A CASE STUDY OF LATINA/O STUDENTS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE IN THE MIDWEST

BY

MOISES OROZCO VILLICAÑA

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor James D. Anderson, Chair
Professor Debra D. Bragg
Professor Jorge Chapa
Professor William Trent
ABSTRACT

Community colleges offer Latina/o students a critical access point to pursue a post-secondary education. The existing literature of Latina/o community college students has primarily focused on capturing the educational shortcomings of Latina/o students along the Mexican-U.S. borderlands. The rapid growth of the Latina/o population has extended beyond the southwest and has produced new growth communities of Latinas/os. For this reason, the focus of this dissertation was to explore the challenges as well as the responses of Latina/o students to overcome the barriers imposed along their journey to attain a post-secondary education in a new growth community in the Midwest region of the United States. Guided by Padilla’ (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success, my dissertation examined the educational experiences of 16 Latina/o students at a Midwest Community College. Over the course of seven months, I interviewed each participant on three different occasions. Each interview focused on a particular moment in their young lives--pre-college, college, and future. The data collection phase generated a total of 44 hours of recorded audio time among all 16 participants. Participants were also informally observed during community service events as well as student organization meetings. All files were transcribed and analyzed using open and focused coding technique. Based on these analytical techniques, four major themes emerged from the data; Latina/o students highlighted the challenges that they encountered, resources available to overcome these challenges, and their resiliency.

Keywords: Case study, Latina/o students, community college, resiliency
Para mis padres—Leticia Orozco y Margarito Orozco. Ustedes me enseñaron la importancia de soñar alto y trabajar duro.

Para mi hermana—Dania Orozco. Te quiero mucho hermanita.

Para mi hermano, cuñada, y sobrino—Armando, Denise, y Anthony. Los quiero muchísimo y gracias por siempre darme inspiración.

Para mis suegros—Norma Osorio y Héctor A. Osorio. Con su apoyo y ayuda pude dedicar tiempo para lograr mi meta de obtener mi doctorado.

Al fin, para mi querida familia—Sandra, Pepito, Poncho, y Esme. Esto fue posible solamente con su amor incondicional!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My mother and father were the reason I decided to pursue an advanced degree. Due to family responsibilities, my parents were forced into adulthood at a very young age. They only obtained an elementary education, but they wanted so much more for their children. For this reason, they always emphasized the importance and value of a formal education, which was something that had not been afforded to them. Their deferred dream of a college education became my own dream. They inspired me to become the first in my family to obtain a Ph.D. degree.

My younger siblings taught me patience, hard work, and commitment. Despite moving away more than 3,000 miles from them, they always welcomed me back with a loving embrace. I love you very much Dania and Armando and I hope you realize that this accomplishment was a direct result of your support and love. To my sister-in-law Denise, my life has been very much enriched because of you. Anthony Orozco you are too young to understand what a major impact you have in my life—I love you immensely.

I want to thank my dissertation advisor and mentor Dr. James D. Anderson. We met seven years ago during my campus visit to the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. You welcomed me with such excitement and enthusiasm that I decided on the same day we met to accept my admissions offer to the Ph.D. program in your department. Since the moment we met, you offered me unwavering support and guidance. You approved of all of my epic adventures and research interests. Throughout this process you made me feel validated! I also would like to thank members of my dissertation committee for your insight and constant support—Drs. Debra Bragg, Jorge Chapa, and William Trent.
I also want to thank a group of incredible scholars and friends that I had honor and privilege of meeting along my journey to obtain a doctorate degree. Our conversations about the impact we wanted to make in our community and the United States continues to resonate with me—John Arrona, Brandon Common, Eduardo Coronel, Victor Perez, Marilyn Perez, Joanna Perez, Evelyn Perez, Gabriel Rodriguez, Andrew Sandoval, and Isela Sandoval.

I want to thank the 16 participants in this case study. Many of you believed that your story was not worthy of being in a book, but I hope this dissertation shows you all that your life and your experience in higher education is an important area in the literature that needs to be explored in further depth. You have all inspired me and gave me insight into how we can improve the community college experience for all Latina/o students. Thank you taking the time to share with me your story of resiliency and determination.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge the unwavering support of my immediate family. My wife Sandra has been my biggest cheerleader and advocate. You have always found the right words to encourage me along the path towards completing my dissertation, Mi Cometa. I wouldn’t be able to accomplish this incredible journey without you in my life. I am eternally thankful for your love and support. To my sons and daughter, you three were the reason I got up early and stayed up late writing. You served as my motivation to continue despite feeling exhausted, overwhelmed, and lost. Pepito, Poncho, and Esme became my precious lighthouse as I sailed the rocky seas of a Ph.D. program.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

