

Lived Experiences of Hispanic Youth during Their Transition to Postsecondary  
Education

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## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife and children.

## Abstract

In a knowledge-based economy, achievement of a postsecondary credential has become a requirement for individual development and, specifically, fulfillment of career aspirations. In the onset of the Twenty-First Century, Hispanic youth represent the fast growing group in postsecondary educational programs in the United States; however, Hispanic youth have the highest non-completion rate in postsecondary programs.

This study investigated the lived experiences of 15 Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary education and supplements current research on the postsecondary achievement of the Hispanic community. Participants of this study were enrolled in postsecondary programs at public colleges or universities in a large metropolitan area in the Midwest Region of the United States. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach was used to explore in detail how Hispanic youth make sense of their personal and social world to better understand the meaning of their experiences and events that have influenced them during their transition to postsecondary education. An adaptation of Tinto's Model of Student Departure (1993) provided the theoretical framework.

The themes found in this study include the lack of a sense of belonging that Hispanic youth experience at postsecondary educational institutions, racism, and difficulty accessing quality education programs and financial resources.

Facilitating positive and effective connections for Hispanic youth with postsecondary faculty and promoting a sense of belonging may help future Hispanic youth access to and succeed in postsecondary programs. The findings of this research could help postsecondary faculty and administrators better connect with Hispanic youth and increase their success at postsecondary education programs. Furthermore, recommendations of further research are presented.

*Keywords:* Hispanic, Postsecondary achievement, Midwest region, non-completion, social development, academic development, emotional development, sense of belonging.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

If a Hispanic high school student in the United States is asked whether or not participation in postsecondary education programs is in their horizon, the most likely answer would be an overwhelming yes (Fry, 2011; Noell, 1992; Perna, 2005;). As the current economic system in the United States has evolved into a knowledge-based economic model where research, development, and implementation of new technologies requires a high level of education and preparation, postsecondary institutions, more than ever before, play a vital role in providing quality educational opportunities (Barton, 2008; Valentine et al., 2011). Participation in postsecondary education in the United States has become an aspiration for the majority of secondary school students, their families, and peers as well as a basic requirement that is sought after by almost all employers who are looking for a well-trained, professional, and talented workforce (Adelman, 2004; Bowers & Bergman, 2016; Grubb, 2002). On average, a high level of education produces a higher level of economic returns to individuals and a larger productivity output for the economic system as a whole (Marcotte, Bailey, Borkoski, & Kienzl, 2005). Achieving a college degree provides higher earnings opportunities for individuals than a high school diploma (Paulsen & St. John, 2002; Valentine et al, 2011). The majority of employment positions that pay wages to support a family require skills and knowledge that are associated with postsecondary enrollment and degree completion (Carnevale & Derochers, 2003). In our contemporary economic system, postsecondary degree completion defines individual's access and mobility to economic, social, and political opportunities (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Furthermore, more education, on the aggregate, produces a decrease in

unemployment rates and a larger participation in economic, social, and community activities (Barrow & Rouse, 2005; Strayhorn, 2010).

In the last sixty years, the dynamics of access to postsecondary education has dramatically changed. Once considered a domain of the wealthy and well-connected, where attendance was heavily influenced by the quality of social networks that individuals and families possessed, access to postsecondary education significantly changed after the Second World War to a meritocracy, where academic preparation and achievement began to play an important role in the opportunity to attend postsecondary institutions (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Huber et al., 2008; Hutcheson & Kidder, 2011). Later, with changes in the economy of the United States, and after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's, access to postsecondary education began to be promoted by a variety of public and private organizations and it is now available to the majority of interested students (Gilbert & Heller, 2013; Trow, 2007). Currently, access to postsecondary education programs varies from institutions that provide open enrollment access, where the minimum requirement is completion of a high school diploma or its equivalent, to highly selective programs that make admissions decisions using criteria that includes scores in standardized examinations, class rank, and other academic and social characteristics of applicants (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Even though, enrollment in postsecondary programs by Hispanic youth has significantly increased, their retention and graduation rates are significantly low (Adelman, 2005; Cerezo & McWhirter, 2012; Cerna, Pérez & Sáenz, 2009; Fry et al. 2011; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, M, 2007; Nuñez, 2009).

Postsecondary institutions in the United States promote educational programs as a required element for the achievement of a better socioeconomic status and the fulfillment of career goals and objectives of individuals (Trow, 2007; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). As a matter of public policy, and to be competitive with other industrialized nations, the United States government promotes educational achievement for all and has implemented a myriad of laws and initiatives to facilitate access and opportunity to postsecondary institutions and programs (Garcia & Bayer, 2005; Kena, Musu-Gillette, Robinson, Wang, Rathbun, Zhang & Velez 2015). With the assistance of government, institutional, and privately-sponsored programs, access to postsecondary programs is within the reach of many; however, individuals' pre-postsecondary experiences, individual characteristics, socioeconomic status, and participation in support programs significantly affect their academic success and graduation. Unfortunately, postsecondary education enrollment and completion rates varied significant among different sectors of the population and, in many respects, has not produced the intended results envisioned (Valentine et. al., 2011). Furthermore, compared to other industrialized nations, the United States is near the bottom in college access and degree attainment (Bok, 2015; Corak, 2013; David, 2014; Kena et al., 2015).

Hispanic students are the fastest growing ethnic group entering public schools in the United States (Hoyle & Collier, 2006; Fry et al., 2011). Between 1990 and 2009, the percentage of public school students who were Hispanic doubled from 11 to 22 percent (Vue, Haslerig, Jayakumar & Allen, 2012). In 2011, Hispanic students made up 17% of all 18 to 24 year olds enrolled in college (Fry et al., 2011). Nevertheless, Hispanic students continue to be underrepresented in 4 year postsecondary institutions (Crisp &

Nora, 2010; Fry & Lopez, 2012; O'Connor, Hammack & Scott, 2010). Although Hispanic students are enrolling in postsecondary institutions, specifically two-year colleges, at record numbers, the percentage of Hispanic students who do not graduate from postsecondary programs is significantly higher compared to other racial and ethnic groups (Aud, Kena, Bianco, Frohlich, Kemp & Tahan, 2011).

In this chapter, the problem statement, purpose statement, and research questions are presented. An overview of the theoretical framework that guides this study and research approach is included.

### **Problem Statement**

Participation in postsecondary educational opportunities is not only a personal aspiration of elementary, middle, and high school students but a required step in a career path in the majority of professions in the United States (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Postsecondary institutions are viewed as places where academic learning and the personal development of students take place that significantly determines how the student will lead productive lives and address major societal issues including social integration and economic development (Tuttle, Chickering & Schlossberg 1995; Graham & Cockriel 1996). Even though access to postsecondary programs is within the reach of many, the quality of programs, availability of resources, and subsequent contributions in the careers of participants varies significantly. Hispanic youth, that, in the onset of the Twenty-First Century, represent a large percentage of students enrolled in elementary and secondary programs throughout the United States, are accessing postsecondary programs at a constantly increasing numbers; however, the level of retention and subsequent graduation

are significantly low compared to white students (Fry & Taylor, 2013; Horn, Nevill & Griffith, 2006; Kelly, Schneider & Carey, 2010).

Hispanic youth are enrolling in postsecondary institutions in record numbers (Fry et al., 2011). According to the U.S. Census, nearly 3.4 million Hispanics enrolled in postsecondary programs in 2012, an increase of over 15 percent from 2011, and now represent over 17 percent of the overall postsecondary student population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Nevertheless, current postsecondary graduations rates of Hispanic youth are less than half of white students (Brown & Lopez, 2013). Furthermore, research conducted by Cabrera, Lee, Swail and Williams (2005) indicates that only 23 percent of Hispanic postsecondary students earn a baccalaureate degree within four years.

Compared with members from their own generation, fewer Hispanic youth are graduating from postsecondary institutions and their experience during their transition is not well understood (Contreras, 2009; Rivas-Drake, 2011). Hispanics are graduating at lower rates from the most selective to the least selective postsecondary institutions in the United States and, besides individual characteristics of Hispanic students, postsecondary institutional practices play a key role in degree achievement (Kelly et al, 2010; Nguyen, Bibo, & Engle, 2012). Therefore, this phenomenon represents a knowledge gap that requires a better understanding of the individual experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary institutions.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs. This study points to some options or

alternatives that could facilitate the success of Hispanic youth in pursuing rewarding careers and, consequently, improving their socioeconomic condition in the United States.

The low levels of retention and degree completion of Hispanic youth in postsecondary programs is well documented in the current literature that studies educational achievement of diverse populations in the United States (Cortez, 2011; Hernandez, 2000; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Johnson, Gutter, Xu, Cho & DeVaney, 2016). There is extensive research conducted on the underlying factors such as income (Ryan & Ream, 2016), quality of education (Maestas, Vaquera, Zehr, 2007), level of engagement (Devos & Torres, 2007; Gonzalez, 2010; Walton & Spencer, 2009), and language (Crenshaw, 2010) that have an effect on postsecondary retention and degree completion of Hispanic students. In the past thirty years, most of the research conducted on transitions to postsecondary education programs has been based on analyses of national longitudinal data sets of secondary school seniors who moved directly to postsecondary institutions (Perna, 2006; Palardy, 2013; Ryan & Ream, 2016). Studies have been conducted to attempt to better explain the effects of real and perceived barriers that affect Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary education programs; however, there have been few studies that have attempted to get the perspectives of Hispanic youth themselves (Nora et al, 1996; Perna, 2006). Some studies have attempted to understand the phenomena from theories adapted from the fields of psychology, economics, and law while other studies have relied on well establish theories from the fields of anthropology and sociology (Brown, 2014; Huber, Lopez, Malagon, Velez & Solorzano, 2008; Von Robertson, Bravo & Chaney, 2016; Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn & Pascarella, 1996). Nevertheless, little is known about how Hispanic youth successfully transition into

postsecondary programs and what factors, including culture, social capital, and the environment, have the most influence. Furthermore, some of the barriers that affect Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs are not popular themes and are generally controversial at best amongst scholars, elected officials and the general population including racism, classism, and xenophobia (Contreras, 2009; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Rivas-Drake, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010; Vartanian & Gleason, 1999).

There is a void in the literature that specifically studies the experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition into postsecondary programs. Better understanding of the transition experiences that Hispanic students have, and the choices that they make while navigating the postsecondary systems in the United States, is critical to improve opportunities for all youth wishing to achieve a postsecondary education and for Hispanic youth in particular (Araujo, 2011). Better understanding of individual lived experiences of Hispanic youth will assist faculty and administrators at postsecondary institutions in better designing sustainable programs that facilitate the academic achievement of all participating students.

### **Research Questions**

For this study, the research questions focus on the lived experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to postsecondary programs. More specifically:

1. - What are the experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to postsecondary education?
2. - How do Hispanic youth recognize, respond to, and manage personal experiences and environmental factors that affect their transition to postsecondary education?



## **Theoretical Framework**

The difficulties experienced by Hispanic students during their transition to postsecondary programs are generally understood as the consequence of a variety of factors and individual situations but a consistent theme throughout the literature is the effect of the level of social, academic, and emotional development achieved by participants that is generally necessary for a successful postsecondary transition (Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Nora, 2004; Paulsen, & John, 2002; Mendoza, Mendez & Malcolm (2009); Goldrick-Rab et al 2016). The theoretical framework used in this study is an adaptation of the Student Departure model advanced by Tinto (1993) that is centered of the following factors that may lead to a student's withdrawal from postsecondary programs: (1) academic difficulties; (2) inability of students to resolve their educational and occupational goals and; (3) failure of students to remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the postsecondary institution (Baker, 2008). Postsecondary students could be academically unprepared for the rigors of postsecondary programs; they could be unaware of the different types of support programs and how to better participate in those; or they are unable to receive the emotional support from teachers, peers, and relatives that are factors usually associated with a successful postsecondary transition (Adelman, 2005; Falbo, Contreras, & Avalos, 2003; Crosnoe, 2004)

## **Research Approach**

The questions posited in this study centered on the personal experiences and their meaning for participants. A qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research approach will be adopted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to bring the lived

experiences of the participants and its interpretation to life (Bluff, King, & McMahon, 2012; Larkin & Thompson, 2012; Smith, 2011). This research approach goes beyond individual participant understanding of their social constructed lived experiences presented in the text of their narratives to include the context where those experiences occurred and how individuals make sense of their own transition to postsecondary programs (Gibson & Hanes 2003). A number of superordinate themes, representing distinct stages of the transition to postsecondary programs alongside subthemes will be presented in the analysis in Chapter 5.

Hermeneutic phenomenology has its origins in the work of Martin Heidegger, Husserl, and Merleau-Ponty (Giorgi, 2012, Groenewald, 2004, Moustakas, 1994;). Gibson and Hanes (2003) indicated that phenomenology can make a significant contribution to research in Human Resource Development (HRD) by seeking to understand the lived experiences and considerations of research participants. Furthermore, Hein and Austin (2001), gave greater recognition to the social and cultural context of experience that hermeneutic phenomenology could elicit.

Using purposive sampling, fifteen Hispanic youth, who transitioned into postsecondary programs, were interviewed (Given, 2008; Smith, 2015; Yardley, 2008). In-depth semi-structured interviews, designed to see the phenomenon from the perspective of the interviewee and gain in-depth understanding of the nature and meaning of everyday experience, was one of the data gathering tools (Baxter, Magolda & King, 2007; King, 2014). Data collected included narratives from semi-structured interviews, surveys completed by participants, observation by the researcher, and analysis of relevant

documents and reports. A data analysis process assisted by Nvivo10 was used to examine in-depth interview data.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research study seeks to contribute to the theory and practice of disciplines that work to promote equal access to postsecondary education programs in contemporary diverse societies that values the different views and experiences of its members. Though the conceptual literature that studies the current educational achievement disparities within various sectors of the population is growing, more empirical studies are needed to support the claims associated with the experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to postsecondary institutions. The literature suggests that research on transitions to postsecondary education is a promising field (Bailey, 2009; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Although there is a significant body of research on factors such as poverty, language, and immigration status underlying Hispanic youth postsecondary participation (Fernandez & Shu, 1988; Hoyle & Collier, 2006; Orozco-Suarez, 2004), there have been few studies that have attempted to gain the perspective of Hispanic youth themselves. As such, there is a need to conduct both quantitative and qualitative research that focus on the perspective of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary education.

By providing a conduit where a variety of factors are presented and analyze how those that affect Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs, this study could assist researchers, practitioners, and policymakers in better understanding the lived experiences that Hispanic youth have during their journey to access and succeed in

postsecondary education programs. Consequently, this research contributes to the body of literature on Hispanic postsecondary participation.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

Because different terminology is used around issues affecting the Hispanic community in the United States, it is necessary to develop a working understanding of terms for the purpose of this study.

*Social Identity.* Turner & Halsam (2001) defined social identity as a collection of people who share the same social identification or see themselves in terms of the same social category membership in the context of a psychological affinity.

*Hispanic.* Comas-Diaz (2001) indicated that the term Hispanic was officially created in 1970 by the United States Census Bureau to designate people of Spanish origin who identified themselves as such.

*First-Generation Student.* According to Upcraft, Gardner, & Barefoot, 2005, first-generation student is defined as a student whose parents' or legal guardian's highest level of education is a high school diploma or below. First-generation students do include those individuals whose parents enrolled in college initially, but failed to complete an associate's or bachelor's degree.

*First-Generation Hispanic.* Zimmerman, Vega, Gil, Warheit, Apospori & Biafora, 1994) indicated that the term first-generation Hispanics identifies individuals born in Latin America.

*Second-Generation Hispanics.* This term is used to describe those individuals born in the United States but whose parents were born in Latin America (Zimmerman et al., 1994).

*Third-Generation Hispanics.* Denote those individuals who were, along with their parents, born in the United States, but all of whose grandparents were born in Latin America (Zimmerman et al., 1994).

*Postsecondary Education.* Aud, Fox and Ramani (2010) define postsecondary education as the provision of a formal instructional program whose curriculum is designed primarily for students who are beyond the compulsory age for high school. This includes programs whose purpose is academic, vocational, and continuing professional education, but excludes adult basic education programs (Valentine et al, 2009).

*Postsecondary Choice.* This term describes as a complex, multi-stage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university, or institution of advanced vocational training (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989).

*Disadvantaged Student.* The term disadvantaged student refers to a student who, due to educational, economic, cultural, environmental, experiential, or familial circumstances, may be less likely to aspire to, enroll in, or succeed in higher education relative to his or her non- disadvantaged peers (Revised Code of Washington, 2009).

*Community Member.* For the purposes of this study, a community member is a member of a group that is organized around common values and is attributed with social cohesion within a shared geographical location (Parada et al, 2016).

*Participant.* This term refers to the participants selected to participate in this study (Rogler, 1989).

*Ethnic Identity.* Encompasses a commitment to and pride in one's own ethnic group (French, Seidman, Allen & Aber, 2006).

*Racism.* Is a real, pervasive, and systemic social construct centered on skin color that is frequently not perceptible to individuals or, if perceived, may not always be reported, that results in fear and social inequality (Krieger, Smith, Naishadham, Hartman & Barbeau, 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Vaught & Castagno, 2008).

*Systemic Racism.* This is a type of racism occurring through societal organizations, institutions, laws, policies, practices, etc. (Goodman & Frazier, 2015; Paradies, 2006)

*Intra-Racism.* Paradies (2006) indicated that this is a form of racism that “occurs when an individual is discriminated against because of their race by a member of their own ethnic/racial group (Cholewa, Goodman, West-Olatunji, & Amatea, 2014).

*Social Capital.* In the context of this study, social capital is defined as the collective perception of the social relationships among students, parents, and faculty within the educational environment and the social resources that are transmitted through these relationships, such as trust, support, norms, and values (Goddard, 2003).

*Hispanic Culture.* Are beliefs and practices that emphasize group-based goals and close identification with one’s family throughout life, known as collectivism (Freeberg & Stein, 1996; Guiffrida, 2006).

*Emotional Intelligence.* This phrase refers to the awareness of, and skills necessary to navigate, emotionally laden circumstances in a healthy manner (Petrides & Furnham, 2006) that contributes to the positive development of emerging adults (Fernandez, Salamonson, & Griffiths, 2012)

*Lived Experience.* For the purpose of this study, lived experiences is defined as the stories of participants as they happen, during their transition to postsecondary programs, paying attention to time, context, and place (Clandinin, Murphy, Huber & Orr, 2009)

### **Qualifications of the Researcher**

In my professional career, I developed and implemented a variety of educational programs and initiatives aimed to promote access to and success in postsecondary programs for traditionally underrepresented students in the United States. My work with the Hispanic community has provided me with the network and trusting relationships with many postsecondary students, parents, college and university administrators, and policymakers to make this research possible. I have been an administrator at a large postsecondary system in the state of Minnesota for over 15 years and have facilitated systemic changes to promote better collaboration with elementary and secondary school programs. My experience as a founder and director of charter schools include promoting the organization of parent's groups to better advocate for the education of their children and to increase the quality and rigor of their educational experience to better prepare them for postsecondary programs and careers.

As a postsecondary administrator, I become aware of the challenges and opportunities that Hispanic students experience during their transition to postsecondary programs and realized that the current literature does not fully incorporate the intricacies and diverse perspectives of Hispanic postsecondary students.

My formal training in adult education, statistical analysis, public policy, and law, have provided me with the theoretical and practical foundation to conduct the current study. As a member of the Hispanic community in the United States and reflecting on my personal experience I have the relational competence to successfully conduct this research. I acknowledge that my values, experiences, and background influence this

research and I am aware of the responsibilities that this entails. My personal knowledge of the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs will help understand the experiences of participants during interviews and effectively analyze qualitative data.

