Expiration Date: *Nov 30, 2017*

Dear Dr. Stephanie Jones, ,Jesse Jalomo:

A Texas Tech University IRB reviewer has approved the proposal referenced above within the expedited category of:

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

The approval is effective from Dec 5, 2016 to Nov 30, 2017. The expiration date must appear on your consent document(s).

Expedited research requires continuing IRB review. You will receive an automated email approximately 30 days before Nov 30, 2017. At this time, should you wish to continue your protocol, a **Renewal Submission** will be necessary. Any change to your protocol requires a **Modification Submission** for review and approval before implementation.

Your study may be selected for a Post-Approval Review (PAR). A PAR investigator may contact you to observe your data collection procedures, including the consent process. You will be notified if your study has been chosen for a PAR.

Should a subject be harmed or a deviation occur from either the approved protocol or federal regulations (45 CFR 46), please complete an **Incident Submission** form.

When your research is complete and no identifiable data remains, please use a **Closure Submission** to terminate this protocol.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kelly C. Cukrowicz'.

Kelly C. Cukrowicz, Ph.D.
Chair, Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board

APPENDIX B

**EMAIL TO THE EXECUTIVE ADMINISTRATIVE ASSOCIATE TO THE
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT AND VICE PROVOST FOR TEXAS TECH
UNIVERSITY**

Dear Dahlia Guerra:

My name is Jesse Jalomo and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University. I am working towards completing a doctoral degree in Higher Education. My dissertation research topic focuses on the perceptions of former Upward Bound participants of the effectiveness of the program. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the perceptions of former Upward Bound Hispanic participants regarding the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students.

Attached to this email is a Consent Form that provides additional information.

I am requesting your assistance as a participant in this research study. If you agree, I am requesting your assistance in sending the email script found below and a copy of the Consent Form to potential participants who meet the inclusion criteria to participate in this study at the institution. I am seeking participants who are former Upward Bound participants enrolled at the institution. They will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting 60 minutes.

Their participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and any information provided will be strictly used for the purpose of the research study.

If you have any questions regarding this research study, please contact me at Jesse.Jalomo@ttu.edu or call (806) 928-0199. This study is being supervised by Dr. Stephanie J. Jones who also will be glad to answer any questions you may have. Dr. Jones can be reached via email at Stephanie.J.Jones@ttu.edu or by phone at (806) 834-1380.

Thank you for your time and consideration in allowing me to conduct this study at your institution, as well as your assistance in forwarding the study information to potential participants.

Sincerely,

Jesse Jalomo
Texas Tech University Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C

EMAIL TO POTENTIAL RESEARCH STUDY PARTICIPANTS

Dear former Upward Bound participant,

My name is Jesse Jalomo and I am a doctoral candidate at Texas Tech University. I am working towards completing a doctoral degree in Higher Education Administration. My dissertation research topic focuses on the perceptions of former Upward Bound participants of the effectiveness of the program. Specifically, I am interested in exploring the perceptions of former Upward Bound Hispanic participants regarding the support of the program provided to low socio-economic Hispanic students.

I am requesting your assistance as a participant in this research study. The research study would involve your participation in one in-person interview lasting 60 minutes. The interview will be scheduled based on your availability. The interview will take place at the Texas Tech Library, and I will provide you with a copy of the questions I plan to ask one week prior to the interview.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and any information provided will be strictly used for the purpose of the research study. If you are willing to participate in the research study, please email me directly at Jesse.Jalomo@ttu.edu, or you may call me at (806) 928-0199. This study is being supervised by Dr. Stephanie J. Jones who also will be glad to answer any questions you may have. Dr. Jones can be reached via email at Stephanie.J.Jones@ttu.edu or by phone at (806) 834-1380.

Thank you for your time and consideration in participating as in this research study.

Sincerely,

Jesse Jalomo
Texas Tech University Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

What do participants need to do to volunteer for this study? If you are willing to participate in the research study, please email the researcher directly at Jesse.Jalomo@ttu.edu, or you may call him at (806) 928-0199. This study is being supervised by Dr. Stephanie J. Jones who also will be glad to answer any questions you may have. Dr. Jones can be reached via email at Stephanie.J.Jones@ttu.edu or by phone at (806) 834-1380.

What is this project studying? This case study is studying the perceptions of former upward bound participants of the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students.