The community college is a critical institution for students of color. It is not only a place to learn; it is a place that matters. It matters because the community college represents hope, opportunity, and for many minority and majority students, one last chance to succeed. (Rendón, 1993, p. 12)

The quote above speaks to the central role that community colleges play in providing students of color the opportunity to pursue a post-secondary education regardless of their pre-college experience or financial constraints. Historically, community colleges have always been important gateways for students to pursue their educational aspirations. Since their inception, junior colleges, now known as community colleges, have played a central role in serving as a starting point for high school graduates seeking to attain a baccalaureate degree. In the late nineteenth century, University of Chicago President, William Rainey Harper, viewed junior colleges as the point of entry for high school graduates to complete their first-two years of post-secondary education and then successfully transfer to a university to complete the last two years of their higher education (Hardin, 1975). Harper’s vision of post-secondary education gave rise to the first junior college in the United States—Joliet Junior College in 1901 (Krebs, Katsinas, & Johnson, 1999). Eaton (1994) also underscores the vital role that the transfer function played in junior colleges. She writes, “All junior colleges, whether emerging from secondary schools or the restructuring of four-year institutions or established independently, made a commitment to ensuring that students had course work and programs available to transfer to a senior institution” (p. 28). Over the course of the past century, junior colleges have evolved dramatically in both name and purpose. Due to social, political, and economic factors, junior colleges have become much more comprehensive and all encompassing in their missions (Bogart, 1994). In addition, student enrollment at community colleges has become increasingly diverse especially with respect to the high enrollment of Latina/o students (Padron, 1994). Junior colleges are now
referred to as community colleges because of their open access and their enrollment of a very diverse student population with varying pre-college experience and post-secondary aspirations. Community colleges have also become multi-dimensional in their mission to serve the local community. Gleazer (1994) writes, “By 1970, the junior colleges, which in earlier years had offered primarily the first two years of the four-year degree, had become comprehensive community colleges” (p. 21).

Despite the evolution of community colleges into more comprehensive institutions, the transfer function still remains a top aspiration for students, especially Latina/o students, beginning their post-secondary education at a two-year institution. In an analysis of the U.S. Department of Education’s Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study of 1996-2001, Bailey, Jenkins, and Leinbach (2007) revealed that community college students had very ambitious long-term educational expectations, especially among Latina/o students. They write, “Although White and Black students had little difference in degree expectations, Hispanic students exhibited higher expectations for earning bachelor’s and graduate degrees (79 percent of Hispanics had such expectations, versus 70 percent for White and 68 percent for Blacks)” (p. 3). Hagedorn and Cepeda (2004) also found high levels of educational aspirations among Latina/o students attending community college in the Los Angeles Community College District—88% of Latina/o students wanted to attain a degree from a four-year college or university. The transfer function is still a central component of the community college curriculum especially for Latina/o students aspiring to attain a baccalaureate degree. The number of Latina/o students enrolling in higher education has reached record-breaking levels. This growth can be attributed to several factors including: explosion in the Latina/o population, youth age distribution, and higher number of high school graduates. The designation of Latina/o is used throughout this dissertation
to refer to women and men who reside in the United States, but have origins or connections to South America, Central America, or Mexico. The term Hispanic is used intermittently only when discussing or referring to organizations and literature that use this designation. I use the term Latina/o because the focus of this dissertation is on people with origins to Mexico or Central America.