### **Overview**

This dissertation contains six chapters. Chapter one provides an introduction to the study that includes relevant background information, significance of the study, and qualifications of the researcher. Chapter two contains a review of current literature on the transition to postsecondary programs by Hispanic youth. Chapter three provides an overview of the research methodology that includes the philosophical foundations of qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological research and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as it applies to the current study. Chapter four will present the findings of this research. Chapter five will provide a discussion of the findings of this study compared with current literature. Finally, chapter six will provide implications of the findings of this study, recommendations for future research and practice, and will present a personal reflection on this research.



## Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

A significant volume of research on the educational achievement of Hispanic youth is present in the current literature. The volume of current literature on Hispanic student's transitions to postsecondary programs reflects the importance of this area of research and authors have contributed thousands of articles on the topic. Research has been conducted from different fields including education, economics, psychology, law, and public affairs (Baum & Flores, 2011; Bok, 2015; Crenshaw, 2010). Quantitative studies that have used measurements of economic factors and degree achievement have informed us about the value of postsecondary education for individuals, their communities, and the nation in general (Alon, 2007; Avery & Turner, 2012). Research on disparities of educational achievement between different communities have demonstrated that there is a need for educational administrators and elected officials to better understand the real and perceived factors that influence such disparities (Goldrick-Rab, Kelchen, Harris & Benson, 2016; Kena et al., 2015). The difficulties experienced during the transition to postsecondary programs are generally the consequence of a variety of factors and individual situations (Pike & Robbins, 2016). Hispanic students could be academically unprepared for the rigors of postsecondary programs; they could be unaware of the different types of support programs and how to better participate in those; or they are unable to receive the emotional support from teachers, peers, and relatives that is usually associated to a successful transition (Adelman, 1999; Barrow, Richburg-Hayes, Rouse & Brock, 2014; Cejda & Rhodes, 2004; Robinson, Stempel, & McCree, 2005). The majority of published empirical articles related to the postsecondary achievement of Hispanic youth utilize normative quantitative supported frameworks; nevertheless, most

recently, there are few researchers that have begun to developed a variety of empirical methods to attempt to provide a conduit where the voice of Hispanic youth is conveyed to better understand the true meaning of their own experience during their transition to postsecondary educational programs (Valentine et al., 2009; Castro & Cortez, 2017; Gonzales, 2010).

This chapter reviews relevant literature on postsecondary education participation of Hispanic youth in the United States and their challenges and opportunities generally presented. The review will be guided by the following questions: How current academic research explains the low postsecondary achievement of Hispanic youth? What programs are helping Hispanic youth in achieving postsecondary education? What are the barriers and challenges that Hispanic youth face during their transition to postsecondary education? What theories and hypothesis have been used to research Hispanic postsecondary transition experiences? This chapter begins with an overview of the literature search process used to find relevant studies that have been published on the postsecondary achievement of the Hispanic community in the United States. Next, some of the main factors that are reported in the literature that influence participation in secondary programs by Hispanic youth are presented.

### **Literature Review Method**

For the current study, an adaptation of the literature review process advanced by Valentine et al., (2009) was utilized. The purpose of this research is to learn about the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs. Individual's experiences are affected by a variety of factors including social, psychological, economic, and environmental (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005). I

used several strategies to find relevant literature, as recommended in the literature on systematic literature review (Chen. & Carroll 2005; Rothstein, Turner, & Lavenberg, 2004; Torraco, 2005; Valentine et al., 2009). Searches were made in the following databases: ERIC, PsycINFO, EBSCOHost, ProQuest, and Google Scholar. First, a qualitative based approach was used to develop a set of common terms that are generally used in the relevant literature that studies transitions to postsecondary education by Hispanic youth. The search terms Hispanic, education, college, university, Latino, and “transition to postsecondary” were used on all databases. Because there is no uniform definition of “transitions to postsecondary education,” a broad construction of the term was used to include terms like college, career, and study. To narrow my search to a manageable size, the terms underrepresented and qualitative were included. The search terms were used for all fields including title, abstract, keyword, and full text (see Table 2.1 for the terms related to Hispanic transition to postsecondary programs that were used in the electronic literature searches)

Table 2.1: Terms Related to Hispanic Transition to Postsecondary Programs

Terms to suggest transition to Postsecondary programs by Hispanic youth	Terms to suggest an empirical study	Term to suggest disadvantage
Access Achieve Career Chicano College Community College Completion Course Credit Employment Equivalency Graduation	Cited Commissioned Database Empirical Experiment Findings Interview Journal Longitudinal Metaanalysis Method Published	Achievement At-risk Border Chronic Corrections Default Dropout English Language Learner Fail Gap Homeless Immigration

High School Hispanic Latino Postsecondary Selective Study Success Trade School Transfer University	Qualitative Quantitative Research Result Review Sample Survey Test Theory	Inner city Judicial Low income Nationalism Poverty Racism Remedial Socio Economic Status Underachievement Underrepresented Undocumented Unemployed Welfare Xenophobia
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After I assessed the initial results and evaluated what databases provided the most empirical results, I narrowed the results based on a criteria that included the venue where studies were published given priority to peer-reviewed studies that contained the description of the research methodology used, research findings, and the type of references that were included. I further investigated the reference sections of the results and included peer-reviewed studies that were not initially found in the database search (Valentine et al, 2009).

Once I completed reading all peer-reviewed articles and reviewed their reference sections, I went back to the databases and expanded my literature research scope to include published reports that were funded and/or commissioned by federal and/or state agencies as well as private foundations. It is important to note that the educational achievement gap phenomenon that inflicts minority communities in the United States has taken a center stage in the public discourse specifically after the 2008 Great Recession that affected working communities across the United States and the amount of non-peer reviewed studies and articles on this topic has significantly increased.

I limited the publication date search in all databases to included only studies published after 2006 and found 97 unduplicated peer-reviewed studies that met my search criteria (results are presented in Table 2.2)

Table 2.2: Students that Met Search Criteria

Database	Total number of results	Peer-reviewed studies
ERIC	956	35
PsycINFO	489	43
EBSCOHost,	438	28
ProQuest	6498	76
Google Scholar	17897	N/A

Altogether 146 studies were examined in the literature review. Even though not all studies had similarly worded research questions, the overarching question was: What is the postsecondary achievement status of Hispanics in the United States? The research on educational achievement of Hispanic youth varied between studies with different emphases including geographical location, gender, national origin, and educational systems. After identifying articles that presented major research studies on transitions to postsecondary education experience of Hispanic student, I then selected for review those articles that in some way addressed the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs.

### **Common Themes that Affect Hispanic Youth Postsecondary Achievement**

Consistent with theme analyst approach advanced by Weber and Watson (2002) I found common themes present in the published articles using a simplified frequency methodology that accounts on the terminology used on the studies, general research approach, and topics covered. According to the majority of the reviewed studies, the following themes emerged from my analysis of the literature: (1) academic preparation

and readiness for postsecondary education; (2) first generation status; (3) support services at postsecondary institutions; (4) socio economic status; (5) family, friends, and peers; and (6) Race, ethnicity, and immigration status. Next, I will expand on each theme and main ideas found in the current literature.

### **Academic Preparation and Readiness for Postsecondary Education**

Academic preparation at the secondary school level plays a crucial role on the career and academic opportunities that are available to secondary school graduates (Adelman, 2005; Astin, 1993; Kim, Rennick, & Franco, 2014; Tinto, 1993). From been accepted to and successfully completing postsecondary programs at selective colleges and universities to the availability of merit based scholarships, the level and rigor of the secondary experience is one of the principal factors that admission committees consider while evaluating who they will accepted into their postsecondary program (Kleiner & Lewis, 2005; Warburton, Bugarin & Nunez, 2001). Roderick, Coca and Nagaoka (2011) concluded that it is essential to link what secondary students are doing in the present with their future academic plans and aspirations so they can understand the importance of their secondary school academic achievement. Perna (2000) found that, in general, students who attend underperforming high schools, which are often found in Hispanic communities, are less likely to have the academic preparation needed to attend postsecondary programs (Perna, 2000).

Gandara and Contreras (2009) research indicates that on average, Hispanic children begin school significantly behind their white and Asian peers, and the gaps in educational achievement continue to mount across the grades. Furstenberg and Neumark (2005) conducted a study using the Philadelphia Educational Longitudinal Data and

indicated that a rigorous preparation in secondary school played a significant role in increasing the postsecondary outcomes of Hispanic students. Academic rigor is defined as the number of postsecondary preparatory courses that secondary students complete in academic subjects; the completion of higher level mathematics and science courses; and the inclusion of honors and Advanced Placement courses in the curriculum (Bangser, 2008). Furstenberg and Neumark (2005) concluded that by taking rigorous courses in secondary school, nontraditional students would significantly increase their chances of completing a postsecondary program. However, Bailey (2009) indicated that a large proportion of secondary school students, particularly low income and racial minorities, do not participate in postsecondary preparatory coursework and, therefore, are more likely unable to succeed in their transition from secondary to postsecondary programs. Hernandez (2002) indicated that Hispanic students that participate in rigorous high school programs felt better prepared to succeed in college.

The level of academic achievement and the quality of the secondary school program directly affects the type of postsecondary institutions that secondary school graduates participate in (Prince & Jenkins, 2005). McSwain and Davis (2007) indicated that the quality of information that nontraditional students receive about postsecondary programs and the amount of individualized guidance and support contribute to their access to selective postsecondary programs. The level of prestige and the quality and nature of resources available to students varies significantly between the types of educational institutions (Hurtado, Eagan, Tran, Newman, Chang & Velasco, 2011). At the high-end, private elite institutions have a very selective admissions process and provide a vast array of educational opportunities, extracurricular options, and ancillary

services to their students (Killgore, 2009). Community colleges, on the other hand, have open enrollment policies and compared to elite educational institutions, generally have limited educational opportunities and support services available to their students (Crisp, 2016; Mellow & Heelan, 2014). Using data collected in the 2003-04 National Postsecondary Aid Study, Horn, Nevill and Griffith (2006) concluded that closed to 50 percent of nontraditional students began their education at a community college, less that 34 percent started at a four year institution, and that students at community colleges commonly attend school part-time while working full-time.

Other factors that have been studied that influence the quality and rigor of the secondary school experience for nontraditional students include the level of educational achievement of their parents or legal guardians, their success in navigating the educational system, the availability of financial resources, and the attitude towards grades (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Golden, Kist, Trehan, & Padak, 2005). Robinson, Stempel, and McCree (2005) in their research of secondary schools with large percentages of nontraditional postsecondary students found that secondary schools that had high academic expectations, not only for meeting the requirements for graduation from secondary programs but to be prepared for the rigors of postsecondary education, developed a culture where education achievement, community engagement, and family involvement were priorities.

Trusty and Niles (2004), using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study, examined the effects of demographic and socioeconomic variables on the long-term educational development of nontraditional postsecondary students and concluded that the level of social and academic interaction that exist within courses have a direct



impact on secondary school completion and on a better preparation for postsecondary programs. Trusty and Niles indicates that sciences courses, that include exposure to research and laboratory work, have a greater effect on degree completion. Wimberly and Noeth (2005), using survey data from five urban districts, indicated that parents of secondary school participants do not always have the resources available to assist their children with their postsecondary transition but they had a great influence in their college planning process. Furthermore, Wimberly and Noeth (2005) conclude that, regardless of income and education, secondary school students that have parents or legal guardians that were actively engaged in their academic success were more aware of financial aid opportunities for postsecondary programs. Ingels, Pratt, Rogers, Siegel & Stutts, (2004), using the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002, indicated that the attitude of secondary school students towards earning good grades had an impact on their postsecondary transition. Adelman (2006) using data from the High School & Beyond/Sophomore Cohort found that proficiency of quantitative based coursework at the secondary school level has a direct impact on the successful transition to postsecondary programs. Arbona and Nora (2007) found that Hispanic students that enrolled in high schools with rigorous academic programs were more likely to participate and succeed in postsecondary programs.

There is significant variation between the different secondary and postsecondary programs in terms of opportunities and services provided to their students (Bempechat, 1998; Lee & Bowen, 2006). Flexibility of schedules, availability of support services, and the quality of faculty are some of the variables that impact transitions to postsecondary programs (Gándara, Alvarado, Driscoll & Orfield, 2012). At the secondary level, Falbo,

Contreras and Avalos (2003) indicated that discrepancies in teacher credentials, educational resources and opportunities between affluent and less affluent secondary school districts affect postsecondary transitions. Private preparatory schools are more likely to better prepare their students to transition to postsecondary programs than urban public secondary schools (Jeynes, 2002; Hammack, 2016; Velez, 1989). At the postsecondary level, the quality of services and opportunities of private baccalaureate granting institutions can facilitate transition by secondary school students compared to community colleges (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Roderick, Coca & Nagaoka, 2011).

Curriculum alignment between secondary and postsecondary institutions has a direct effect on postsecondary transition (Wimberly & Noeth, 2005). Venezia and Jaeger (2013) indicated that often there no connection between what secondary schools consider a useful postsecondary preparation, particularly in mathematics and English, and what postsecondary institutions are requiring of their entering students. The lack of an effective curriculum alignment often results in postsecondary students to require enrollment in remedial or developmental courses at the postsecondary institution. However, there are differences related to participation in developmental courses at the various types of postsecondary institutions. As community colleges attract a large percentage of students who generally lack the academic preparation that is required to succeed in four-year baccalaureate granting institutions, the percentage of secondary school graduates requiring remediation is dramatically higher compared to participants at baccalaureate granting postsecondary institutions (Attewell, Lavin, Domina, & Levey, 2006).

Adelman (2004) indicated that the need to take remedial education courses reduces the probability of achieving a postsecondary degree; however, remediation is, in fact, quite effective at improving the chances of postsecondary success for underprepared students who have a low probability of success to start with (Bettinger & Long, 2009). Some postsecondary institutions have implemented a curriculum that embeds remedial education to their for-credit coursework. This method generally allows students to receive extra academic support and mentoring that will effectively facilitate their course completion (Aliaga, Kotamraju, & Stone 2014)

Setting a career path early on in the education pathway of students has been assumed to be an important factor that facilitates transition to postsecondary education. Massey et al., (2003) found out that an early decision to begin the transition to postsecondary education allows secondary students to take the require coursework and to develop the necessary skills that are generally required in postsecondary programs. The exploration of a particular program of study and the selection of the necessary coursework to complete it has been shown that facilitates the transition to postsecondary education (Adelman, 1999).

Students who enrolled in postsecondary programs who come from secondary programs that provided them with minimal counseling, advising, and preparation for postsecondary work tend to have greater anxiety and stress over their ability to do coursework (Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008). Students' misconceptions about the classes that are required for completion of their postsecondary program, and their lack of information about postsecondary opportunities, are at a disadvantage compared to students who have developed a concise academic success plan during their

secondary school. LaSota and Zumeta (2016) concluded that postsecondary students at community colleges who had not declared a major were more likely to drop out from postsecondary institutions. Issues related to communication between secondary and postsecondary counselors and advisors have been studied and some programs have been implemented to facilitate and share communication (Adelman, 1999). However, there are legal restrictions that preclude the free flow of communication between counselors and advisors from secondary and postsecondary institutions on matters related to individual students.

Student's personal mindset, specifically the perception that postsecondary education is somehow not for them, or that it is too much of a challenge, perhaps instilled by environmental factors beyond their control, have a negative impact on their transition to postsecondary programs. Secondary school counselors and advisors who wrongfully assess some students as not candidates for postsecondary programs tend to generate a chilling effect on the academic aspirations of those students (Yosso, Smith, Ceja & Solórzano, 2009).

### **First Generation Status**

As a postsecondary degree becomes increasingly important for Hispanic youth seeking employment, the numbers of first generation students continues to grow (Kena et al 2015). First generation postsecondary students are comprised largely of members of working class families, ethnic minorities, women, and or adults (Chen & Carroll, 2005; Arbona & Nora 2007). A great majority of Hispanic youth are first generation postsecondary students and as a result are less prepared to succeed in postsecondary life in comparison to their peers that come from families of

postsecondary graduates (Pascarella et al., 2004). Pascarella (2007) indicated that one of the greatest challenges confronted by first-generation Hispanics is that college attendance represents a departure from the pattern established by family and friends, who may in turn are unable to provide appropriate support and guidance. Dickert-Conlin and Rubenstein (2007) indicated that completing a postsecondary program is a challenge for nontraditional students as they have to balance personal and financial constraints. Even though, postsecondary students whose families have limited financial resources and are generally eligible for federal education grants and federally subsidized education loans, the full level of financial need for postsecondary attendance is usually not met and it significantly restrict the choice of postsecondary program (Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, & Jenkins, 2006). McSwain and Davis (2007) indicated that first generation students are often less well prepared for postsecondary programs than their classmates from college-educated families. Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco (2005) found that first generation students often have insufficient knowledge to successfully navigate the impersonal, bureaucratic nature generally prevalent in postsecondary institutions.

Chen and Carroll (2005) on an analysis of national data found that first generation students are at a distinct disadvantage in accessing and succeeding in postsecondary programs. First generation students often face a lack of support from their parents in transitioning to postsecondary programs, as their parents are not familiar with the process. Pascarella et al., (2004) indicates that first generation Hispanic postsecondary students worked more hours than their peers, took less course load per term, and were less likely to live on campus. Generally, first generation Hispanic students are attracted

by the open enrollment options that community colleges offer and the apparent flexibility of course scheduling; however, they are less likely to benefit from extracurricular activities that are generally available on college campuses. (Brazil-Cruz & Martinez, 2016; Phillips, Stephens, Townsend & Goudeau, 2016).

### **Support Services at Postsecondary Institutions**

Academic support services provided by postsecondary program have an effect on the postsecondary experience of Hispanic youth. Fry and Lopez (2012) indicate that when Hispanic youth decide to attend postsecondary programs, they generally enroll in postsecondary programs that are less selective than those they actually qualify to attend and where the institutional graduation rate is higher. Alon and Tienda (2005) found that the more selective a postsecondary program, the greater is the probability that Hispanic students will complete the program and earn a degree regardless of previous academic qualifications. The current situation indicates that Hispanic students are more likely to enroll in non-selective postsecondary programs where the probabilities to transfer to professional degree granting institutions are remote (Gandara, 2011). Regardless of the type of presecondary program, the majority of educational institutions provide some type of academic interventions that are designed to facilitate the transition of their students and increase their institutional graduation rates (Bowen, Chingos & McPherson, 2009). Braxton, Hirschy, Yorke and Longden, (2004) indicated that postsecondary environments and a student's sense of belonging to campus are institutional factors found to influence a student transition to postsecondary programs, particularly for racial minorities and that rewarding informal interactions between students and faculty could enhance academic and social development. Bragg (2001) indicated that state and local laws and initiatives

also appear to influence students' perception of institutional climate and culture, sometimes producing a chilling effect on students' aspirations and willingness to enter certain campus environments.

Educational interventions, that provide social capital and facilitate postsecondary transitions, are increasingly seen in the literature as an exercise of instructional strategies to facilitate human relationships where identities are negotiated in the interactions between postsecondary educators and their students (Orbe & Groscurth, 2004; Tinto, 2006). Those interventions could generally be categorized by their source of funding and the demographic characteristics of the students that those are intended to serve (Bragg, Kim, & Rubin, 2005). In the late 1960s, the United States Department of Education's Office of Higher Education developed three educational intervention programs that collectively became known as TRIO programs. The primary goal of TRIO programs is to increase the postsecondary academic success, retention, and graduation rate of first-generation, low-income students, and students with disabilities (Aliaga, Kotamraju & Stone, 2014). TRIO programs are operated by private and public institutions of higher education with funds from the United States Department of Education. In addition to TRIO programs, there are many initiatives and programs present in the literature that have been designed to facilitate the transition to postsecondary programs. One of those initiatives that has been developed in the last ten years are credit-based transition programs that operate under specific agreements between high schools and postsecondary institutions (mainly two-year community colleges and four-year colleges) through which high school students can enroll in postsecondary courses either on the college campus or at the high school (Karp & Hughes, 2008). Those programs include: Advanced Placement

(AP); International Baccalaureate (IB); Tech Prep; Middle College High Schools; and Dual Enrollment (Bragg, 2001; Bedolla, 2010; Klekotka, 2005; Martinez & Klopott, 2005). Also, there are many educational interventions developed and implemented by postsecondary programs themselves that focus on orienting students by providing them with the academic, social, and emotional support during their initial entry into their postsecondary education experience (Hearn & Holdsworth, 2004; Kleiner & Lewis, 2005; Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby & Bastedo, 2012; Santos & Sáenz, 2014; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). The social capital that nontraditional students receive from educational intervention has a positive impact on their transition to postsecondary programs while postsecondary students without the benefit of those programs are more likely to have a difficult transition (Kim & Schneider, 2005; Nuñez & Kim, 2012; Palmer & Gasman, 2008).

Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR-UP) are partnerships between low-performing, high poverty schools, universities, businesses and community based agencies to provide high school participants with exposure to a pre-postsecondary curriculum to first-generation, low income students (Perna, 2006; Sanchez, Lowman & Hill, 2016). The program is designed as a cohort progression model of service delivery where recipients of GEAR UP partnership grants are expected to serve and track a cohort of middle school students through high school graduation. GEAR UP addresses the financial aid barrier to postsecondary education by providing scholarships to participants (Adelman, 1999; Sanchez, Usinger & Thornton, 2015). The federally funded GEAR UP program began in 1999 providing grants to 30 states (Knight-Manuel, Marciano, Wilson, Jackson, Vernikoff, Zuckerman & Watson,



2016). Currently, GEAR UP serves more than 700,000 students nationwide (Sanchez, Lowman & Hill, 2016).

Dual enrollment programs, often called concurrent enrollment or dual-credit programs, which have existed for over 30 years and have been implemented in many states and localities, are another example of programs that attempt to link secondary with postsecondary institutions (An, 2013; Lile, Ottusch, Jones & Richards, 2017). Dual enrollment are credit-based transition programs that are based on specific agreements between secondary and postsecondary institutions (e.g., community and baccalaureate-granting postsecondary institutions) through which secondary school students can enroll in postsecondary courses either on the postsecondary campus or at the secondary school (Ndiaye & Wolfe, 2016). For example, Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Program (PSEO) allows high school students to take college courses free of charge (Smith, 2014). Dual enrollment are often seen as a way to offer high school students access to coursework not available at the high school as well as a means of exposing them to the academic demands of postsecondary institutions, however, courses given at the high school are under the auspices of the hosting postsecondary institutions. Dual enrollment programs allow high school students to enroll in a college course prior to high school graduation, giving them first-hand exposure to the requirements of college-level work while gaining high school and college credit simultaneously (Adelman, 1999; Kotamraju, 2005). In these cases, the host postsecondary institution will recognize the credit, although other postsecondary programs in the state, and especially out of the state, may not (An, 2013). One important factor to mention is that the funding stream, academic requirements, and general structure of Dual Enrollment programs range widely and in

some states participants are required to pay for their tuition while in other states it is the responsibility of the local school district (Austin-King, Lee, Little & Nathan, 2012).

In conducting an evaluation of an intervention program that promotes transition to postsecondary education for nontraditional students, Brewer and Landers (2005) incorporated the use of a comparison group composed of participants who chose not to attend the program. The results indicated that participants in academic intervention program were more likely to enroll in postsecondary programs than their peers. However, variables such as the level of education of the parents, socioeconomic background, and peer support were not appropriately controlled for. Therefore, it is not at all clear whether participants in this program were more likely to attend college because of the academic intervention program, level of education of their parents, socioeconomic background, peer support, or a combination of those (Smith, Place, Biddle, Raisch, Johnson & Wildenhaus, 2007).

Valentine et al., (2009) conducted a systemic review of the literature on postsecondary transitions and interventions programs and found that the majority of those programs lack the necessary data to effectively assist their participants in their transition to postsecondary programs. Further, Valentine et al., found that many educational intervention programs that are developed to promote postsecondary transitions lack the sound evaluation processes that are generally associated with sustainable programs. The use of data, which is not just numbers and statistics but information about participants that assist with the effective delivery of educational services, is on the center of educational reform and it promotes a culture of accountability and educational engagement (Creswell, 2012; Huijgen, van Boxtel, van de Grift & Holthuis, 2016;

Martinez & Klopott, 2005; Reid & Moore, 2008). Robinson, Stempel, and McCree (2005) found that schools that successfully assist nontraditional students use data driven and research based approaches to tailor interventions with the individual needs of students. Perna (2006) stated that the available literature suggest that the majority of educational postsecondary intervention programs lack significant empirical data and program study designs that would allow for a more complete assessment of the relationship between program inputs, in the form of services and activities, and outcomes, in the form of postsecondary application, admission, enrollment, and graduation. Furthermore, in a qualitative study that used theory of identity to analyze the postsecondary experience of racial minority students, Orbe (2008) concluded that faculty, rather than educational interventions per se, have the strongest influence on facilitating the development of social capital that is necessary for Hispanic students during their transition to postsecondary programs. Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) studied the extent to which student-faculty interaction affect students' academic preparation and satisfaction with their postsecondary experience and found that it does positively contribute to student learning and individual development specifically for racial minority students. Furthermore, the type of postsecondary institution had not a statistically significant effect on the student-faculty interaction.

Martinez and Klopott (2005) concluded that social, academic, and emotional support available at colleges and universities are strong predictors for postsecondary attendance and completion for Hispanic students. Levin, Van Laar and Foote (2006) found that Hispanic student that have a strong sense of belonging to the educational postsecondary institution as a whole were more likely to be successful compared to

Hispanic students that limited their friendships to peers of similar cultural backgrounds. Torres and Hernandez (2007) concluded that there is a gap between the expected experiences that Hispanic students have before enrolling in postsecondary programs and what they personally experience during their enrollment and, as a consequence, this gap generally contributes to the high attrition and no completion rates of Hispanic students.

### **Socio Economic Status**

In 2011, 38 percent of Hispanic youth were living in poverty in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). For Hispanic families, participation in postsecondary programs represents a substantial financial expenditure (Higher Education Research Institute, 2013). Perna and Titus (2004) indicate that poverty is a major factor in postsecondary program completion. In the last twenty years, tuition costs at postsecondary institutions had significantly increased at a rate higher than inflation (Pike & Robbins, 2016; Rumberger, 2011). Adelman (2005) indicated that the proportion that postsecondary expenditures reflect on family incomes of low socioeconomic status (SES) students is inversely related. Therefore, families with low SES backgrounds have to contribute a large proportion of their income to cover expenses associated to participation in postsecondary programs while families with high SES background the increase of postsecondary expenditures will be negligible. Furthermore, families with low SES backgrounds are less likely to enroll in postsecondary preparatory programs than are students with high SES backgrounds (Knaggs, Sondergeld & Schardt, 2015). Bozick (2007) indicated that there is a direct relationship between income and postsecondary attendance and that the rising costs of postsecondary programs mean that low-income students are increasingly unable to cover the full costs of even public postsecondary

institutions. Fry and Lopez (2012) stated that one of the most consistent findings in the review of the national literature was the relationship between the parental income and their education and the probability of a student to transition to postsecondary education. For Hispanic families, the higher the level of income and parental education, the greater the probability for a secondary student to enroll in postsecondary programs (Camblin, Gullatt & Klopott 2003). Castellanos and Jones (2003) found that many Hispanic parents were unable to assist their children with finances in college and that the lack of financial assistance caused added strain on Hispanic students. In surveys of Hispanic youth, Estela and Gallimore (2005) found that financial stress and pressure to work were consistently cited as major factors in dropping out of postsecondary programs.

Cabrera, Nora and Castaneda (1990) indicated that perceptions over finances and financial aid packages influence postsecondary degree attainment and that Hispanic students are less likely to qualify for financial aid, especially independent and part-time students. The availability of financial aid, which is generally comprised of educational grants and student loans, is directly associated to the cost and affordability of postsecondary programs (Perna, 2006). Federally funded educational grant programs like Pell Grants and Supplemental Educational Opportunities Grants are generally available to students from middle and low income families and are meant to cover tuition and a limited amount of other educational related expenses, like books and housing. The formula used to allocate Federal grants includes the amount of money that a family is expected to contribute toward the educations of the student (Allen, 2007). Generally, students from low and middle incomes qualify for and apply for federally guaranteed student loans (e.g., Stafford and Perkins loans) and their parents could qualify for

privately managed student (Alon, 2007). Another source of financial assistance is in the form of merit based scholarships that are provided by a variety organizations and postsecondary institutions. One of the main requirements to apply for such merit based scholarships is evidence that the student has a high level of education achievement and has the potential for success in postsecondary programs (Murr, 2010). Generally, those requirements leave behind a large number of Hispanic secondary students who did not possessed the financial recourses or were given the opportunity to participate in rigorous secondary school programs (Aliaga, Kotamraju & Stone, 2014).

According to Perna (2005) the decrease in need-based postsecondary funding, like Pell Grants, is also a factor in Hispanic secondary school students' ability and motivation to continue postsecondary programs. Montalvo (2013) indicated that attendance patterns and type of institution play a significant role in financial aid availability, with the majority of Hispanic students attending two-year postsecondary institutions and many enrolled less than full time, they generally receive limited financial aid than other students enrolled at four-year baccalaureate granting postsecondary institutions. For many Hispanic students, financial aid come in the form of repayable loans that they are less willing to assume because of their sense that their lifetime earnings from a postsecondary education may not repay the costs incurred from loan indebtedness (Gandara, 2009). Orfield (1992) indicated that the receipt of financial aid was a better predictor of postsecondary participation for racial minorities than for whites and while grants and scholarship have shown to have a positive effect educational loans have had a mixed effect on persistence. Cabrera and Padilla (2004) concluded that racial minorities are less willing to borrow for postsecondary education for purely economic reasons like

the economic return on their investment and psychological reasons like their perception that a postsecondary education will not result in a higher paying job.

Bangser (2008) in a study that analyzed socioeconomic characteristics and academic engagement, found that postsecondary students in the highest socioeconomic status quartile experienced a more engaging faculty and peer experience than students in the lowest socioeconomic quartile. Pascarella et al., (2004) using results from the National Study of Student Learning concluded that, as a consequence of low of social capital, that is described as the intangible asset that centers among relationships between individuals that facilitates information and transfer of resources, Hispanic students as a group tend to have fewer postsecondary educated parents with greater social capital that could facilitate attainment of postsecondary degrees. Alemán, Bernal and Cortez (2015) found that there is a relationship between parents' income and postsecondary achievement of Hispanic youth as Hispanic youth from low socioeconomic backgrounds could not fully participate of many traditional experiences available to postsecondary students, such as overseas study and travel; consequently, exacerbating the sense of belonging to the postsecondary institution.

### **Family, Friends, and Peers**

Support from family, peers, and friends is a dominant theme throughout the literature on postsecondary transitions as students are engaged in their social, emotional, and academic development, family, friends, and peers play a very important role in their transition to postsecondary education (Lopez, 2013). Locks, Hurtado, Bowman and Oseguera (2008) indicated that despite low educational attainment among Hispanics, Hispanic parents have high educational aspirations for their children and believe that a

postsecondary education is critical to their future success. Across the board, researchers generally agreed that parental involvement resulted in improved expectations for attending postsecondary programs, as well as completing them. (Cabrera, Burkum, La Nasa & Bibo, 2005).

Akey (2006), using data from a study that examined the influence of school engagement, found that postsecondary students who feel that their family, friends, and peers support their academic pursuits and interest are more likely to succeed academically. Cushman and West (2006) indicated that, depending on social and emotional factors, peers can have a positive or negative effect on nontraditional postsecondary student and that those nontraditional students who are committed to their academic pursuit tend to distance themselves from those peers that are not supportive and possess conflictive educational and career expectations. Furthermore, Cushman found that nontraditional students who keep an emotional balance in their interactions with family, peers, and friends are more likely to have a positive postsecondary experience. The study conducted by Pryor, Hurtado, DeAngelo, Sharkness, Romero, Korn and Tran (2008) indicates that Hispanic postsecondary students shown to desire more involvement of their parents in their lives than other populations. However, the support of parents is ineffective from many Hispanic parents unable to provide this guidance as they may lack knowledge of the postsecondary education process (Auerbach, 2004). Programs that have facilitated the engagement of parents on their children's postsecondary education pursuit have been shown to produce positive results as parents become more aware of their role in their student's ability to earn a postsecondary degree (Auerbach, 2004; Ryan & Ream, 2016; Stein, Gonzalez, Cupito, Kiang & Supple, 2015).



Family expectations, accompanied by the necessary emotional and financial support, have been documented as contributors to transition to postsecondary programs (Phinney, Dennis & Osorio, 2006). Some studies have found that perceived family support predicts social adjustment and institutional attachment (Anglin & Wade, 2007). Terenzini (2004) indicated that family and friends play an especially important role among Hispanic postsecondary students in providing support for them to attend, persist, and succeed in postsecondary programs. Parents are educational role models that influence transitions to postsecondary programs (Suarez, 2003). Parent educational attainment is an important predictor of educational attainment and postsecondary enrollment than family income for low-income and racial minority students (United States Department of Education, 2001). Wimberly and Noeth (2005) conducted a study of academic preparation among secondary urban students and concluded that students' relatives, parents or legal guardians, are a major influence on their postsecondary enrollment and success. Also, participants of the study indicated that educators, specifically individuals with authority, as important factors in their postsecondary planning and preparation. Furthermore, Martinez and Klopott (2005) indicated that parental involvement promotes the development of postsecondary aspirations and the acquisition of skills and knowledge that is generally necessary to become a successful postsecondary student.

Trusty and Niles (2004) indicated that family expectations influenced postsecondary achievement of Hispanic youth as well as their career choices. Cushman and West (2006) found that positive interactions with other Hispanic students, social engagement, and self-confidence influenced their transition to postsecondary programs

and their achievement of their professional aspirations. Nora (2004) found that parental support and prejudice were significant in shaping the educational experiences for Hispanic students. Generally, the greater the level of the parents' education, the greater the educational aspirations of the student to enroll in postsecondary programs (Conchas, Oseguera & Vigil, 2012). Schneider, Martinez and Owens (2006) reported that parental involvement, or lack thereof, in Hispanic youth contributed to students' performance on postsecondary entrance exams and perceptions of postsecondary education. Perna and Titus (2004) found that parental involvement was positively associated with postsecondary enrollment; however, Hispanic parents faced additional hurdles to effective involvement such as language, limited financial resources, and unfamiliarity with postsecondary institutions. The level of education engagement and involvement by parents have an effect on the quality of the postsecondary educational experience of Hispanic youth (Kao & Tienda, 2005; Núñez, 2014; Tienda, 2013).

### **Race, Ethnicity, and Immigration Status**

In the last thirty years, in significant part due demographic changes and laws and policies that promote inclusion in postsecondary programs to all sector of society, the rate of postsecondary participation of Hispanic youth has significantly increased compared to the total population (Fry & Taylor, 2013; O'Connor, 2009). However, the postsecondary completion rate is significantly disparate between racial, ethnic, and immigrant groups (Clements, 2000; Hurtado, Alvarado & Guillermo-Wann, 2015; Passel & D'Vera Cohn, 2011).

Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) indicated that Hispanic youth are less likely than their white counterparts to complete a postsecondary program. Llagas & Snyder (2003) concluded

that, as a result of historical institutional inequities and structural factors, postsecondary educational opportunities provided to racial and ethnic minority students are significantly different than the opportunity provided to white students. Hatch, Mardock Uman & Garcia (2016) indicate that regardless of high participation of Hispanic youth in postsecondary programs, their graduation rate is lower than their white peers.

Perceptions of racial and ethnic discrimination appear to also play a role in Hispanic youth's participation in postsecondary programs (Cheng & Mallinckrodt, 2015; DeGarmo & Martinez, 2006; Von Robertson, Bravo & Chaney, 2016). Weerts and Cabrera, (2015) stated that racial and ethnic identification of Hispanic youth influenced their participation and success in postsecondary programs and that it is closely affected by the differences related to the social environment, type, and quality of the postsecondary institution. Schneider and Ward (2003), in their study that examined the role of perceived social support and racial and ethnic identification on adjustment to postsecondary institutions, concluded that highly racial and ethnic identified students were less adjusted to postsecondary institutions than less racial and ethnic identified students. Differing from early research conducted by Ethier and Deaux (1990) that concluded that a stronger ethnic identification facilitated integration and mitigated perceived threats in mainstream postsecondary culture, Martinez and Klopott (2002) found that a strong racial and ethnic identification has also been linked to lower educational goals.

Most Hispanic youth (about 77%) are native born American citizens, but a very large portion (about 6 in 10) have immigrant parents (Brown, 2014; Passel & D'Veira Cohn, 2011). Immigrant status generally has a negative effect on postsecondary

participation, specifically for Hispanic immigrants (Ojeda, Castillo, Rosales Meza & Piña-Watson, 2014).). Passel (2006) indicates that Hispanic immigrants, who comprise 30% of the immigrant undergraduate population, do not generally have legal constraints due to immigration status; however, they encounter other socioeconomic and political factors that affect their educational level and have the lowest postsecondary educational attainment compared to other immigrant populations.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

### Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs in the Midwest Region of the United States. The research questions focus on the lived experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to postsecondary programs. More specifically:

1. What are the experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to postsecondary education?
2. How do Hispanic youth recognize, respond to, and manage personal experiences and environmental factors that affect their transition to postsecondary education?

This study adopted a qualitative design and data was analyzed by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (Smith, 2017; Smith, Jamarn, & Osborn 1999). This chapter covers methodology used, research design, procedures, participant recruitment and selection, data collection techniques, data analysis, trustworthiness, and protection of human subjects. This qualitative research seeks to elicit answers to how Hispanic youth describe their postsecondary transition, their lived experiences, real and perceived barriers and opportunities, and how coping mechanisms are developed and used. The theoretical foundation of this study is based on Tinto's Theory of Student Departure (1993). The findings of this study may contribute to the literature surrounding Hispanic youth and their participation in postsecondary programs and may influence theoretical and practical advances in facilitating their educational success.

## **Methodology**

Postsecondary educational access is a complex issue that affects all members of society. Postsecondary education is woven with the quality of the human life and its development; that is, postsecondary education is a crucial factor that determines the level of development and culture of modern societies (Crisp, Taggart & Nora, 2015). There has been a significant amount of research conducted on the educational achievement of Hispanics in the United States, yet little is known about their individual experiences navigating a complex and often disparate educational system (Gandara, 2009). What are the experiences that affect Hispanic youth on their decision to pursue and complete postsecondary programs? How is the current educational system supporting or hindering the human resource development of the Hispanic community in the United States? The current literature which addresses this issues, is nascent and there is an immediate need to apply research methodologies that facilitates a better understanding of the lived experiences that Hispanic youth had during their transition to postsecondary programs.

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) provides a systematic approach of identifying commonalities and differences among participant's understandings, given credit to their experiences rather than attempting to quantify their account (Groenewald, 2004; Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1997). By using a phenomenological approach, this study tries to avoid preconceptions, rather, allows a rich description of experiences to emerge from participants who are the experts of their own realities (Reid, Flowers, & Larkin 2005). Interpretative phenomenological analysis allows for an ideographic approach to experience, that is, individuals' reflections of their lives are valued and

those experiences contribute to the interpretation of their environment (Eatough, Smith & Shaw, 2008). The purpose of achieving postsecondary education for Hispanic youth in the United States is affected by a myriad of factors including but not limited to culture, familiarity with the educational system, development of effective social networks, and other personal experiences that generally are not quantifiable. Smith (2004) has indicated that interpretative phenomenological analysis is not committed to quantification and is centered on the concept that the participant is the expert of their own experience. Brocki and Wearden (2006) indicated that interpretative phenomenological analysis is useful and applicable to a wide range of topics surrounding human experiences.