What would you do if you participate? In this study, you will be asked to participate in an in-person interview, conducted a time and location on your college's campus. The questions asked during the interview will focus on your experience as a former Upward Bound participant. Following the interview, participants will be provided with a complete transcript of the interview to verify the information provided and a follow-up phone call will be conducted to offer an opportunity to clarify any information provided during the interview and/or to provide additional information believed to be pertinent to the research study.

Can I quit if I become uncomfortable? Yes, absolutely. Your participation is completely voluntary. The researchers and the Institutional Review Board have reviewed the questions and think you can answer them comfortably. You may skip any question you do not feel comfortable answering. You can also stop answering questions at any time. You are free to leave at any time you wish. You can keep all the benefits of participating even if you stop. However, we do appreciate any help you are able to provide.

How long will participation take? We are asking for 60 minutes of your time for the in-person interview.

How are you protecting privacy? Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and any information collected will be strictly used for research purposes. Your identity and the identity of your institution will be kept confidential. The following measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality: 1) each participant in the study will be assigned a pseudonym and no personal identifiers will be collected or noted in the research study; 2) the institution the participants' attend will be identified by a pseudonym; 3) all data collected will only be viewed by the researchers and a possible third party transcriptionist; 4) all data, including audio recordings, notes, and records, will be stored in a password protected computer hard drive; and 5) any materials printed during the research study will be locked in a safe when not in use.

How will I benefit from participating? By participating you will be providing valuable information to the research study that will contribute to the improvement of the Upward Bound program in serving Hispanic low socio-economic participants.

I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?

1. If you have questions about this study, please contact Jesse Jalomo at Jesse.Jalomo@ttu.edu or by phone at (806) 928-0199.
2. You may also contact Dr. Stephanie J. Jones, who is supervising this study, by email at Stephanie.J.Jones@ttu.edu or by phone at (806) 834-1380.
3. TTU also has a Board that protects the rights of people who participate in research. You can call to ask them questions at 806-742-2064. You can mail your questions to the Human Research Protection Program, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409, or you can email your questions to hrpp@ttu.edu.

Participant's Signature

Date

Participant's Signature

Consent form is valid until 11/30/2017

APPENDIX E

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

A Qualitative Study on the Perceptions of Former Upward Bound Participants of the Effectiveness of the Program in Supporting Low Socio-Economic Hispanic Students

Interviewer: Jesse Jalomo

Date:

Time:

Location:

Pseudonym:

I. Opening Statement:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and participate in this research study. Your contribution to this study will prove valuable in understanding the effectiveness of the Upward Bound program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. The purpose of this Qualitative case study is to explore the perceptions and experiences of former Upward Bound participants regarding the effectiveness of the program in supporting low socio-economic Hispanic students. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and any information collected will be strictly used for research purposes. You may choose not to answer any question or discontinue the interview at any time. Your identity and the identity of your institution will be kept completely confidential and will not be published in any reports. You will be given an opportunity to review the transcripts of this interview to clarify meaning and verify information. At this time do I have your permission to continue this interview, audio record the interview, and take notes? Consent given:

Do you have any questions before we begin?

I. Opening Questions:

1. What is your name?
2. Are you currently enrolled at Texas Tech University?
3. What is your current classification and number of college credits?
4. Are you currently in good academic standing? What is your overall GPA?
5. What is your major/minor?

II. Main Questions:

1. How long were you in the Upward Bound program? What years?
2. Did you successfully complete the Upward Bound program? When?
3. Did you enroll in the institution in the first fall after graduation? If not, when?
4. How do you perceive Upward Bound was helpful in preparing you for college? Why?
5. What specifically with regard to programming did you perceive as the most significant and/or helpful for your college career? Please explain and provide details.
6. What specifically with regard to programming did you perceive as not being significant and/or helpful for your college career? Please explain and provide details.
7. How do you perceive Upward Bound is supportive to low-socio economic students? Why?
8. How do you perceive Upward Bound is supportive to Hispanic students? Why?
9. What semester and year do you expect to graduate from college?
10. What programming improvements would you recommend for the Upward Bound program? Please provide specifics.

III. Concluding Questions:

1. Is there anything else you would like to add at this time?
2. Is there anything I have may have missed about Upward Bound that you feel may be valuable to this research study?
3. Do you have any questions for me?
4. If I should need to follow-up and clarify any information provided, would it be ok to do so?

II. Closing Statement:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and serve as a participant in this research study. I would like to remind you that everything you and I have discussed will be used strictly for research purposes, and at no time will your identity be compromised in any published reports. Finally, once I have prepared a transcript of this interview, I will share it with you to verify the information you provided. This concludes our interview session, and I will now stop the recording.