**Latina/o Demographics: Larger and Younger**

The Latina/o population has grown tremendously over the past two decades. In 2001, Latinas/os surpassed African Americans, becoming the largest minority group in the United States. In 2010, Hispanics surpassed the 50 million mark and accounted for more than half of the nation’s growth (56%) in the past decade (Passel, Cohn, & Lopez, 2011). Scholars attribute the rapid growth of Latinas/os to several factors such as immigration and more births than deaths (natural increase). The growth of the Latina/o population has also extended beyond its traditional concentration in the West and Southwest and into new growth communities throughout the United States. Latina/o new growth communities have emerged in the Southeast and the Midwest making the presence of Latina/o population more geographically dispersed. The growth of Latinas/os in non-Latina/o states has caused a blurring of the traditional Black-White color lines (Yen, 2013). As the Latina/o population has grown and is projected to increase, the percentage of non-Hispanic Whites has hit an all-time low of 63% (Walsh, 2013). In 2014, for example, Latinas/os will become the largest single racial/ethnic group in California. Latinas/os in California will surpass Whites for the first time since California became a state in 1850 (Lopez, 2014). California and New Mexico are the only states in which Latinas/os have become the largest single racial/ethnic group in their state. Lopez (2014) also projects that the Latina/o population is well positioned to become the largest ethnic group in Texas.
One of the major factors contributing to Latina/o growth is youthful age distribution (Passel, Cohen, & Lopez, 2011). Latina/o children, among the ages of 17 and younger, make up 23.1% (17.1 million) of this age group. In the last decade, the number of Latina/o children grew 39%, (Passel et al., 2011). The Latina/o growth rate (43%) has slowed compared to the previous two decades of 1980 (53%) and 1990 (58%). However, Passel et al. underscored how Latina/o growth has doubled in 9 non-Latina/o traditional states: Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Maryland, and South Dakota. Latinas/os continue to grow, even in non-Latina/o traditional states, and are skewed towards a youthful age distribution.

In 2011, the Pew Hispanic Center (2011) produced a report examining the sources of population growth (fertility and immigration) among the Mexican-American population in the U.S. for 1980-2010. Their analysis focused on several national-level data sources (i.e., 2010 U.S. Census, March U.S. Current Population Survey, and June U.S. CPS). According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2011), Latina/o immigration has slowed down since the 2000s and births have surpassed immigration as the source of growth in the U.S. Latina/o population. This report highlights the importance of providing educational opportunity to the fastest growing segment of the U.S. population—a growth that is driven by birth rather than the arrival of new immigrants.

Latinas/os in Education

The rapid growth of Latinas/os, coupled with their heavy youthful age distribution, has had a profound effect on the enrollment demographics of the U.S. public education system. For the first time in U.S. history, one-in-four (24.7%) public elementary schools students are Latinas/os (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Latina/o enrollment in post-secondary institutions has also seen an increase over the past four decades. Fry and Lopez (2012) write, “Between 1972 and 2011,
the Latina/o share of 18- to 24-year-old college students steadily grew—rising from 2.9% to 16.5%” (p. 5). Although the recent increase in Latina/o college students is noteworthy, the authors attribute the increase of Latina/o college enrollment to two factors—an increase in the overall college-age population (18- to 24-year-olds) and record-high level of high school completion rather than a phenomenon in the college enrollment. A comparison of Latina/o student achievement with that of White and Asian students, however, reveals the persistently low educational achievement of Latinas/os in K-12 and post-secondary education.

Snyder and Dillow (2012) poignantly explain that Latinas/os and African Americans continue to have higher dropout rates in 2010 (15.1% and 8%, respectively) and 16- to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and who have not completed a high school program, compared to Whites (5.1%). With respect to postsecondary degrees, in 2009-2010, Hispanic students earned nine percent of all bachelor’s degrees awarded compared to 71 percent White students, seven percent Asian/Pacific Islander students, and 10 percent Black students (Snyder & Dillow, 2012).

Although Latinas/os became the largest U.S. minority group in 2001, they still encounter perpetual educational disparities that have placed them in a permanent underclass. Gándara and Contreras (2009) elaborate:

Education is the single most effective way to integrate the burgeoning population of Latinos into the U.S. economy and society. Thus, if the high dropout rates and low educational achievement of Latino youth are not turned around, we will have created a permanent underclass without the hope of integrating into the mainstream or realizing their potential to contribute to American society. (p. 13)
Gándara and Contreras (2009) also remark on the unequal investment in majority-minority schools illustrated by highly segregated schools with limited resources.

Latina/o students have also shown progress, albeit limited, in reducing their high school dropout rate and increasing their immediate enrollment in college. For the first time, seven-in-ten (69%) Latina/o high school graduates in the class of 2012 immediately enrolled in college the subsequent fall semester, which surpassed their White counterparts’ (67%) enrollment rate (Fry & Taylor, 2013). Fry and Taylor (2013) also report that the Latina/o dropout rate, which is defined as 16- to 24-year olds no longer enrolled in school and without a high school diploma, has reached its lowest point ever. Between 2000 and 2011, the Latina/o drop out rate has decreased to almost fifty percent (i.e., 28% and 14%, respectively) (Fry & Taylor, 2013). A major factor contributing to the increase in Latina/o students’ immediate enrollment into college has been their surge in community college enrollment. Fry (2009) underscores that the economic pressures of the recession have funneled students’ entry into community colleges. The increase of Latina/os graduating from high school as well as enrollment in college should be celebrated, however, there is much more progress that needs to be made. For example, in the same report, Fry and Taylor (2013) underscore the dismal reality that Latina/o high school graduates are less likely to enroll in four-year colleges, less likely to attend selective colleges, less likely to be enrolled in college full-time, and less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree. Educational researchers have well documented these abysmal statistical educational disparities that exist for Latina/o students (Chapa, 2012; Contreras, 2011; Gándara & Contreras, 2009; Moreno, 1999; Yosso, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). The persistent educational disparities for Latina/o students as well as high enrollment in community college warrants further consideration because of Latina/os represent the fastest growing segment of the United States, but continue to
lag behind their peers in all forms of educational attainment from high school completion to college enrollment.