### **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) has its roots in phenomenology and regards that human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality, but rather they interpret and understand their surrounding world in a form that makes sense to them (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). The goal of a phenomenological study is to explore the truth and understanding of experiences from the participant's point of view (Bluff, King & McMahon, 2012). The participant experiences the phenomenon and the researcher observes the meaning the participant experiences within the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Smith (2004) highlighted the main elements of interpretative phenomenological analysis, recommending that this research should focus on meanings, try to understand what is happening, examine the totality of each situation and develop ideas through induction from data. This study concentrated on the lived experiences that Hispanic youth had during their transition to postsecondary programs. In an interpretative

phenomenological analysis, the researcher must describe and then interpret the story told by the participants (Gibson & Hanes, 2003). Fifteen Hispanic youth that participated in this study described in detail their experiences during their transition to postsecondary programs, and the objective of the analysis was to discern patterns that emerged from their experiences. Groenewald (2004) indicated that themes and patterns are the foundation of the interpretative phenomenological analysis.

Interpretative phenomenology analysis recognizes the participant's expert yet subjective knowledge and experiences of the phenomenon and the researcher interpretation of these experiences, with the interpretative role of the researcher being central to their reflections, analysis, and construction of new knowledge (Smith, 2004). Interpretative phenomenology analysis allows rigorous exploration of idiographic subjective experiences (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Within interpretative phenomenology analysis it is recognized that the research process is dynamic. Indeed, the researcher takes an active role in attempting to get an insider's perspective of the participant's experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Patton (1990) asserted that the researcher is an instrument in the qualitative process, and should disclose previous experience and training. The researcher is of Hispanic background and has personal and professional familiarity with the various factors that affect the transition to postsecondary programs of Hispanic youth. Furthermore, consistent with the aspirations of many researchers, the researcher believes that Hispanic youth as well as postsecondary institutions and government entities have a responsibility to contribute to the social, emotional, and academic development of all postsecondary students, especially of those from underrepresented backgrounds (Creswell 2012). Furthermore, the researcher is aware of his role within the current study



and has utilized blackening techniques, which are based on objectivity and academic tenants, to eliminate potential biases that could affect the trustworthiness of this study.

Qualitative research is interested in rich descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation (Lincoln & Denzin, 2000). The research process is flexible, and it enables the discovery of novel and uncommon themes and new insights into the presented phenomenon (Merriam, 2002.). Qualitative methodology allows a subjective understanding that emerges from the data analyzed (Corbin & Morse, 2003). An interpretative phenomenological approach is well suited to learning about the lived experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to postsecondary programs, a phenomenon that is not easily quantifiable (Creswell, 2012). In addition, this approach represents a systematic set of procedures to move from descriptive to interpretative (i.e., hermeneutic) analysis where the meanings an individual ascribes to events are of central concern but are only accessible through an interpretative process (Huff, Smith, Jesiek, Zoltowski, Graziano & Oakes, 2014).

### **Data Collection**

A variety of postsecondary organizations and programs that serve Hispanic families in the Midwest region of the United States were contacted for assistance in identifying potential participants. Permission to recruit Hispanic college students and recent graduates from a large postsecondary organization in the Midwest region of the United States was sought and obtained. The recruitment process was conducted by a snowballing technique where individuals with knowledge of the research study shared that information with their networks.

Fifteen qualified participants agreed to participate in the study. Data collection involved completion of a demographic survey and answering question during a 60-90 minute in-depth semi-structured interviews by participants. Participants were given a copy of the Participant Consent Form to read (see Appendix B), and were offered an opportunity to ask questions. Then the Consent Form was read aloud by the researcher and researcher reassured participants about confidentiality and that interview participation is totally voluntary and that participants can stop participation of the interview at any time. The research collection for this study was conducted from early October 2013 through June 2014. Signed consent forms from all participants were obtained before completion of the demographic survey and participation in the interview (See Appendix B). Interviews were held at times and venues that were most convenient for participants. All personal interviews occurred at public places, specifically, at libraries of colleges and universities. The confidentiality and anonymity of the data was ensured through a code given to each participant. This code was used to identify the selected verbatim-transcripts. Personal interviews were recorded using password protected recording devices and audio files were stored in password protected computer servers. This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of Minnesota (See Appendix C)

The researcher conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews with participants utilizing an approved protocol (see Appendix D) to collect data as they are suitable for interpretative phenomenological studies and enable the collection of rich data (Smith, 2015). Personal interviews were conducted as one-on-one interviews between the researcher and participants. Personal interviews lasted between 55 minutes and 70

minutes and were recorded using a password protected audio device. At the start of the interview, the researcher thanked the participant and remind them that participation in the research was totally voluntary and that the participant can stop participating at any time. Then, the researcher explained again the goal of the research and that the researcher was interested in hearing the lived experiences that participants had during their transition to postsecondary programs. Personal interviews required rapport building so that the participants felt safe and comfortable enough to express their personal stories (Creswell, 2012). Rapport was easily established with all participants during individual interviews as all participants shared some common experiences of being of Hispanic descent and having participated in postsecondary programs. The recorded interviews were transcribed in their entirety and lines in the transcript were numbered for ease of reference. For triangulation purposes, each participant had an opportunity to review a copy of their transcribed interview and to make any changes or revisions to reflect the true meaning and accuracy of provided information.

### **Participants**

Purposive sampling was used to identify and recruit participants that self-identify as Hispanics and were enrolled in or have recently completed a postsecondary program (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In an interpretative phenomenological study, it is essential that all participants experience the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012). Potential participants were identified by snowballing through existing networks that the researcher had based on his 20 years of experience in the educational sector in the region including college counselors, administrators, and faculty at postsecondary institutions in the Midwest Region of the United States. These potential participants were either invited to contact the

researcher, or agreed thru a common contact to be contacted by the researcher. Seventeen potential participants were given the Research Information Sheet by the researcher containing information about the study, and disclosing that I am involved with the University of Minnesota (See Appendix A for copy of Research Information Sheet).

Potential participants were screened in order to determine if they met the following inclusion criteria:

1. Enrolled in postsecondary program that leads to a baccalaureate degree
2. 18 years of age or over
3. Not on academic warning or suspension from postsecondary program
4. Identify as member of the Hispanic community
5. Resides in the Midwest Region of the Unites states
6. Attends a postsecondary program at school located in the Midwest region of the Unites Sates
7. Graduated from a secondary school in the Midwest Region of the United States

Fifteen participants, who attended postsecondary institutions in the Midwest region of the United Sates, consented to participate and represented a homogeneous group in accordance with the assumptions of interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith, 2004). After interested participants agreed to participate, interviews were scheduled. Each participant was asked to read and sign the research Consent Form prior to the interview. (See Appendix B for copy of Consent Form). Fifteen participants represent an appropriate number of participants needed for saturation of data where the participants are a relatively a homogeneous group (Guest, Bunce & Johnson 2006).

Table 3.1 presents demographic characteristics of participants. The majority of participants were between the ages of 18 to 25 years, and 7 were female. 12 participants were born in the United States and 9 have lived in the Midwest region of the United States for over 10 years. 2 participants indicated that have honorably served in the Armed Forces of the United States. 8 participants identified themselves as Mexican Americans and 2 as Chicano.

Table 3.1: General Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Participant General Demographic Characteristics	n	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10	Participant 11	Participant 12	Participant 13	Participant 14	Participant 15
<b>Age:</b>																
18-19 years old	3	X		X			X									
20-22 years old	4		X		X			X			X					
23-25 years old	5					X			X	X		X			X	
26-30 years old	2													X	X	X
31+ years old	1												X			
<b>Gender</b>																
Male	8	X		X			X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Female	7		X		X	X		X		X		X			X	
<b>National Origin</b>																
U.S. Born	12	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Naturalized U.S. Citizen/Resident Status	2								X	X						
Other	1													X		
<b>Years Residency in Midwest:</b>																
1-4 years	4	X									X			X	X	
5-9 years	2			X				X								
10-14 years	4		X		X				X			X				
15-19 years	1						X									
20-24 years	2					X				X						
More than 25 years	2												X			X
<b>U.S. Veteran Status</b>																
Veteran	2								X				X			
No Veteran	13	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Hispanic Origin Identification</b>																
Mexican/Mexican American	8	X	X		X		X	X			X		X		X	
Chicano	2			X					X							
Salvadorian American	1					X										
Venezuelan	1									X						
Ecuadorian	1															X
Puerto Rican	1											X				
No Response	1													X		

### Education Characteristics of Participants

Table 3.2 provides a summary of the educational characteristics of participants.

Social science academic majors were well represented among participants (7 participants), and approximately one-fourth (4 participants) have selected a major in education. Just 1 participant indicated to be pursuing a major in science and technology and 3 participants in business related majors while 1 participant indicated to be undecided

about selecting an academic major. 8 participants indicated to be on their second year of college, 4 participants have completed their first year of college, and 3 participants are on their third year of college. 10 participants indicated to be enrolled in two-year degree granting postsecondary institutions and 5 participants enrolled in a four-year degree granting postsecondary institutions. The majority of participants (14 participants) indicated to be enrolled in college full time (12 credits or more). 10 participants indicated having a grade point average (GPA) of 3.01 or above and seven percent a GPA of 2.00 or less. About two-thirds (11 participants) of participants had a parent with a formal education of less than high school. A small percentage of participants (2 participants) indicated that at least one of their parents completed a postsecondary degree.

Table 3.2: Education Characteristics of Participants

Participant Education Characteristics	<i>n</i>	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10	Participant 11	Participant 12	Participant 13	Participant 14	Participant 15
<b>Academic Major:</b>																
Business	3			X			X							X		
Education	4	X			X			X		X						
Engineering	1								X							
Human Services/Social Work	5					X					X	X	X		X	
Science and Technology	1															X
Undecided	1	X														
<b>Year at College</b>																
First Year (freshman)	4	X					X				X			X		
Second Year (sophomore)	8	X	X	X	X	X		X				X			X	X
Third Year (Junior)	3								X	X			X			
<b>Mother's Education:</b>																
Less than High School	5	X	X								X		X			X
High School Grad	6			X	X	X			X					X	X	
Greater than High School	3						X	X		X						
College Grad	1											X				
<b>Father's Education:</b>																
Less than High School	10	X	X		X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
High School Grad	2	X								X						
Greater than High School	2			X		X										
College Grad	1								X							
<b>Postsecondary Type</b>																
2-year College	10				X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
4-year College/University	5	X	X	X		X					X					
<b>Number of Credits Registered per Term</b>																
Less than 12 Credits	1					X										
12 to 15 Credits	11	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
More than 15 Credits	3										X				X	X
<b>Current Grade Point Average (GPA)</b>																
1.01 to 2.00	1	X														
2.01 to 3.00	4		X	X			X							X		
More than 3.01	10				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

### Economic Characteristics of Participants

14 participants reported to have a household income of less than \$55,094, participants indicated to have a household income of less than \$20,134. 3 participants indicated that they work less than 10 hours per week and 8 participants indicated that



they work more than 21 hours per week. Table 3.3 presents basic economic characteristics of participants

Table 3.3: Economic Characteristics of Participants

Participant Economic Characteristics	<i>n</i>	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10	Participant 11	Participant 12	Participant 13	Participant 14	Participant 15
<b>Household Annual Income</b>																
Less than \$17,654	3	X			X		X									
\$17,655 to \$20,134	6		X					X	X		X	X			X	
\$20,135 to \$42,614	3			X									X	X		
\$42,615 to \$55,094	2					X				X						
\$55,095 or More	1															X
<b>Number of Hours Worked per Week (Student)</b>																
Less than 10 Hours Work/Week	3		X								X				X	
11 to 20 Hours Work/Week	4	X		X			X	X								
21 to 30 Hours Work/Week	4				X				X	X		X	X			
31 to 40 Hours Work/Week	2					X			X							
More than 40 Hours Work/Week	2													X		X

### Family Characteristics of Participants

Table 3.4 presents the family characteristics of participants. 8 participants indicated that their marital status is single, 6 participants as married and 1 participant as separated or divorced. 7 participants indicated to have one or more dependent children and 2 participants had more than three dependent children. 6 participants indicated that their family unity is composed of 5 or more family members. 8 participants indicated that they live independently and 5 participants live with parents. 13 participants indicated that their commute more than 11 miles to school and 2 participants more than 30 miles.

Table 3.4: Family Characteristics of Participants

	<i>n</i>	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9	Participant 10	Participant 11	Participant 12	Participant 13	Participant 14	Participant 15
<b>Participant Family Characteristics</b>																
<b>Marital Status</b>																
Single	8	X	X	X	X		X	X			X					X
Married	6					X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Separated/Divorced	1								X							
<b>Children</b>																
No Dependent Children	8	X	X	X			X	X			X			X		X
1 Dependent Child	3				X	X			X							
2-3 Dependent Children	2									X					X	
More than 3 Dependent Children	2										X	X				
<b>Size of Family Unit (including yourself)</b>																
1 Family Member	2	X									X					
2 Family Members	2				X				X							
3 Family Members	3		X				X							X		
4 Family Members	2			X				X								
5 Family Members	4					X				X		X	X			
6 Family Members	1														X	
More than 6 Family Members	1															X
<b>Commuting Miles to School per Day</b>																
Less than 10 Miles	2	X									X					
11 to 30 Miles	11		X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X
More than 30 Miles	2					X										
<b>Housing Arrangements</b>																
Living with Parents	5		X	X			X	X								X
Living in Dorms	1									X						
Living with Friends	1													X		
Living Independently	8	X			X	X			X	X		X	X	X	X	X

### Data Analysis

Smith and Osborn's (2007) step-by-step approach to doing interpretative phenomenology analysis was used in the analysis of the data. A semi structured interview format was used and participants and an interview guide with open ended questions and probes was used (See Appendix D). By using open ended question, interviews were designed to elicit the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary education. Participants were asked to answer questions only about their own experiences. Before individual in-person interviews began, participants were

provided with a copy of the research consent form (See Appendix B). The researcher read aloud the consent form to the participant and asked if there were any questions.

Researcher reminded participants of the voluntary nature of participating in the research and that participants can stop participating in the study at any time. Two participants had general questions as to the amount of time commitment for the study and one participants indicated that it is the participant's first time to be participating on a research study.

After participants acknowledged understanding of the content of the consent form and signed it, they received a copy of the demographic survey form (See Appendix E). Once participants completed the demographic survey form, the researcher began to asked open ended question that seek to elicit participant's experiences during their transition to postsecondary programs (See Appendix for a copy of questions).

The researcher transcribed verbatim the audio recording of interviews immediately after each one was conducted. For confidentiality purposes, any data that could potentially identify the participant including name, postsecondary program attended, high school name, place of birth, location were replaced with codes.

Participants were invited to look at a copy of their transcripts and they were able to delete anything they wished the researcher not to use, or to make corrections if they chose. Five participants asked to see their transcripts; none made any changes to their transcripts. The analysis was based on notes from the interviews and from the literal and systematic transcriptions of the data. A thematic interpretive content analysis was carried out with the support of Nvivo 10 software. This software allows efficient coding of themes for easy analysis.

Throughout data collection and analysis, the researcher was aware of and consciously aimed to minimize potential influences on views expressed, including from the researcher's own positionality and from interactions within groups (Green & Thorogood, 2009). Transcripts were systematically coded and analyzed using a detailed a priori thematic code list based on research interview protocol. The analysis began with a detailed investigation of one interview before the other interviews were incorporated and a more general categorization was developed. A verbatim transcript of one of the interviews was read a number of times and notes of anything interesting were recorded. In the next step the transcript was read again and possible theme titles were recorded. The emerging themes were noted and clusters of themes that have commonality across interviews were formed and defined as superordinate themes (Smith, 2015). Then, themes were organized coherently and tables of themes were generated. The same analytical process was repeated for all transcripts. A final table of themes and subthemes was developed for the whole group of participants. This analysis allowed the researcher to discover the essence of the participants' lived experiences during their transition to postsecondary programs (Vagle, 2016). Themes, subthemes, common meanings, patterns, and relationships found in this analysis emerged from Nvivo 10 nodes effort to characterize the essential structure of the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs. Detailed analysis offered thematic findings, permitting a deeper understanding of the factors surrounding successful postsecondary transition experiences is presented in Chapter 4.

**Trustworthiness Criteria.**

Qualitative research is criticized for its lack of robustness, and therefore, demonstrating rigor through a careful and comprehensive articulation of the data is critical (Creswell, 2012). Lincoln and Denzin (2000) suggest researchers must consider credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. To enhance the reliability and validity of the phenomenological evidence presented in this study, the researcher used the following techniques to obtain multiple sources of evidence including maintaining interview notes, reviewing publically available reports and documents, consulted government publications and academic based websites to enable triangulation of the data and stronger corroboration of constructs (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014; Smith, 2017).

To address credibility, a consistent interview protocol was used to conduct all interviews. Interviews were audio recorded and the researcher made notes that were captured during the interview to complement the audio recording. During the interview, participants were asked to elaborate on concepts and terms that were not well described or elaborated. Furthermore, participants were provided the opportunity to review the transcripts and notes of the interviews and verify their accuracy, adding credence to the researcher's account through comparison with participants' own comments and observations. (Creswell, 2012).

Generalizability is another potential problem in qualitative research (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This research studies the lived experiences that Hispanic youth have during their transition to secondary programs. The research is restricted to the

geographical location of the data to the Midwest Region of the United States, an area that has specific social, cultural, and economic characteristics (Creswell, 2012).

### **Protecting Human Subjects**

In planning and implementing this research study, steps to protect participants against potential harm was taken (Yin, 2015). Prior to initiating this study, the researcher received approval from the University of Minnesota Institutional Review Board Office. The notice of approval can be found in Appendix C. The researcher planned for and minimized potential harms to participants through procedures of anonymity, confidentiality, and informed consent. Participants provided written consent to the study and were reminded of their entitlement to withdraw at any time. Issues of risk and confidentiality were discussed prior to interviews. To ensure participant confidentiality and safety, the researcher have completed the Course in the Protection of Human Research Subjects through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and is certified to conduct research on human subjects.

## Chapter 4: Findings

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to learn about the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs. The overarching objective of this study focuses on the challenges and opportunities, as well as real and perceived barriers that Hispanic students experienced and that affected their transition to postsecondary programs. The line of inquiry that guided this research was centered on the individual, institutions, and environmental factors that were perceived and reported by students as to have an effect on their transition to postsecondary programs. The analysis of interview data incorporates Tinto's theoretical framework to explore the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary programs considering the following factors: pre secondary attributes, social development, academic development, and emotional development. The focus on students' lived experiences, as reflecting their own personal is in the context of other studies that have attempted to better understand the pathways that Hispanic youth navigate during their pursue of postsecondary education and social and economic wellbeing. In this manner, this research emphasizes the importance to learn about the individual experiences and circumstances from participant's own beliefs and perspectives.

This chapter presents the responses that were obtained through personal interviews with participants of this study. The findings presented in this chapter will serve as the foundation for the discussion of the various themes founded in the context of current literature and the implications for higher education faculty, administrators, and student support personnel that will be presented in Chapter 5.

For the most part, participants indicated that their transition from high school to college was a positive experience. Participants were asked how they perceived the value of participating in a postsecondary program and the majority indicated that the achievement of postsecondary education is valuable for the individual development and a necessary credential in today's internationally interconnected competitive economy. The most common answer from participants was that they saw a postsecondary education as a means to achieve social and economic upward mobility. While less frequently mentioned by participants, still one-fourth of participants believe that a postsecondary education per se does not necessarily provide the means for financial stability and one third of participants indicated that the high amount of student loans will affect their capacity to provide for their families and promote community participation.

Participants also frequently believed that there are many barriers to access high demand postsecondary education programs and that selective postsecondary institutions were out of their reach. Furthermore, participants indicated that the Hispanic community in the United States does not have a well-defined national identity. Also, participants indicated that their experiences during their transition to postsecondary education cannot be generalized as the Hispanic community is diverse and issues surrounding differences of race, class, and national origin are prevalent within the community.

Almost all participants indicated that parents did play a crucial role in their decision to complete high school and enroll in a postsecondary programs, many felt that the economic condition of their families created a sense of urgency to achieve a postsecondary education to break a cycle of poverty. The most common barrier perceived by participants that affected their transition to postsecondary programs was related to



their financial conditions and of having to work full time while attending college to pay for tuition and living expenses. The majority of participants indicated that racism and racial discrimination constituted a barrier in accessing and participating in postsecondary programs.

Participants acknowledged cultural and linguistic differences as barriers, citing the level of knowledge that postsecondary faculty and administrators have on relating to and understanding the Hispanic community. Participants emphasized the need to receive more information about scholarships, postsecondary enrollment option programs, and access to culturally sensitive academic support programs. Participants also suggested that it was important to know the different postsecondary degree programs that Hispanic youth are seeking access to, and how those programs will benefit them in the future. The next section of this chapter will present the main themes that emerged from the interviews with participants based on the frequency and relevance.

### **Participant Perceptions of the Value of Postsecondary Education**

Interviews with individual participants began with a discussion on how participants perceived postsecondary education programs. (I need to add more text here). How student perceive the value of their postsecondary education and how that perception is affected by internal and external factors like family and friend were present in the responses provided by participants. The achievement of postsecondary education was perceived as a valuable component for the success in today's economy. Many participants linked the value of education to economic return on investment or economic success. Few participants viewed the value of education as a way to reflect and learn on the liberal arts. There was a direct tie with economic factors that students had in mind and

reported where students saw to pursue of postsecondary education as a route to achieve economic upward mobility and not just for their individual development. This can pose a challenge as there are sometimes not a link between the career goals and the market.

Table 4.1: Most Common Perceptions of the Value of Postsecondary Education

<b>Rank</b>		<b>Percentage</b>
1	Facilitates social and economic mobility	68%
2	Necessary in today's competitive work environment	56%
3	Achieving a personal development milestone	51%
4	Expensive and out of reach for many	42%
5	Milestone for individual development	32%
6	Required for career goals	29%

Table 4.1 presents the most common themes that emerged from student's interviews of the perception of postsecondary education. Many participants talked about the economic benefits of a postsecondary degree:

“It was not a decision as to whether or not I should go to college but it was a decision as to where I should go to college.” (Participant 8 M)

“In this economy, one must ...I know...should get a college degree to get a better job.” (Participant 1 M)

“Well....you know, to get a college education is a personal matter, you are the one getting a college education and nobody will take that away from you...So, I think a college education represents that completion of something that you have wanted to do.” (Participant 9 F)

“I have applied for many jobs and the person who has the college degree ends up getting the job...I guess...I should also get a college degree to get a job that will help me provide for my family.” (Participants 13)

“I think that going to college is something that most people should do, as a way of basically growing up as well as finding the kind of person you want to become in the world. Attending college... of course is not for everyone, and attendance is definitely not something that everyone can attain in their life, however I feel that it is just one of many avenues in which people may mature and create their path in life.” (Participants 15)

“College is enabling me to meet new people with backgrounds that varied from mine. It is exposing me to different cultures and perspectives. Yet, at the same time, there are people who had similar work ethics, ambitions, and personal goals....my education will allow me to obtain a job with a higher earning potential than I could have found with just a high school education” (Participant 6 M)

“In college you meet people who will help you in your professional life....I have many friends who have graduated from college and are working now and they are willing to help me get a job once I graduate...”(Participant 12 M).

The dynamic nature of today’s work environment was also represented in many of the answers provided by participants. Over 50% of participants indicated that a college education is a necessity in the current work environment:

“It is not just getting your college degree that will help you getting a good job, it is getting the certifications and the licenses that employers are looking for when they hire for the jobs that you are interested in....I want someday to be a Registered Nurse and so far I just completed the nursing assistance training at

[name of college] and am registered with the state...without the college education I cannot be even a nursing assistant.” (Participant 4 F).

“Without a bachelor’s degree in education I cannot apply to become a teacher in [name of state in the Midwest region of the Unites States]...even though I have been a teaching aid for more than 5 years, I still need to get my college degree to apply to become a licensed teacher.” (Participant 7 F)

“I believe going to college depends on what type of career you wish to have. In my case, I certainly don't need to go to college...though I have chosen to do so, but with the competitiveness of the type of work I wish to be doing in life, it is almost a necessity. As for other careers, there are many different routes that I could have taken to be where I wish to go whether it I getting experience from work, an apprenticeship program, or even volunteer work.” (Participants 6)

Selecting a specific college degree or a major area of study, that better aligns to the needs of the job market, was important for participants as a college education per se was viewed by some not as a necessary requirement for some jobs:

“While I believe that employers still look for a college degree, I’m not convinced that certain fields actually need that degree. For instance, the technology arena is filled with people who have intuitive tech skills even if they have not been officially trained. Jobs in sales do not necessarily require a marketing degree to be successful. A college degree these days sometimes is simply an indication of a person’s ability to follow through on a task” (Participant 12 M)

“Many friends from high school, in fact most, did not attend college or go on to postsecondary education and instead have grown in other ways. Whether it be

travel or finding careers right out of high school, these friends have created lives for themselves and have found other ways to mature. If economic mobility is at the top of one's priorities in life, there is certainly a better chance if one goes to college and graduates, however what you choose to study in college matters”

(Participant 12 M)

The completion of a college degree as a milestone for personal development was an answer provided by 51% of participants. As the Hispanic community increases the number of college graduates, a college education becomes part of the personal and social development of its youth:

“I will be the first one in my family to complete a college degree...my mom only completed 7<sup>th</sup> grade and my father 6<sup>th</sup> grade...there are different times now and a college education for me is a way to prove that I have accomplished something good...you know...something that I, myself, am proud of.” (Participant 7 F)

“I definitely think that completing a 4-year degree gives a person a sense of accomplishment and pride. Being the first one’s family to graduate is important not just to me but also to my family. Conversely, not graduating...can be a source of shame.” (Participant 12 M)

“I believe that college is certainly helping me grown up and mature into adulthood. Of course, as there is with everything in life, this maturation is not a definite. I have achieved real world experiences while attending, and feel better prepared for the job market. I am maturing as a citizen, as a human, and even as a spouse and parent. College is a route of learning to live for me and a way for me to realize who I am.” (Participant 9 F)

“Getting a college education is a personal milestone for myself, however I see many other personal milestones beating it. I found college to be one long training for living the life I wish to lead, but I am getting more from college than an education in [participant’s major], I am getting experiences that are much more valuable than anything else. If these experiences however, were to come in another way, I’m sure I wouldn’t have found the need to go to college.” (Participant 12 M)

Respondents indicated that a college education is an investment on the student and on the community; however, the cost of college participation has significantly increased and it is out of reach to many:

“I have been taking the maximum number of credits that I am allowed each semester to maximize my tuition payments...you know...after you pay for 12 credits the rest of credits you do not have to pay any extra for tuition...but that required me to work less hours and have less money for other expenses” (Participant 3 M)

“I was fortunate to come from circumstances where the college expense is not too much of a hardship. I know that there are many opportunities for scholarships but those often require an excessive amount of work for minimal pay-off. I remember considering applying for a scholarship but it involved writing multiple long essays for a possible \$200 scholarship. I know that community colleges can ease the burden somewhat by taking less expensive classes and then transferring credits to [University Name], but even those are not cheap.” (Participant 2 F)

“College cost is a main reason for many of my friends from high school to not go to college. College is extremely expensive and can really cripple you financially if you can't find a job afterwards, and this is just one of many reasons not to attend if you are not sure that it will help you in getting a better job.” (Participant 10 M)

A college education was viewed as a requirement for some participants with specific majors like education and accounting:

“My career goal is to become a high school teacher...a college education is absolutely required to apply for a teaching license. I am definitely learning things in college that are pertinent for my career choice, and they are concepts that I'm not sure I would have gotten without college training. Such concepts included things such as developing multiple ways to present the same information to be able to reach most students, paying attention to my speech to avoid the constant use of “um”, and identifying the proper level of development within my students....” (Participant 5 F)

“Since I am still finding who I want to be in the workforce... you know... I believe that college is allowing me to feel secure in taking risks in life and knowing that after graduation I will probably find a job that I don't mind doing. A college education is given me options and been a safety net, though if instead of college I had experience I probably would have still been able to move and feel confident in getting a job.” (Participant 7 F)

### **Perceived Influences to Pursue Postsecondary Education**

As shown in Table 4.2, there were many individuals and organizations that promoted participation in postsecondary education programs of participants. Parents,

friends, high school counselors, and religious leaders were reported as having a positive effect on the decision to continue education beyond high school. Even though, the majority of participants indicated that their parents did not complete a college education in the United States, nevertheless, they reported that their parents were the main force to encourage them to attend college. It is important to notice that religious leaders, including priest and pastors, did influence many of the participants to pursue a college education.

Table 4.2: Most Common Influences to Pursue Postsecondary Education

Rank		Frequency
1	Parents	92%
2	Friends and relatives	62%
3	High School counselors	45%
4	Manager/supervisor at work	34%
5	Priest/religious leader	32%
6	College access programs	12%

Participants indicated that parents were the most influential in their decision to pursue a postsecondary program. The level of education of parents, specifically of the mother, was reported as a factor that contributed to the effective transition to postsecondary programs. Participants reported that the level of support of parents included providing financial resources, motivation, and personal sacrifices like delaying retirement or acquiring a second job:

“You know...in the Hispanic community parents are always willing to sacrifice their own comforts and in some cases their wellbeing for their children...I have not met a single Hispanic parent that does not want their children to go to college so they can be better off...my mom has taken a second job to help me pay some



of the expenses related to college....I am so thankful for what she is doing for me....I would not disappoint her” (Participant 2 F)

“College was always on my parent's minds throughout high school. That I was going to college, that was a given. I guess if I had had parents who did not always pressure me to apply to college I might have still gone, since I am the type of person who is constantly challenging myself to do more.” (Participant 10 M)

“It was expected within my family that I would go to college, and I never questioned nor disagreed with that expectation.”(Participant 7 F)

“I guess...my parents influenced me to go to college. Even though they are not helping me financially because they do not have the money, they insisted that I should go to college.” (Participant 15 M)

The influence that friends and relatives had on the decision of participant to attend postsecondary programs were also reported:

“Yes...some of my friends in high school did not know what to do once they graduated....the friends that I hang out with were the ones that chose to go to college and worked hard to get the grades that colleges are looking for....I definitely learned a lot from working on class projects during high school with them” (Participant 1 M)

“I was part of a robotics program while in high school and we went to a regional competition and met lots of people who were interested in robotics....at my school I felt that I was one of the few that liked math and science...but when I was part of the robotics team I realized that it was cool to be a geek...and that

experience pushed me to graduate from high school and move on to college”

(Participant 8 M)

“My circle of friends all are or went to college....to a certain extent, the one or two acquaintances that did not are somewhat looked down on” (Participant 11 F)

“Playing sports is important to me. As a girl I always wanted to play soccer at the college level and that is why I asked my parents to enroll me in a school that had a soccer team....I still keep in touch with my soccer team friends and all are in college like me...and their parents were so nice too.” (Participant 14 F)

“I definitely did not find that my friends influenced me to go to college, since most of my friends in high school never went on to college. My other relatives however, did influence my decision on which college to attend since most of my family has a history with the [Name of College] that I am attending” (Participant 10 M)

Participants indicated that the influence and recommendations of religious leaders were motivating factor to access postsecondary education programs:

“My [religious group] sponsored a long weekend of college tours within the four surrounding states, interspersed with social activities to build camaraderie, Now that I am in college I continue to participate in the programs that my [name of religious organization] offers here on campus” (Participant 2 F)

“Well...I was encouraged by my [religious leader] to do well in high school and to apply for college as soon as my senior year started...it was good advice because I was able to get into college and receive a scholarship....by the

way...my [religious leader] wrote a good letter of recommendation for me”(Participant 4 F)

Across the United States and in the majority of secondary schools, there are programs that are funded by federal resources or private donors whose mission is to provide assistance to their students to access and succeed in postsecondary programs. Fewer than 15 percent of participants indicated that college programs that promote college access and success had an influence on their decision to participate in postsecondary programs:

“I was part of [name of college access program] and it was helpful...they helped me with my essays for the application and provided some funding to cover the application fees.

“(Participant 5 F)

“The guidance counselors at my high school were actually the only people that did not encourage attending 4-year colleges. They were big into recommending community colleges regardless of one’s GPA.”(Participant 8 M)

### **Student Preparation for Postsecondary Education**

The pre postsecondary school experience that Hispanic youth have in the United States is affected by many factors including the location of the educational institution, financial resources, and the quality of the curriculum. Participants indicated that taking writing courses in high school significantly contributed to their transition to postsecondary programs. Hispanic youth experienced structural disadvantages in accessing quality elementary and secondary programs. Table 4.3 describe the most common themes that emerged from participant’s discussion on the effects of pre postsecondary school programs.

Table 4.3: Most Common Steps Taken in High School to Prepare for Postsecondary Programs

Rank		Frequency
1	Taken writing courses	80%
2	Taken foreign language courses	67%
3	Visiting colleges	53%
4	Apply for financial aid and scholarships	27%
5	Taken advanced placement (AP) and college level courses	20%
6	Have a mentor	7%

Participants indicated that taking writing intensive courses in high school helped them better prepare for their transition to postsecondary programs:

“I learned English from watching television when I was a child....it was not until I took an English course in high school that I realized that there are different ways to write....and the level of English that I knew back then was not enough to better communicate myself with others.” (Participant 2 F)

“Definitely...in college I have to write lots of papers and those writing courses that I took in High School have helped me a lot” (Participant 1 M)

“My parents have been here in the United States for more than 30 years and both work two and sometimes three jobs....and they do not have the time nor the opportunity to learn how to write in English well....I do help my mom with translating documents and writing....so...I guess, I took English writing courses so I do not struggle like my parents...and that has helped me to be better prepared for college” (Participant 13 M)

“Throughout high school I took honors courses in English, this was to challenge myself but also to fine tune my skills in preparation for college. I'd say those

courses prepared me very well for college since they were intensive and required a lot of reading, which is something very prevalent throughout college.” (Participant 12 M)

“I had a very strong writing program at my high school. I was actually able to test out of Freshman English due to my high school education.” (Participant 11 F)

Studying a language besides English was reported by participants as an experience that did help them with their transition to postsecondary programs. Many colleges and universities have in their curriculum a second language requirement and the ability to either test out or demonstrate proficiency has helped Hispanic youth:

“I took five years of French in high school, but the program was not very strong. Fortunately, I did not have to test out of a foreign language at my college; it was enough to have transcripts that indicated my education.” (Participant 13 M)

“I took the [foreign language proficiency test] for Spanish and score well...I was able to get 12 credits added to my education transcripts and that saved me almost one semester” (Participant 15 M)

“Growing up speaking Spanish at home, and also going to a Spanish immersion school throughout elementary and middle school was very helpful for me in college because that prepared them to take advanced level courses and get college credits for what I know.” (Participant 6 M)

“I went to [name of high school] and did take advanced Spanish courses there that were challenging....and was helpful that I took those courses during high school and that helped me with my transition into college.” (Participant 9 F)

Participating in a postsecondary program is a significant investment of resources by students and their families. Often families of Hispanic youth are not familiar with the college setting and the different types of postsecondary programs. Visiting the educational institution, and meeting with representatives that will have decision making as to acceptance and financial aid allocation was reported to have benefited many participants:

“Other than a weekend trip with my [religious group], I did not visit any colleges before making my selection. I based my choice on the program being offered. I do see the value of visiting colleges, but it was not routinely done in my day.”

(Participant 3 M)

“For me I was actually really excited to go to visit a college because I have an older brother who had gone to college two years before me and I did visit him few times and it was fun to visit him and get to know what college was about and what was he doing there”(Participant 6 M)

“Visiting colleges was helpful in deciding which one to attend; however, I would say that the visits themselves were not helpful in preparing me for attending or even applying but getting to know people at the [postsecondary institution] was helpful as they provided me with the forms that I needed to complete in order to apply” (Participant 13 M)

Many colleges and universities offer some source of financial aid assistance that range from grants to cover the cost of tuition to student’s loans. Participants indicated that accessing financial aid resources did facilitated their transition to postsecondary programs, specifically, receiving grants and scholarships:

“I was offered some financial aid based on my academic achievements in high school, but I did not apply for any. None of the offers were substantial and I did not factor them in when making my decision” (Participant 6 M)

“Well... there was the financial aid information that I received and it did help me....Also, the grant that you get to pay for up to five credits that I received at {name of postsecondary institution} was very helpful for me....well... financial aid information was very important for me and getting financial aid is what helped me to pay for college” (Participant 15 M)

“The counseling center at [name of postsecondary institution] was helpful and I was able to get information about the programs and degrees available ... as well as how to get financial aid.” (Participant 7 F)

“It was a personal decision for me to go to college because I did not receive any assistance... and I apply for financial aid by myself...when I was in high school I was not aware of the programs that help students to get to college. Now that I am at college I know that there are many programs that help students get into college and I have been telling some of my friends to take advantage of that opportunity and to get the help that they need to get into college, specially to go to the financial aid office and get all the forms to get financial aid.” (Participant 1)

“Applying for financial aid before the end of my senior year in high school was very helpful because when I got into college in the fall all my financial aid was there and I got my books before classes started...that did help me because I needed to have all materials to do well in class.” (Participant 5 F)

“Applying for financial aid and scholarships was very stressful the first time. It was a completely foreign concept to me and my family had a hard time making decisions so I did the process by myself. If anything, that was my first real glimpse at financial independence because I was doing the paperwork and correspondence myself. Stressful, but a very important learning experience.” (Participant 10 M)

“Financial aid is important as well as scholarships. Also, what helped me to succeed my first year in college was the opportunity to meet my advisor who has been there for me.” (Participant 13 M)

“To apply for financial aid was the hardest part but not registration. To apply for financial aid for the first time is hard...after you do it is not that bad the next time as all you basic information is already in the system.” (Participant 14 F)

“ Sometimes I felt that there were lots of paperwork and forms to get financial aid and that could be difficult to complete...but I got some help at the admissions office and from the people at the counter...and getting financial aid did help me with my college transition...in high school I did not have to worry about tuition payments as I went to a public school but it is very different in college as you have to apply for financial aid and somehow you have to qualify for it...the process is complicated but receiving financial aid helps” (Participant 11 F)

One option to demonstrate academic preparation during high school for many students is to take college level courses during their high school years. Dual enrollment programs, like Minnesota’s Postsecondary Enrollment Option (PSEO) has been used by many students to satisfy the requirements of their secondary school as well as to get



postsecondary credit. Participants reported that the experience of taking a postsecondary level course at the campus of the postsecondary institution provided a positive experience and assisted them to become familiar with the rigors, demands, and services that are expected in a postsecondary program./ Also, satisfactory completion of college courses was indicated that did benefit participants in their transition to postsecondary programs:

“It was definitely worth to take challenging high school courses. In some cases, those courses helped me to be exempt from taking the same subjects in college.