**Enrollment Characteristics in America’s Higher Education System**

In the fall 2011, college enrollment was roughly 21 million (U.S. Department of Higher Education, 2012). Of these 21 million, community colleges enrolled over 7 million students. Data presented in Table 1.1 provide the enrollment numbers and percentages of students by racial/ethnic group in all of higher education and community college for the fall 2011. Latina/o students represent almost 19% of the total enrollment at the community college. They represent the largest ethnic minority group enrolled at the two-year institution with an enrollment of 1.3 million students. Of the total number of 2.9 million Latina/o students enrolled in higher education, 46% of Latina/o students enrolled at a community college. In comparison to other racial/ethnic groups, Latina/o students had the largest racial group enrollment at a community college.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>All of Higher Education</th>
<th>Community College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>12,394,153</td>
<td>3,907,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3,067,947</td>
<td>1,081,446</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>2,890,111</td>
<td>1,330,061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>1,282,478</td>
<td>426,814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/Alaska Native</td>
<td>186,076</td>
<td>76,292</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>432,873</td>
<td>147,946</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident Alien</td>
<td>740,475</td>
<td>92,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20,994,113</td>
<td>7,062,467</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 268 (2012)
Data presented in Table 1.2 provide the enrollment percentages within individual racial groups at community colleges. These enrollment percentages reveal the diversity of the student population as well as the overrepresentation of Latina/o students at public two-year institutions. These enrollment figures also indicate that community colleges have become a key destination point for Latina/o and American Indian students in their pursuit of a post-secondary education. On a national scale, the enrollment characteristics paint a very important portrait of the breakdown of enrollment trends within different sectors of higher education, especially with respect to racial/ethnic group differences in enrollment by institutional type. In addition, these enrollment characteristics underscore important implications regarding access and equity issues in higher education with respect to high enrollment of minority groups in two-year institutions. Community colleges have become a de facto point of entry into higher education for Latina/o students. In the following section, a closer examination of the enrollment characteristics at public two-year institutions will be explored.

Table 1.2
Fall 2011 enrollment community colleges as a proportion of degree-granting institutions, by racial group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Group</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>46.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian/ Alaska Native</td>
<td>41.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>35.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>34.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>33.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>31.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident Alien</td>
<td>12.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>33.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Digest of Education Statistics*, Table 263 (2013)
Enrollment Characteristics in Community Colleges

According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) (2011), community colleges represent 45 percent of all undergraduate enrollments in the United States. Enrollment at community colleges has reached record-breaking heights. For example, between 2003 and 2011, community college enrollment has increased 21 percent (AACC, 2011). Community colleges also have the most diverse student population in all of higher education. In comparison to baccalaureate granting colleges and universities, students that enroll at a community college are more likely to be female, non-White, over the age of 24, and from low-income families (Horn & Nevill, 2006). In addition, community college students are more likely to work full-time and enroll part-time. As Horn and Neville (2006) note, “In 2003-04, more than two-thirds attended classes part-time, including 26 percent who attended less than half time” (p. v). In a national study examining the immediate enrollment of high school graduates in fall of 2004, Provasnik and Planty (2008) found that a greater percentage of Hispanic students (46%) enrolled in a community college than any other racial group. Data presented in Table 1.3 provide the percentage of 2004 seniors who enrolled immediately a post-secondary education after completing high school. Among immediate enrollees, Hispanic students also had the lowest percentage of enrollment (33%) in public four-year colleges and universities than any other racial group. In addition, Hispanics had the lowest percentage of students (47%) that enrolled in public four-year colleges and universities immediately after completing high school. In comparison, Whites and Asian/Pacific Islanders had the greatest immediate enrollment percentage of 69% and 75%, respectively. Asian/Pacific Islander also had the largest enrollment percentage at public 4-year colleges and universities.
Immediate enrollment percentages at community colleges were lowest for White (28%) and Asian (25%) students. Provasnik and Planty (2008) provide further evidence on the overrepresentation of Hispanic students at two-year institutions while also highlighting the enrollment disparities that exist among immediate enrollees into higher education. Hispanic and American Indian/Alaska Native students still had the lowest immediate enrollment rate as compared to other racial and ethnic groups. This study took place in central Illinois, so an examination of on the enrollment trends of Latina/o students in Illinois’ K-12 and higher education is warranted.