In other cases, they gave me a strong foundation for how to read, analyze, and/or write about literature during my first year’s college coursework (Participant 3 M)

“I took many college in the school courses...my high school and [postsecondary institution] have a really good program that allows students to take college level courses and use those credits for high school and college...It was very helpful for me...I met college professors and they were very nice too” (Participant 9 F)

“I took college level English courses all throughout high school and found them extremely helpful in preparing me for college. The projects in each course reflected my first few courses in college and that was one of the few things that I found encouraging my first year.” (Participant 4 F)

“I had a robotics program in my high school and in my team there were some kids who were taking college level courses and I began taking college level courses as well...It was great to get those courses while I was in high school and it did help me a lot with college work...specially that I was able to transfer those courses to [postsecondary institution].” (Participant 9 F)

“I took PSEO courses while I was in high school...I think I had like 18 college credits that I completed while in high school and that did seriously help me with my transition to college...my stepdad was the one who encouraged me to take college level courses and I am thankful for his advice” (Participant 14 F)

There are many programs that pair students with mentors and coaches that are willing and able to assist students with accessing and succeeding in postsecondary programs. Having interaction with a trusted person that is knowledgeable of the various processes that entails preparing, applying, and succeeding in postsecondary programs was indicated by participants as to be helpful. From the application process to be accepted to a postsecondary program, to finding employment in the area of interest, mentors have provided encouragement, guidance, and opportunities for students to succeed. Participants indicated some of their mentored were their high school guidance counselors, secondary and postsecondary instructors, as well as family members like older siblings, all of which were able to assist participants with their postsecondary experience:

“I am a member of [college access program] and I do have a mentor that kind of guided me and helped me on making wise decisions as to what college is about and how to adapt and relate with other students... With the help of my mentor, I have better idea of what field I should go to and with the support of my mentor I start networking and want to be in the business field.... I get help from my mentor in preparing for college and beyond so that is kind of what I am doing to do better in college” (Participant 6 M)

“I was part of a high school program that is part of [college access program]...and it provided me with a mentor while I was in high school...my mentor kept me

focused on the fact that high school will end and that I needed to prepare for what is after high school. My mentor told me that I needed to be organized and get things in order and prepare for the transition to college and that helped me with getting into college” (Participant 1 M)

“In my college we had peer mentors...you know...kids who have been in college and many were seniors...kind of having a mentor who will tell you that grades and academics does matter and who can help you navigate the college process was helpful for me”(Participant 8 M)

“My high school actually had a program that is funded by [name of organization] that is a nonprofit organization that provided me with a mentor who is Latino...my mentor was very approachable and helpful, he helped me prepare for college and provided opportunities to interact with other employees in his company” (Participant 13 M)

“Well, you know I would not say anybody in particular helped me here at the [postsecondary institution] but there is a couple of people that I trusts, there is a counselor that was really helpful... outside the school I have a good support group and a friend of mine who is more like a mentor and more or less but we are good friends. He just graduated with a degree in business. He kind of got what I am shooting for, he graduated from college and I want to graduate from college too. He is kind of the main guy, he is what I call my accountability partner. He kind of keeps me on line. So when he calls and I see his number on my telephone, I kind of have to answer...he is very helpful and he is a good mentor for me.” (Participant 11 F)

“Mentorship was something that I didn't come into contact with until after my first year in college. I know that if I had established a relationship with a mentor before college my first year may have been different, but nonetheless I really valued that relationship once I had one now in college.”(Participant 12 M)

### **Individual Barriers Associated with Transitioning to Postsecondary Education**

Individual circumstances have a direct effect on the transition experience of participants. As college students, some participants indicated been unable to take full advantage of the programming that was offered by their postsecondary institution, including conferences, trips, etc. due to financial reasons or difficulties finding time from their work schedules. 80 percent of participants indicated that they work 11 or more hour doing the school year.

Table 4.4: Most Common Individual Barriers

Rank		Frequency
1	Financial responsibilities	93%
2	Academic preparation in high school	80%
3	Difficulty navigating educational systems	73%
4	Lack of mentorship opportunities	60%
5	Work schedule demands	53%
6	Transportation	40%

Nine three percent of participants indicated that financial responsibilities posed a barrier for their success in postsecondary programs:

“I am a single mother and I have been working three jobs just to pay the bills and ...had to apply for student loans to cover for tuition...I do not have to pay the money back right now but when I graduate will do...so the financial situation is a barrier for me” (Participant 5 F)

“Well, in high school I was always thinking how to get into college...I did not have the best parents that guided me with my decisions to go to college...Actually, my first year I had to drop from full time to part time so I could work full time...those are some of my challenges...I was not able to afford college at the time, even though I was saving as much as possible, I did not have the financial resources to be full time student my first semester.” (Participant 7 F)

“I am taking out student loans to help pay for school. I struggle financially everyday with all the work that I do but I keep things to myself...you know, I want to be positive... but at the end, there is going to be a reward, right?” (Participant 9 F)

“Well...for being in college gives me a sense of accomplishment also, it is a responsibility. My family does not have enough financial resources for me to go to college. I have taken students loans to go to college and also to help with living expenses. College is very expensive and as a college student I think that I have some pressure to do well so I can pay my student loans back.” (Participant 14 F)

“I think that money is a big challenge for me as a college student, even though there is some financial aid available in the form of loans ...but college is really expensive and I think one of the biggest challenges for me is just the cost of it all. I think education is the most important things that you have to get but when it creates this heavy financial burden is hard” (Participant 15 M)

“A big issue was related to funding and financial need as funding for education was difficult for me to get. [Name of postsecondary institution] is the most

affordable college that was available for me so that is why I chose [name of postsecondary institution] over a private or out of state college.” (Participant 4 F)

“For me the biggest challenge or problem was financially, you know, I think college is too expensive. I do work two jobs and go to school as well and I do not have too much money for anything else.” (Participant 9 F)

“I have been registering for a full time credit load each semester so I can maximize my financial aid and qualify for student loans” (Participant 3 M)

The quality of academic preparation in high school was presented by participants as a barriers as many had to take developmental, non-postsecondary credit, courses.

“It was frustrating that my scores in the [placement exam] were not good enough for me to take college level courses...I ended up spending two semesters taking developmental courses...I did get good grades in high school though”( Participant 5 F)

“I had to take developmental math in college because I did poorly in the placement test...I had no idea that math was not that difficult once I took a course with a college professor that know how to teach” (Participant 10 M)

“It is not fair that I was not told in high school what courses will help me with preparing me for college...I am a good writer but as for math... I did not take it seriously in high school and my teachers did not care about that.” (Participant 15 M)

“In high school I was told that my education really is my own responsibility, which is really stressful. Some would say that high school doesn't give you the tools for the real world, which I would somewhat agree with. However I worked

hard in high school to be able to apply that in which I was learning to my life outside of school. I'd say that not being strong in academics while in high school is still quite a barrier. Although I took many honors classes in high school, I was still at the bottom of my class in terms of GPA in my first year of college.”

(Participant 8 M)

### **Institutional Barriers Associated with Transitioning to Postsecondary Education**

Enrollment in postsecondary programs by Hispanic youth has experienced a significant growth in the last 20 year. Many postsecondary institution in the Midwest Region of the United States have implemented programs specifically tailored to attract and retain students from different backgrounds including Hispanic youth. The majority of postsecondary institutions have marketing materials and college policies that promote equal access and opportunity to all of their students. However, participants reported that some of the barriers and difficulties experienced during their transition to postsecondary programs included the high cost of the postsecondary program, low representation of Hispanic faculty and no clear alignment between coursework and career opportunities amongst others.

Table 4.5: Most Common Postsecondary Institution Barriers

Rank		Percentage
1	High tuition costs cost of postsecondary programs	87%
2	Low representation of Hispanic faculty	80%
3	Developmental non-college credit requirements	67%
4	Bureaucratic process related to registration and financial aid	60%
5	No clear coursework alignment with career opportunities	27%
6	Unwelcomed college environment	13%

As shown on Table 4.5, the high tuition cost of postsecondary programs is perceived a major barrier for the transition of Hispanic students. Tuition at postsecondary institutions

has dramatically increased in recent years and it poses a significant burden to students and their families that affects their decision to participate or not. Highly selective postsecondary programs appear to be better positioned to attract high quality applicants and offer significant scholarships, while, less rigorous or prestigious programs are more willing to accept students with average academic qualifications that are able and willing to pay for tuition expenses using their own resources or applying for students loans:

“College is extremely expensive, I know that going into college my parents vowed to pay for my tuition so that I could have a better life. In my second year, it seemed as though I was all on my own for paying for college. Though this was scary, I decided to stay in school and finish out my degree. I have many thousands of dollars in student loans to pay off, but I know that it was money well spent, and know that I am surely not the only one out there with college debt.” (Participant 5 F)

“I know if my scores in the [assessment] were a bit higher I could have been accepted to [name of university] and received a scholarship, but I did not do well and was accepted at [name of university] instead...It is expensive but I got student loans to cover for tuition” (Participant 10 M)

Even though the percentage of the population that identifies as Hispanic in the Midwest region of the United States has significantly increased in the last 20 years, the number of high school teachers and college faculty has not increased:

“I had no Latino faculty that I can recall. Except for one mathematics professor from a foreign country, I believe that so far all of my professors have been white, middle-aged men and women.” (Participant 12 M)



“I have not had a Latino professor so far in college. I think this is one of the most surprising things for me going into college, the lack of faculty that shared my ethnicity. Having grown up in a household where higher education was so highly valued and to come to college to see very little minority representation among faculty was quite disturbing.” (Participant 9 F)

“I do not know if we have Hispanic professors here...I have not met any yet...If anything the lack of Hispanic representation in the faculty really influenced my decision in what to choose for my major. The majority of faculty in [name of college] is white but with diverse views and opinions...and the students within the college represent all different races, ethnicities, as well as sexualities and genders. Seeing such little representation of my own ethnicity may have been a barrier at first, but instead of feeling discouraged, I sought other opportunities to meet professors that shared a similar academic background as my.” (Participant 7 F)

The postsecondary experience includes not only academic preparation but it also includes the social and emotional development of postsecondary students. Participants indicated that the sense of belonging to a postsecondary institution is difficult if not impossible to have:

“When the recruiters visited our high school, they were nice and interested in us. We received information on how to apply for college and they guide us in the process...however, once I registered and begun taking classes, it was a totally different experience...I felt that they wanted me to be in college so I can generate income for the school....After the first year, I do not care about that anymore, I just want to graduate now and move on” (Participant 11 F)

“In my first years, as a commuter student...I mean...I did not live in the dorms...I felt that I was not taking advantage of all the activities that were available to freshman students...I felt that [name of postsecondary institution] is not doing too much for older students who leave at home and not at the dorms like me...and I feel not welcomed or somehow out of place.... if I attend some of the events and all ...I feel uncomfortable... the other kids know each other because they live in the dorms.” (Participant 5 F)

“College is a big place and there are lots of people...it is not like in high school where you can know everybody and your teachers are helpful. In college I feel that I am on my own and that professors do not really care too much about students...it is a bit quite unwelcome place...intimidating and scary at first. However, I feel like this comes with the territory in any new situation.”

(Participant 4 F)

### **System Barriers Associated With Transitioning to Postsecondary Education**

In our contemporary economy, a college education is not only an aspirational goal of high school students but an important factor that contributes to their social and economic wellbeing and to the betterment of communities across the United States. It is not only the responsibility of students to access and succeed in postsecondary programs but a responsibility that must be shared with all members of society to provide a safe and supportive environment where all can have equal access to the benefits and responsibilities that a postsecondary education enables. Race and racism continues to be unpopular and difficult topics to talk about in the context of educational programs and how postsecondary students perceive and experience their interaction with faculty, classmates,

and administrators. Even though, legislation has passed that precludes unequal treatment of equally qualified students in postsecondary institutions and programs, it is myopic to conclude that no de facto racial discrimination and prejudice does not exist. Participants have indicated that the Hispanic community is internally diverse in race and national origin; however, it has strong commonalities that bounds the community. Also, participants have indicated that the concept of a race blind society, or to move beyond racial differences, is unachievable in contemporary society as they are reminded each day by media and other communication venues of their differences and deficiencies in comparison with other racial and ethnic groups.

Table 4.6: Most Common System Barriers

Rank		Frequency
1	Racism and racial discrimination	80%
2	Misunderstanding of Latino cultural traditions and family	73%
3	No clear path between high school and college	47%
4	Cost of higher education	33%
5	Immigration status	13%
6	Lack of apprenticeship and mentoring opportunities	13%

Table 4.6 shows that 80 percent of participants sees racism and racial discrimination as system barriers that affect their transition to postsecondary programs. The majority of participants reported being subject to racial prejudice either over or cover in a way that the effect was felt by the student:

“Racism is a barrier that affects college access and graduation even more present today than before. I spent much of my time with activists fighting for equality within our school but not much progress is happening in regards to racial equality... and this is heartbreaking. There is still so much racism and discrimination in [name of postsecondary institution], and without the support

of administration and tenured faculty, I don't see much of a resolution. College administrators tell us that we are now beyond race...but that is not really true.”

(Participant 12 M)

The majority of respondents indicated that at some time during their postsecondary experience, they have been subject to stereotypes or remarks that made them feel unwelcomed. One participant indicated:

“...when I was taking a class in [class subject] the instructor told me that I look like George Lopez [George Lopez is a television character that depict a Latino person] and asked me to share with the class the customs and characteristics of Latino families living in the United States” (Participant 6 M)

“I can feel there is racism in the classroom but I cannot describe with words what it is or how it is but it is there....people like to be around people who they like and more or less look like them” (Participant 8 M)

“To talk about race and racism is a very controversial topic and I do not really want to talk about it with people that I do not know that well...you know...racism is there and it affect us all...however, if you think about race and racism all the time it will affect you internally and that is not good either” (Participant 1 M)

“I do not understand why people ask me where am I from...when I said to them that I am from Mexico, they are not that friendly anymore...I guess people in [City located in the Midwest Region of the Unites States] have negative stereotypes of Mexicans and that is sad” (Participant 11 F)

”I have been treated differently than my college classmates and it is not because who I am but how I look like, I mean...people look at you and the color of your

skin and they act differently...like they do not want you to be there” (Participant 5 F)

“Racism in the Latino community came from different sides...I mean...from people outside the community and from people inside of the community...If you skin is white, then you do not have a problem...but if you look more like indigenous or mestizo then you are treated differently...you know...like an outsider of somebody who does not belong there” (Participant 3 M)

Family unity and cohesiveness is a positive attribute that characterizes the Hispanic community and it has provided the support and encouragement to our youth; however, it is perceived by many faculty and administrators as a detriment for students:

“...for me family is very important and I share everything with my mom...I do not understand why the [postsecondary institution] does not have a way to inform my family about the programs that are available here like scholarships and financial aid...I feel that I am always missing something” (Participant 2 F)

“Many faculty and college administrators at [postsecondary institution] quite do not understand the Latino community...perhaps it is because we as community do not have any relevant role models or representative leadership. Cultural sensitivity is not the most trained aspect within our college environment...I guess having the support of instructors and people who really care about you...and who know that you are here to learn and not to bother them. It helps to have instructors who respect your culture and whom don't see you as a foreigner.” (Participant 7 F)

“There are lots of celebrations in the Latino community that need to be observed like the Day of the Dead, Ash Wednesday, and Quinceañera but somehow we are unable to keep them in college and that is a loss for the Latino community. I the bond that unites a community is the traditions that it has and if there are no traditions that are kept then the bond is not there and the community is gone.”

(Participant 14 F)

“My parents come to [name of city in the Midwest Region of the United States] from a small town in [Country in Latin America] and they have been working here for more than 30 years and their English is not that good but they are always willing to help me and I am proud of them and wish I can invite them to be part of the celebrations that are here on campus but [postsecondary institution] don’t want me to invite my parents....maybe their presence could make people uncomfortable.”(Participant 9 F)

Another system barrier that was identified by participants relates to the perceived lack of clarity and coordination between secondary and postsecondary institutions. As the variety of secondary and postsecondary institutions has increased, including public, private, and proprietary, students and their families often struggle to find an educational institution that is a good fit for their academic interest. Also, academic rigor in secondary programs was perceived as not to have well prepare students for postsecondary programs:

“In high school I took classes that were easy and did not have to study that much...it did not help me to better prepare me to college as I found out here that courses here at [name of university] are difficult and my writing was not that good during my first year” (Participant 8 M)

“I heard about college courses that I can take in high school but my counselor in high school told me that I have to be in the top of my class to take college level courses...” (Participant 6 M)

“I feel like many people expect there to be a straight and perfectly laid out path to be taken between high school and college, but that's never the case. If there was a clear path, I'm sure everyone's lives would be better. But there isn't. And that is a barrier as we are used to follow paths and systems but there are many paths and options that make the process complicated and leave us confused and undecided.” (Participant 9 F)

“well...you know...I wish I was better informed about what courses should I take in high school and what courses should better prepare me for college but I had no idea and I just took the courses that I was told will help me graduate from high school” (Participant 7 F)

“I was part of [federal funded program] and the counselor told me that I can take college level courses at [postsecondary institution] but when I met with my guidance counselor [name of guidance counselor] recommended not to do it because those courses are difficult and could affect my GPA if I did not do well there”

“For me, transportation was a challenge as I was interested in taking college courses in my senior year but was told that I have to find my own way to get to [postsecondary institution].” (Participant 13 M)

“I registered for a college level course in high school but I had to withdraw from it because there was a fee that I did not paid on time and I did not know about it”

(Participant 15 M)

### **Services Needed by Latino Youth**

All participants have successfully transitioned into postsecondary programs and during their personal interview they reflected about their experiences. Participants were also asked to share what services they considered as necessary that secondary and postsecondary institutions should provide to facilitate the postsecondary transition of Hispanic youth.

Table 4.7: Most Common Services Needed by Latino Youth

Rank		Frequency
1	Academic preparation in high school	87%
2	Mentorship opportunities	80%
3	Better alignment between high school preparation and college programs	53%
4	Financial aid and scholarships	40%
5	Clear paths to degree completion	40%
6	Flexible scheduling	33%

The majority of participants indicated that academic preparation at the secondary school level is the most important followed by mentorship opportunities and a better alignment between secondary and postsecondary programs:

“Definitely, you must prepare in high school for college, it is not just taking the classes that you need to graduate but having the mindset that you can get into college.” (Participant 3 M)



“I took writing classes in high school and those did help me in college, also, I began to participate in the school debate team and it was a good place for me to get to know other students who were planning to go to college.” (Participant 9 F)

“Yes, reading and writing is important not only to prepare us for college but to prepare us for real life...I agree that high school writing is not as rigorous as college writing, but you must practice and have opportunities to practice in high school...I guess are needed.” (Participant 7 F)

“In elementary school I was not good in mathematics and when I got into middle school I got into the robotics program and it did change my life. I was able to apply math concepts to real problems and got the help from teachers who really know what they were talking about. It definitely helped me with my college experience.” (Participant 5 F)

“I feel that my senior year in high school did not help me with what I faced in my first year in college...I did enjoy the time off that seniors have in high school but when I got into college I did struggle to keep up with all classes and readings.” (Participant 2 F)

“I graduated from a STEM high school and the math and sciences courses that I took in high school did prepare me well with the academic demand of college courses...I would say that you must take challenging courses in high school to help you with your college level courses.” (Participant 15 M)

“I only wish that high school had actually prepared me and my classmates for college. Honestly, if I hadn't taken honors classes throughout high school, I don't think I would have gotten through my first year of college, and that's why I feel

that more students should be encouraged to take high level courses in high school. Not only does it prepare you for the intensity of college level courses, but I feel like I had more passion to learn from those classes than anything.” (Participant 12 M)

Personal relationships with mentors and educational professionals like faculty and college administrators were indicated that positively contributed to the transition to postsecondary programs for Hispanic youth:

“Mentoring opportunities for Latino students are not that common...I was part of a mentoring program and it was very helpful for me...I not only met other students who were interested in going to college but also it provided me with a great opportunity to network with professionals” (Participant 7 F)

“Well... mentoring is very important for Latino students...specially if you are the first on in your family to go to college...there are not to many mentoring programs though...I did participate with [postsecondary institution] that had a mentoring program with [social service agency].” (Participant 4 F)

“I can see mentorship being a huge benefit in getting Latino youth into college, or even interested in pursuing college. Having someone to look up to and be honest and open with you about college is something that I know a lot of Latino youth are really lacking. It’s one thing to have parents who wish to have their children go to college and succeed, but it’s another thing to have someone else invested in your child’s success.” (Participant 5 F)

“I play soccer and I can say that my coach was a good mentor because he encouraged me to do my best and to be disciplined. I hope there are more mentoring opportunities for more Latino high school students” (Participant 3 M)

“People learn from other people who have experience in the educational system...if it was not for the help received from my mentor in high school who helped me with the financial aid application I would not be here in college.”

(Participant 6 M)

“There are many faculty members at [postsecondary institution] that are helpful if you visit them during their office hours and they also are willing to be mentors for new students as well” (Participant 1 M)

Information about financial aid and assistance in completing necessary steps were presented as ways to help Hispanic students transition into postsecondary programs:

“College is very expensive and you have to apply for financial aid early so you can get the maximum aid.” (Participant 12 M)

“I had to complete my federal taxes before applying for financial aid and that is complicated...there is not too much help at high school...As a single parent I was considered independent and I it was difficult to complete all the forms that the financial aid office required” (Participant 4 F)

“In my first year at [educational institution] I was dropped from all my classes because my financial aid application was not on file...even though I was allowed to register later after filing my FAFSA, I was not able to get into the courses that I needed that semester.” (Participant 11 F)

“The amount of scholarships out there for Latino youth is amazing, and it's baffling how few scholarships I was actually encouraged to apply to by my high school counselor. I think services in this area, with folks who really know their stuff, is absolutely necessary.” (Participant 6 M)

Participants indicated having clear pathways for degree completion facilitates that transition to postsecondary programs by Hispanic youth. Also, having an efficient system that will facilitate transfer of coursework between postsecondary institutions will benefit Hispanic youth as well:

“I received my nursing assistant certificate during my first semester at [postsecondary institution] and it help me a great deal as I was able to get a better job, work less hours, and spend more time at school. Definitely, having a clear college pathway helps immensely as I know what courses I need to take each semester.” (Participant 9 F)

“Counselors in high school try to help you in choosing a career but once I got into college I change my major few times...you know...you have an idea of what you want to study in college but when you get into college you end up changing your mind. It helps that many of the courses that I have already taken will also apply to my new major.” (Participant 12 M)

“Whatever degree one chooses to pursue, you should always feel that you can complete your requirements within the time that you set out to do so. I feel that this is something that is often said, but whether colleges can walk the walk is a whole other story. I think creating these clear achievable paths would create much better prepared students.” (Participant 6 M)

## Chapter 5: Discussion

This research investigated the lived experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition from secondary to postsecondary educational programs. While the Hispanic community continues to have a growing representation in the general population of the United States, the educational achievement of its youth continues to lag behind all other communities (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Due to the increased necessity to obtain postsecondary credentials for workforce placement, postsecondary education is viewed as a means for job training and not necessarily as a crucial component in the lives of Hispanic youth that will positively contribute to their development as engaged participants of a modern society. Efficient curriculum alignments between secondary and postsecondary institutions are reported to influence the postsecondary transitional success of Hispanic students. Furthermore, facilitating meaningful connections between Hispanic youth and postsecondary faculty and administrators is viewed as promoting a sense of belonging at postsecondary institutions that is a crucial contributor in the development of an educated citizenry.

The current literature is extensive on examining the difficulties and challenges that Hispanic youth face during their transition to postsecondary education, including socioeconomic factors (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009), culture (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005), social integration (Dey & Hurtado, 2005), immigration (Gandara & Contreras, 2009) and racism (Lopez, 2013); however, a research approach that examines the factors that facilitate the effective transition to postsecondary programs could shed a better light on how educators and policy makers could help the Hispanic community benefit from the opportunities that postsecondary education programs have to offer (Rios-

Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). The emphasis on this analysis will be on the factors that facilitate Hispanic students to be successful in their transition to postsecondary programs.

Chapter 4 presented the data that was obtained through personal in-depth interviews with participants of this study. This chapter presents an analysis of the main themes found in the transcribed interviews in comparison with current research literature. Chapter 6 will provide implications of each theme to practice as well as provide recommendations for change and future research. The themes were developed by a qualitative research process of thematic analysis that created meaningful patterns that elicited participants' perceptions, feelings, and most importantly, their lived experiences (Creswell, 2012).

### **Theme 1: Postsecondary education as a means to achieve social and economic wellbeing**

Current research literature on postsecondary access and opportunity indicates that social and economic factors (SES) including family income, parents' education, and neighborhood conditions have a direct impact on the motivation and decision of Hispanic youth to enroll in postsecondary programs (Bell, Rowan-Kenyon, & Perna, 2009). This motivation factor was found in this research as all participants indicated that enrollment in a postsecondary program was a tool to achieve social and economic mobility in today's economy (Phinney, Dennis & Osorio, 2006). Furthermore, all participants stated that one of their most important purposes to participate in a postsecondary program was to receive the preparation for a job that was consistent with their professional and career objectives. This finding is relevant in relation to the current dilemma surrounding the purpose of postsecondary education. One side argues that postsecondary education aims to

reproduce what an ideal educated citizenry should be in a modern democracy, while the other side argues that it should provide participants with the tools that are needed to find a job (Selingo, 2013).

Participants indicated that their postsecondary education was not solely a time in their lives to explore their surroundings and to get new knowledge, but as a time and place to get the training and the connections that are necessary to get a job. As one participant indicated:

*“Well, for me, attending college is a necessity in today’s economy...in my field, nobody will hire me if I do not have at least a bachelor’s degree....also, college is so expensive that I cannot afford to take courses just for the sake of taking them....I have to graduate and get a better job than the one that I already have...you know, college is an investment in my future career” (Participant 4 F).*

Generally, postsecondary participants expected that postsecondary institutions would provide them with the necessary tools to find a job, to better understand themselves, and to get new knowledge to become engaged members of society (Henderson-King & Smith, 2006). This combination of extrinsic or societal factors and intrinsic or personal factors could be considered an aspirational goal of postsecondary students; however, for Hispanic participants, extrinsic factors, specifically to secure and/or prepare for a job, appears to take precedence (Phinney, Dennis & Osorio, 2006).

As postsecondary institutions have moved to emphasize the promotion of higher learning outcomes, including critical thinking, amongst the large majority of their disciplines (Keeling & Hersh, 2012), it has not defined how those outcomes will reconcile with the job specific skills that Hispanic youth need to be competitive and

successful in the current workplace. As extrinsic demands are placed by employers, Hispanic youth are giving priority to those demands over their own. This has changed the traditional purpose of college as a time to develop themselves as well as create rounded individuals.

Hispanic youth are not being given the opportunities that, traditionally, one should get from a postsecondary education experience. This is because Hispanic youth tend to focus on improving their social and economic status during their years in college. Usually, postsecondary students would work to better themselves, and learn more about what they like, along with the world around them. However, for a great majority of Hispanic youth, these opportunities are diminished with and overpowered by the need to find work. Postsecondary experience is then filled with working toward a specific job, and only getting the necessary credentials for this job, rather than working to find a passion, and bettering oneself and increasing one's knowledge. This also translates into the fact that Hispanic youth do not have the same opportunities outside of postsecondary programs, due to social and economic factors that requires them to prioritize narrowly tailored work-focused educational programs. A large proportion of Hispanic youth cannot reach their full potential because they are stuck getting the bare minimum training needed for workforce placement in today's economy.

## **Theme 2: Secondary school curriculum alignment with postsecondary requirements**

Some participants reported that the curriculum that was offered during their secondary school program did not adequately prepared them for the rigors of the courses that they were required to take at the postsecondary level. Four participants noticed significant differences in course content while others indicated that there were differences



on how courses were taught at both academic levels. At the secondary school level, one participant indicated that instructors were more willing to spend more time with students after class helping them better understand critical concepts while at the postsecondary level, the participant indicated that instructors appeared to be less engaged with the needs of individual students.

*“You know...this is a very large university and I have felt that many professors here do not have too much time to assist students...or they do not know how to assist Latino students...I mean, it is not like in high school where I had teachers that had more time and they got to know me better” (Participant 7 F).*

There is significant research that indicates that the quality and academic rigor of the primary and secondary school programs have an influence on the academic preparation and skills that Hispanic students bring to the postsecondary program. According to Kern (2010), academic preparation in high school is a predictor of how well a postsecondary student will perform, specifically during their first year. Furthermore, research conducted by Crisp and Nuñez (2014) indicates that there are significant differences between instructional methods that are used at the secondary school in comparison with instructional methods that are prevalent at postsecondary programs. At the secondary school programs, participants indicated receiving more guidance and support on completing academic tasks, while at the postsecondary program, participants indicated more reliance on study groups and accessing student support services that were available including tutoring, mentoring, and counseling and advising. One participant indicated:

*“Working on group projects and getting to know my classmates did help me with courses that were difficult....I took physics on my first year and it was with the help of my study group that I was able to pass the course....it was a large class and I felt intimidated at first but once I met with my group and work with them we did help each other do well”*  
(Participant 9 F)

Taking postsecondary level courses while enrolled at the secondary school program did assist participants in their postsecondary transition experience. Programs that provided access to postsecondary courses facilitated a better aligning of the content of coursework and the methodology of instruction between both educational levels as well as provided opportunities for participants to better understand the postsecondary school system. Furthermore, as Talbert (2012) found, providing opportunities to secondary school students to experience the social and academic life of a postsecondary environment is beneficial for students as they become more aware of the realities of postsecondary life, and that experience facilitated the dispelling of myths and uncertainties of what the expectations of postsecondary programs are about. One participants indicated:

*“I took my first college level course when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade at [name of postsecondary program] and at first I felt intimidated because it was something new...the class was not that big and there were medical students that were helping us learn....that experience was great and it did make me realize at that time that college was possible for me and that I could do well”*

The availability and quality of students support services offered at the postsecondary program was reported as important for participants. Many postsecondary

programs have implemented a variety of student support services that have effectively assisted students with their academic and social experience during their participation at a postsecondary program. The level of engagement and academic intervention of support programs could range from peer mentoring to intrusive advising that includes academic alert notifications for participating students. Participants that utilized such services reported a high level of academic success and better integration into the postsecondary program (See Gandara, 2015). One of the qualities of successful academic support programs is the high level of coordination of activities between counselors and advisors with faculty, as faculty have a direct influence on student evaluation, grades, and degree progress. For Hispanic students, academic support programs that included active faculty participation were reported to be successful (Mercer & Stedman, 2008).

*“Last summer I was part of the McNair Scholars program at [name of postsecondary program] and I did research with [name of faculty] and it was a very good experience. I did create a poster presentation and met many professors that gave me advice and feedback for my project and for my professional career” (Participant 9 F)*

As it has been described by participants, the level of academic rigor that they experienced at the secondary school level was not the only determinant for their success at the postsecondary program. An important factor for a successful transition into postsecondary programs was the quality of instruction and academic support services that were available at the postsecondary program and the opportunities to be exposed during their secondary school years to a postsecondary education environment that helped students realize the real and perceived differences between both educational systems. As

students became aware of the real differences between both systems, they planned accordingly to overcome such differences.

A great amount of the current literature that has been produced that tried to understand the educational achievement gap between white students and racial minority students, including Hispanic students presents academic deficiencies as the main factor that determines future academic performance (Davis-Kean, Mendoza & Susperreguy, 2012). This research approach generally omits the various social and cultural strengths, including family, community, and peer support systems that Hispanic youth could access while they are enrolled at a postsecondary program. As it was presented by participants, postsecondary institutions, as centers of community and economic development, also benefited from the diverse views and experiences that Hispanic students bring to their programs. Secondary and postsecondary educational programs could learn from each other not only on curriculum but also in instructional procedures and practices. Very often, Hispanic youth are not given opportunities to learn about the postsecondary program or to experience firsthand taking a postsecondary course in which the faculty are truly committed to their success. It is important for Hispanic youth to get their minds and curiosity ignited on the academic subject of their interest and by such help dispel the myth that states that a great majority of Hispanic youth are not college material due solely to their level of academic performance at the secondary school level.

**Theme 3: Cost of postsecondary education, financial aid policies and procedures.**

Historically, the cost of attending a postsecondary program was directly related to the level of political influence and prestige of the postsecondary institution; however, in the current postsecondary environment, public, private, and proprietary organizations are

the main choices of postsecondary institutions that coexist to provide a vast selection of postsecondary programs to Hispanic students whose costs are not necessarily related to their prestige and political clout (Scott-Clayton, 2015). Participants indicated that the cost of attending a postsecondary program, including tuition and living expenses, had an influence on their decision to select the type of educational institution in which to enroll. The cost of attendance at a community college was viewed as affordable and accessible for many participants that did not qualify for financial aid provided by federal and state programs, including Pell Grants and Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants. One participant indicated:

*“I did not qualify for financial aid because I do not have a social security number... but I received a scholarship from [name of the scholarship program] that cover a big part of my tuition and my parents do not have to pay too much for tuition at [name of community college] because tuition is less than at [name of university]” (Participants 12).*

Nora and Crisp (2012) have indicated that the cost of a postsecondary program could vary between institutions and that applying for financial aid and scholarships early on in the process could facilitate a better decision as to what postsecondary program to attend based on the academic rigor of the program and applicant’s potential to succeed rather on their ability to cover the costs.

*“I came here to [name of postsecondary institution] because it is a small college and it has a very good reputation...my mom and I met with an admissions counselor and later with a financial aid advisor who helped us complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid...it is complex process, we needed to have our taxes as well as many other forms and documents....I am so grateful that we got help the first years and I was able to*

*get more financial aid here than at [name of postsecondary institution] that is a public university” (Participants 6)*

Many participants indicated that they accessed student loans in order to finance attendance at their selected postsecondary program. Carey and Dillon (2009) found that low income students are equally likely to take student loans to cover the cost of attending a postsecondary program. Getting into student loan debt was viewed as a good investment since completion of a postsecondary program was considered a necessary tool rather than a luxury in today’s competitive work landscape.

*“You know, all the good paying jobs require now a college education....and if you do not have one you cannot even apply...I do have students loans that will need to be repaid once I graduate and with a bachelor’s degree my possibilities of getting a better paying job are higher...that is why getting student loans is a good investment not only for me but for the future of my family” (Participant 1M).*

There are real and perceived barriers related to the cost of a postsecondary program and the ability of participants to obtain financial aid. Postsecondary student financial aid could be divided into three categories: (a) Federal and State government grants; (b) privately funded scholarships and: (c) student loans (McKinney & Novak, 2013). As the cost of tuition and living expenses has increased in the last ten years across all types of postsecondary programs, Hispanic youth and their families have increasingly utilized student loans to cover educational expenditures (Perez & Ceja, 2015). However, very often, many Hispanic youth have difficulty paying back their student loans after they depart from the postsecondary program. To dispel real and perceived barriers paying for postsecondary programs, a variety of initiatives have been implemented across many

states in the Midwest Region of the United States. One initiative that was mentioned by one participant is the Power of YOU Program (Schultz & Muller, 2008). Under the Power of YOU Program, students residing within a specific geographical area need to graduate from secondary school, apply for federal and state financial aid, and enroll at participant postsecondary programs. Any tuition cost that is not covered by federal and state financial aid is covered from private scholarships that are secured by the participating postsecondary institution. The participant stated:

*“I went to a charter school and my counselor helped me complete the application for the Power of YOU program at [name of the postsecondary institution] ...I did not have good grades...even though I applied for many scholarships I did not get any....I was accepted to the Power of YOU Program at [name of postsecondary institution] and my tuition was covered ...I did not have to worry about getting student loans...I got a college work study job and that helped me with living expenses” (Participant 12 M)*

Palmadessa (2016) indicated that programs like the Power of YOU and other similar programs that made their postsecondary programs tuition free have a significant effect on facilitating a successful transition into postsecondary programs of nontraditional students. Other programs like dual enrollment, where secondary students enrolled for credit at postsecondary institutions, have also provided financial relief to Hispanic youth and their families as the funding for the postsecondary program is born from local and state taxes and not the direct responsibility of the student nor their family.

#### **Theme 4: Hispanic cultural identity and sense of belonging**

As with many diverse communities that are now a vibrant part of the American social fabric, the Hispanic community has begun to make a strong presence in all corners

of the social, political, and economic sectors of the Midwest Region of the United States (Fry & Taylor, 2013). As a community that has a vast set of cultural, social, and religious traditions and beliefs, Hispanic families value and encourage the postsecondary education of their youth.

*“I am very thankful for the encouragement and support that I receive from my mom, she did not graduate from high school but she wants me to do better than her and she often reminds me that a college education is the path for a better future... and she is right, I am graduating this spring and got a job at [name of company] ...I could have not done this without the support of my mom and of my siblings” (Participant 6 M)*

Hispanic culture and traditions values family relationships and gives priority to the family over the individual. Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, (2005) have indicated that Hispanic collectivistic cultural orientation has a positive impact on the educational achievement of Hispanic youth. Consistent with a collectivistic approach of interaction and achievement of educational goals, participants indicated that working in groups with other Hispanic students and interaction with Hispanic postsecondary faculty and administrators did facilitate their successful transition into postsecondary programs.

*“College is difficult, I would be kidding myself if I say it is not....there are many things that you are required to do, many deadlines, applications, papers....however, having other students that look like you and know and understand your language and your culture is very helpful....also, having professors that are Latino and are willing to help you...you know...we should help each other and together we can achieve great things”(Participant 8 M)*



The opportunities to interact with students that share the same cultural identity and history was presented by participants as a factor that facilitated their transition to postsecondary programs. The ability to speak in Spanish and to have Hispanic celebrations on campus were valued by students as opportunities to create a sense of belonging; that is, Hispanic students felt equally welcome on campus and equally welcome to participate in the opportunities that were available to them within the postsecondary institution and in the surrounding community.

Postsecondary institutions that facilitated participation of family members of their students on school events and activities, including campus visits and meetings with faculty and administrators, were viewed as beneficial for a better integration of Hispanic youth and their families into the fabric of the postsecondary program. A participant indicated:

*“When I was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade I visited my sister here...she was living in the dorms...people there were so nice...I met some of her classmates as well as her college advisor and a professor...that experience really changed my perception of what she was doing in college and it was not that bad as a thought...really...that experience did help me come to this university and I hope that I can share my experience with other students that are interested in enrolling here...I feel that I am part of this university” (Participant 14 F)*

Participants have indicate that one of their main objectives in pursuing a postsecondary education is to be able to better contribute to the wellbeing of their families and community. Phinney et al., (2006) indicated that the Hispanic culture values family interdependence where family interaction and collaboration takes precedence over individualistic self-serving outcomes and personal attributes. Family, as the core social

unit in the Hispanic community, plays an important role in the education of their youth that embraces community interaction and goes beyond academic settings. A supportive interaction that Hispanic parents provide to their postsecondary students have a direct impact on their psychological welfare and contribute to their postsecondary academic success (Rodriguez, Lu & Bukoski, 2016; Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005; Hurtado et al., 2011).

## **Chapter 6: Personal Reflection and Recommendations**

The stories that each participant shared with me during this research provided me with a unique perspective on the complex interactions that continuously take place between varieties of stakeholders whose contributions, positive and/or negative, affect the achievement of a postsecondary education for Hispanic youth. For most participants, enrollment in a postsecondary program is a major investment, not only financially but emotionally as well, that raises individual and social expectations to succeed. Even though the value of education is well recognized amongst the Hispanic community, some participants shared some doubts on how completion of a postsecondary program would effectively contribute to their social and economic wellbeing.

In the last twenty years, a great majority of postsecondary educational institutions throughout the United States, facing a continued decline of eligible applicants from their traditional populations, have promoted their programs amongst the Hispanic community, a community that is producing an increasingly high percentage of high school graduates (Fry & Lopez, 2012). For many Hispanic youth, access to postsecondary programs is not a significant barrier as several postsecondary programs in the Midwest Region of the United States have open enrollment policies that only require the completion of a high school program and the taking of an assessment test that will place applicants into courses within the postsecondary institution; however, the difficulty for a large percentage of Hispanic youth arises once they become students in the postsecondary institution.

Lack of representation of Hispanic faculty and administrators that are committed to promoting the wellbeing of the Hispanic community were reported by participants as a

difficulty factor during their experience at postsecondary programs. As I think about my own experience as a postsecondary student, I can relate to the experiences of participants as they are a relative minority at postsecondary programs. Assumptions about national origin, immigration status, culture, religion, and family's social economic status that are generally held by a majority of peers and faculty at secondary and postsecondary programs do not clearly represent the reality of the Hispanic community in the United States. For example, a participant indicated that being close to his family was viewed as a negative factor that was precluding his academic and social development. Another participant indicated that she could not openly state that she is a conservative practicing Catholic at a public university. A former war veteran of the Armed Forces of the United States felt that being Hispanic and a veteran was viewed as two perceived barriers for his academic success. Furthermore, another participant indicated that she is always asked by classmates and faculty where she is from and if she is a citizen of the United States, even though she was born and raised in the Midwest region of the United States. Experiences like these make me realize that we, as a society and most importantly as postsecondary faculty and administrators, continue to differentiate individuals based on a social construct that favors a particular sector of the population and that reinforces the maintenance of their privilege.

The educational system in the United States is complex and difficult to navigate for a large majority of Hispanic youth and their families (Villalba, Gonzalez, Hines, & Borders, 2014). However, there are many steps that can be taken by students, their families, postsecondary faculty and administrators, as well as policy makers that will facilitate the successful transition into postsecondary programs of all Hispanic youth. A

goal of this research was to hear from Hispanic youth about their experiences during their transition to postsecondary programs. I was interested in the factors that facilitated their successful transition, and the factors that make it difficult for them to access the many services that are available on postsecondary campuses that can improve outcomes. Equally important, the purpose of this research was to help develop concrete recommendations that could inform next steps to improve the transition to postsecondary programs of Hispanic youth. Next I will provide some recommendations for practice and for future research that are based on my analysis of the factors that did contribute to the successful postsecondary transition of participants of this research.

### **Recommendations for Practice 1**

#### **Facilitate pathways for transition to postsecondary programs**

Participants provided an enormous wealth of information about the steps they took during secondary and postsecondary programs that facilitated their academic success. Many participants indicated having taken postsecondary courses during their secondary school experiences while other participants indicated that even a sole educational exploratory activity, like visiting a postsecondary institution, had a positive effect on their perceptions and realities of the postsecondary school program. While postsecondary institutions have continued to attract traditionally underrepresented students from different communities, Hispanic students indicated that there has to be better information about course requirements that are part of their postsecondary program as well as a consistent teaching approach between the secondary and postsecondary school system.

One potential educational model is to implement, expand, or promote dual enrollment programs, like Minnesota's Post-Secondary Enrollment Program (PSEO), which allows any student that is enrolled in a secondary program to take courses at postsecondary institutions (Austin-King, Lee, Little, & Nathan, 2012). Under this model, secondary school students are exposed to the rigor of a postsecondary curriculum and become better informed of the type of preparation that they need during their enrollment at their home schools (Zinth, 2015). Also, under this model, the cost of instruction at the postsecondary program is not the direct responsibility of the participant but it is covered by the funding allocation received by the secondary school program from local, state, and federal sources.

The ability to transfer courses between postsecondary institutions was reported to benefit participants by eliminating duplication of courses and providing a clear pathway for graduation (Karp & Hughes, 2008). Postsecondary institutions must provide pathways for completion that are clear and that can transfer from one accredited institution to the next by developing and/or expanding a common core transfer curriculum that is fully equivalent within participating institutions.

Granting college level equivalencies to postsecondary students, by assessing credit for prior learning through the use of assessments such as the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) and the Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Education (DANTES), should be implemented and/or expanded at postsecondary programs (Johnson, & Bell, 2014; Bowers, & Bergman, 2016). The ability to get postsecondary level credits on a topic that students have already mastered does provide an incentive to

participate in the postsecondary program as well as reduces the expenditures that students have to afford.

There are many ways for secondary and postsecondary programs to facilitate a common pathway for their students; however, beyond the good intentions of individual leaders, there is a need for government officials and political representatives to promote and regulate the integration of educational systems and to accordingly allocate funding to educational institutions that are committed to the development of their local workforce and that see education as a way to increase the wellbeing of the entire community.

#### **Recommendations for Practice 2:**

##### **Engage Hispanic families into actively participating in the secondary and postsecondary educational experience of their youth.**

The Hispanic community in the Midwest Region of the United States is characterized by traditional family values and beliefs that give priority to the family over the individual (Martinez, 2013; Schwartz, Unger, Baezconde-Garbanati, Benet-Martínez, Meca, Zamboanga & Soto, 2015). As Hispanic youth participate in secondary and postsecondary programs, there is the need to inform and educate parents as to the best way to support and contribute to the success of their children. It is very common for college educated parents to be active participants on the education of their children and to be involved in supporting educational programming like after school programs and sport events; however, many Hispanic families do not have the experience to provide academic support nor to effectively advocate for a good quality educational experience of their children (Martinez, 2013). Some postsecondary institutions have already implemented programming to assist families with the application process and living arrangement of

their postsecondary students; however, a great majority of Hispanic youth are enrolled in community colleges and state institutions that lacks such resources (Quaye, & Harper, 2014).

Teacher parent conferences have been successfully utilized to communicate academic progress of secondary school students. Participation of parents could be enhanced by facilitating training to parents on topics related to the educational experience and expectations of secondary programs. Also, implementing and/or expanding current communication methods that inform parents on the academic progress of their children to include text messages and email should be used to facilitate better communication and interaction between parents, teachers, and administrators at the secondary school level.

At the postsecondary school level, students should be informed of the availability to continue to have their parents on the communication stream that is generated by postsecondary institutions so parents are aware of the requirements and expectations of postsecondary institutions on a timely basis. Also, implementing and/or expanding programming that invite families to visit the postsecondary institution to meet faculty, staff, and administrators will facilitate a better understanding about the place and available resources where their children are enrolled.

### **Recommendations for Practice 3:**

**Embed additional academic support into the postsecondary coursework required for graduation.**

Some participants indicated having a positive experience taking courses where in addition to the subject matter taught there was a component within the course that assisted them in completing required assignments and in better understanding the subject.



Generally, students that are not well prepared for the academic rigors of a postsecondary course are required to take developmental or remedial course work. Postsecondary students could spend a significant amount of time and resources taking remedial courses before they even have the opportunity to register in coursework that is required for their chosen program (Bracco et al., 2015). Unfortunately, students taking remedial courses are less likely to graduate with a postsecondary degree than those not needing remediation (Bailey, 2009)

Co-requisite course models have been successfully implemented at many postsecondary institutions across the United States (Cafarella, 2016; Edgecombe, Jaggars, Baker & Bailey, 2013). Co-requisite remedial education enrolls students in remedial and postsecondary level courses in the same subject at the same time. Participating students receive additional academic support to assist them in better understanding the postsecondary level course material. This model does not only save time and resources of the students but it facilitates a better transition into the postsecondary program resulting in higher completion rates of the postsecondary program.

Hispanic students who demonstrate some necessity to review foundational course material should be placed into postsecondary credit-bearing course level and co-requisite support courses. For example, if a Hispanic youth has a need to review some basic mathematical concepts as assessed by a placement score, the student should register in an enhanced mathematics postsecondary course that is required for the chosen program that has additional instruction on key mathematical concepts and that identifies student's academic need. Besides participating in the general mathematics core class, students will have additional time to review with faculty concepts that are not well understood. An

example of a successful co-requisite program is the one developed by the University of Maryland at College Park where incoming students that have been identified as deficient in mathematics are enrolled in enhanced courses that have additional meeting time requirements. Results of the program indicate that students who enrolled in enhanced math courses have the same success rate as students that did not need the additional instructional support (Bryan, Moore-Thomas, Day-Vines & Holcomb-McCoy, 2011).

For Hispanic postsecondary students who are first-generation and/or low income, the opportunity to take postsecondary level courses at the onset of their postsecondary program will not only save time and financial resources but it also will increase their confidence as they could demonstrate their ability to complete postsecondary level work.

### **Recommendations for Future Research 1:**

#### **Engage Hispanic youth on academic research of their own community.**

Many participants had concerns about the value and relevance of currently published research on their educational experiences. There was some frustration as to how the Hispanic community is represented in traditional research that tends to emphasize shortcomings and difficulties that many youth face during a complex and often overwhelming educational journey. For all participants, to have an opportunity to meet with a researcher who was interested in listening to their experiences in a language and approach that gave priority to their cultural traditions and values was indicated as a sign of significant progress from what their previous experience with researchers had been.

A participant stated having partaken in a significant number of research projects in the past where completing a survey and responding to a set of previously formulated

questions was the main methodology. It was reported that very often there was no input on the type of questions that are presented to participants and that there were no opportunities to truly interact with the researcher. For the participants, that experience felt like a mechanical process where the human interaction between the participant and the researcher did not occur.

In order for research on the Hispanic community to be credible, there has to be a true relationship between the researcher and participants where the human experience of both are accounted and shared in an honest interaction that values and emphasizes what is working to develop the community and how barriers are successfully overcome instead of listing shortcomings and failures (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014)

### **Recommendations for Future Research 2:**

#### **Better understand the role that Hispanic culture and identity have on the educational experience of Hispanic youth.**

Participants indicated concern that traditional cultural traditions and the identity of Hispanic youth were somehow at crossroads with the prevalent culture of postsecondary institutions. It is important to identify the role that some cultural traits play in maintaining traditional values and how postsecondary institutions can reconcile those differences if any. Hispanic postsecondary students must be viewed as whole individuals, in need of social, academic, and emotional development in conjunction with cultural practices, language, and religion that have provided support to Hispanic families across generations. Hispanic postsecondary youth must be encouraged to bring their cultural traditions and practices to postsecondary programs with them. However, more research on this area is needed (Yosso, Parker, Solorzano & Lynn, 2004; Warren, 2014).

## **Conclusion**

There are significant real and perceived barriers that Hispanic youth who reside in the Midwest region of the United States have to overcome to successfully transition into postsecondary programs at the onset of the Twenty-First Century, including disparate immigration policies, covert and overt racial and ethnic discrimination, and antiquated educational policies; nevertheless, many Hispanic postsecondary students have successfully completed their education program and begun to benefit from the many opportunities that completion of a postsecondary program offers including upward economic mobility and active civic participation. As the data of my research indicates, postsecondary institutions that have implemented comprehensive student support programs that integrate the work of faculty, administrators, and staff with community and workplace resources have seen positive results in graduation and career development of their Hispanic students. Concurrently, a great majority of Hispanic youth that have actively participated in culturally sensitive postsecondary programming and have developed collegial relationships with individuals of influence within the postsecondary institutions have a higher probability to achieve a successful postsecondary transition.

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**Appendix A**

## **Hispanic College Students Volunteers Wanted for a Research Study**

The purpose of this research is to study the experiences of Hispanic adult college students during their transition to post-secondary education. This research is conducted by a graduate student at the University of Minnesota.

Participation involves completing an interview with the researcher.

If you are interested in participating, please call or email:

612-702-0923 [novi0007@umn.edu](mailto:novi0007@umn.edu)

## Appendix B

### CONSENT FORM

#### *Transition Experiences of Hispanic Youth in Post Secondary Institutions*

You are invited to be in a research study of the personal experiences of Hispanic youth during their transition to postsecondary education. You were selected as a possible participant because you are currently enrolled at a post-secondary institution. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Walter Novillo, a Ph.D. Candidate at the Department of Organization Leadership, Policy, and Development at the University of Minnesota.

The purpose of this study is to find answers to the following research question: What are the personal experiences of Hispanic adult students during their transition to post-secondary education?

If you agree to be in this study, you will participate on a structured interview that will ask you a set of questions about your experience during transitioning to post-secondary programs. The questions will be about your personal experiences, reasons for pursuing post-secondary education, and your familiarity with the post-secondary education system in the United States. The interview will take approximately 90 minutes.

There are no risks in participating in this study. You may choose to not answer any or all of the interview questions, and quit the interview at any time. I will never report individual's responses. All information obtained from the interview will be kept confidential. Your answers will be counted with everyone else's.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study, but we hope your answers will help us improve the post-secondary experience of Hispanic youth pursuing post-secondary education.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant. Research records will be stored securely and only researchers will have access to the records. Study data will be encrypted according to current University of Minnesota policy for protection of confidentiality. I will maintain complete anonymity of the interview materials. The interview does not ask of you any information that will identify you.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or with Century College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

The researcher conducting this study is: Walter Novillo and his advisor is Dr. Rosemarie Park. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact them at 110 Wulling Hall, 86 Pleasant Street S.E., University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN 55455, telephone 612-702-0923, email [novi0007@umn.edu](mailto:novi0007@umn.edu) and [parkx002@umn.edu](mailto:parkx002@umn.edu).

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

*You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.*

#### Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C



Walter Novillo &lt;novi0007@umn.edu&gt;

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**1302E28342 - PI Novillo - IRB - Exempt Study Notification**

1 message

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**irb@umn.edu** <irb@umn.edu>

Wed, Mar 20, 2013 at 2:48 PM

To: novi0007@umn.edu

TO : parkx002@umn.edu, novi0007@umn.edu

The IRB: Human Subjects Committee determined that the referenced study is exempt from review under federal guidelines 45 CFR Part 46.101(b) category #2 SURVEYS/INTERVIEWS; STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL TESTS; OBSERVATION OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR.

**Study Number:** 1302E28342**Principal Investigator:** Walter Novillo**Title(s):**

Transition Experiences of Hispanic Youth in Post Secondary Institutions

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This e-mail confirmation is your official University of Minnesota HRPP notification of exemption from full committee review. You will not receive a hard copy or letter.

This secure electronic notification between password protected authentications has been deemed by the University of Minnesota to constitute a legal signature.

The study number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

Research that involves observation can be approved under this category without obtaining consent.

**SURVEY OR INTERVIEW RESEARCH APPROVED AS EXEMPT UNDER THIS CATEGORY IS LIMITED TO ADULT SUBJECTS.**

This exemption is valid for five years from the date of this correspondence and will be filed inactive at that time. You will receive a notification prior to inactivation. If this research will extend beyond five years, you must submit a new application to the IRB before the study's expiration date.

Upon receipt of this email, you may begin your research. If you have questions, please call the IRB office at (612) 626-5654.



## Appendix D

The following are the proposed questions to be asked during interviews to participants:

Please talk a little bit about your decision to pursue post-secondary education	<i>Probe: What are your hopes for the future? How are you preparing to make these hopes a reality?</i>
Please talk a little bit about your decision to enroll in college	<i>Probe: What are your primary worries about your educational future? What do you see as major roadblocks in your transition to college?</i>
Describe the things you have done, or are doing, to successfully transition to college?	
Describe programs or organizations that were helpful during your transition to college	<i>Probe: Why were they important?</i>
Describe programs or organizations that were not so helpful during your transition to college (harmful)	<i>Probe: What else should they be doing?</i>
What classes have you taken in high school to prepare you for your transition to college	<i>Probe: Why were they important?</i>
What did it mean when you first become a college student?	<i>Probe: What types of guidance were you provided as high school student with course selection and career opportunities? Probe: How would you describe your involvement in college?</i>
What classes have you taken in college	<i>Probe: Are those classes part of your degree program?</i>
Please talk a little bit about what you like about your high school experience that helped you with your transition to college	<i>Probe: Why are they important?</i>
Please talk a little bit about what you like about your college experience that helped you with your transition to college	<i>Probe: Why are they important?</i>
Please talk a little bit about what needs to be changed in your high school that would help others with their transition to college	<i>Probe: What else should your high school be doing to help students with their post-secondary transition experience? Probe: Tell me how you have been successful in transitioning to college in light of challenges. Why do you think others have not been successful in their transition to college?</i>
Please talk a little bit about what needs to be changed in your college that would help others with their transition to college	<i>Probe: What else should your college be doing to help students with their postsecondary transition experience? Probe: Tell me how you have been successful in transitioning to college in light of challenges. Why do you think others have not been successful in their transition to college?</i>
Describe the needs/challenges of being a college student	<i>Probe: How much do you work on or off campus? How does that relate to your experience as a college student? Does work interfere with your college experience? Do family and personal responsibilities affect your college experience?</i>
Describe your level of interaction with other college students	<i>Probe: Why are they important?</i>

Describe your level of participation in social groups	<i>Probe: Why are they important?</i>
Please talk a little bit about your online social network experience	<i>Probe: Why are social networks important in your transition to college?</i>
Please describe what do you do when you run into difficulties?	<i>Probe: What types of communication and/or support did you receive from [friends, family, counselor, teacher, etc.] during your transition to college? During high school?</i>
What would help you succeed in college?	<i>Probe: Describe the frequency/quality/type of that communication and/or support that you receive</i>
What does it mean to be a college student?	<i>Probe: What does it mean to your family, relatives, and friends?</i>
What is your responsibility with your family	<i>Probe: Describe the type of responsibility that you have with your family?</i>
Could you talk a little bit about your experience with college administrators	<i>Probe: Were there college administrators who were really helpful? As you think about people who were helpful or not, could you describe what they did or did not do to assist you during your transition to college?</i>
Could you talk a little bit about your experience with faculty	<i>Probe: Were there college faculty who were really helpful? As you think about people who were helpful or not, could you describe what they did or did not do to assist you during your transition to college?</i>
Could you talk a little about your experience with college support programs	<i>Probe: Were those support programs helpful? As you think about programs that were helpful or not, could you describe what they did or did not do to assist you during your transition to college?</i>
What advice would you give to other students who are hoping for success in their transition to college?	
What would help you succeed in your transition to college?	<i>Probe: Why do you think others have not been successful in their transition to college?</i>
What is the level of interaction with your friends and family during your transition to college	<i>Probe: Why were they important? Are those interactions helpful?</i>
Can you identify specific programs, practices, and/or policies that have contributed to your success in transitioning to college?	
Describe your connection with college faculty, administrators, and advisors?	<i>Probe: Do you have a connection of trust and support with at least one faculty, administrator, or advisor?</i>
Is college education valued in your family, community, social group?	<i>Probe: Does your family, community, social group support your transition to college?</i>

## Appendix E

### Demographic Survey

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
3. National Origin
  - 3a. U.S. Born
  - 3b. Naturalized U.S. Citizen/Resident
  - 3c. Other
4. Years of Residence in Midwest \_\_\_\_\_
5. U.S. Veteran Status
  - 5a. Veteran
  - 5b. No Veteran
6. Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
7. Number of Dependent Children \_\_\_\_\_
8. Hispanic Identification \_\_\_\_\_
9. Academic Major \_\_\_\_\_
10. Year in College
  - 10a. First Year
  - 10b. Second Year
  - 10c. Third Year
  - 10d. Four Year
  - 10e. Fifth Year
11. Type of Postsecondary Institution
  - 11a. 2-Year College
  - 11b. 4-Year College
12. Number of Credits Registered per Term \_\_\_\_\_
13. Current GPA \_\_\_\_\_
14. Mother's Education
  - 14a. Less than High School
  - 14b. High School Graduate
  - 14c. Greater than High School
  - 14d. College Graduate
15. Father's Education
  - 15a. Less than High School
  - 15b. High School Graduate
  - 15c. Greater than High School
  - 15d. College Graduate
16. Annual Household Income \_\_\_\_\_
17. Size of Family Unit (household) \_\_\_\_\_
18. Number of Hours Worked per Week \_\_\_\_\_
19. Commuting Miles to School per day (one way) \_\_\_\_\_
20. Housing Arrangements
  - 19a. Living with Parents
  - 19b. Living in Dorm
  - 19c. Living with Friends/Roommates
  - 19d. Living Independently