**Latinas/os in Illinois’ K-12 Public Education**

For the past decade, Latina/o enrollment in Illinois’ K-12 public education has rapidly increased. For example, in 2002, Latina/o students represented roughly 17 percent of the K-12
Since 2002, Latina/o student enrollment has jumped to almost a quarter (24%) of the total Illinois’ public elementary and secondary student population (ISBE, 2012). In raw enrollment numbers, Latinas/os represented 351,065 of the total 2 million students in Illinois’ public schools in the fall of 2002, but in the fall of 2012 this number jumped to over half a million of the total Illinois’ K-12 public schools. The percentage change in Latina/o students in Illinois’ K-12 public schools equates to roughly 42 percent. As of today, one out of every four students in Illinois’ K-12 public schools is Latina/o (Vonderlack-Navarro, Puente, & Buell, 2012). Data presented in Table 1.4 show the enrollment figures in Illinois’ public schools by race/ethnicity over the past decade.

Several important trends have taken place over the past ten years. First and foremost, Latina/o students have become the largest racial/ethnic minority group in Illinois’ K-12 public schools. While Latina/o and Asian student enrollment in Illinois’ K-12 public schools has increased, the percentage enrollment for Black and White students has declined. The continued growth of Latina/o enrollment in Illinois’ public schools is primarily attributed to their youthful age distribution.

**Table 1.4 Enrollment Percentages in Illinois K-12 Public Schools by Race/Ethnic Group.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
<td>51.33%</td>
<td>50.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latinos</td>
<td>16.94%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>22.78%</td>
<td>24.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacks</td>
<td>20.91%</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
<td>18.43%</td>
<td>17.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asians</td>
<td>3.56%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.09%</td>
<td>4.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Illinois State Board of Education; Data Analysis and Progress Reporting Division
Illinois is home to the fifth largest Latina/o populated state in the United States. Latinas/os in Illinois are also the youngest segment of the population. Based on an analysis of 2010 census, Chapa (2012) found that Illinois Latinas/os have a much younger age distribution (median age of 26 years) compared to non-Latinas/os (median age of 39 years). This youthful distribution is not reflected among all Latina/o sub-groups. Mexican-origin Latinas/os have a much younger median age (25 years) compared to Cuban-origin Latinas/os (38 years).

Latina/o students’ rapid growth in Illinois’ K-12 public schools has also translated into a higher number of Latina/o students attaining a post-secondary education, especially in Illinois’ two-year public universities. The presence of Latina/o students in two-year public institutions has grown strong over the course of the past decade. Latina/o enrollment has also increased in four-year public institutions. Data presented in Table 1.5 show the Latina/o student fall enrollment in Illinois’ two-year and four-year public institutions from 2005 to 2012. Although the percentage change has been the greatest for Latina/o students enrolled in four-year institutions, Latina/o enrollment at two-year institutions is still three times more than at four-year colleges and universities.

Table 1.5
Fall Enrollment Numbers for Latinas/os in Illinois Post-secondary Education by Institutional Type, Fall 2005-12

<table>
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<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-year, Public</td>
<td>56,280 (N)</td>
<td>58,116</td>
<td>57,677</td>
<td>61,641</td>
<td>65,027</td>
<td>63,345</td>
<td>63,440</td>
<td>66,702</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-year, Public</td>
<td>13,313</td>
<td>13,614</td>
<td>13,897</td>
<td>14,339</td>
<td>15,263</td>
<td>16,668</td>
<td>17,553</td>
<td>18,533</td>
<td>70.29%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Illinois Board of Higher Education
On a national level, Hispanic students have the largest enrollment percentage (46%) at two-year institutions than any other racial group. In Illinois, Hispanic students also have the greatest enrollment percentage at two-year institutions than any other racial group. Data presented in Table 1.6 reveal the enrollment percentage within individual racial groups by institutional type in the state of Illinois for the fall 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Community colleges</th>
<th>Public universities</th>
<th>Independent NFP Institutions</th>
<th>Independent For-Profit Institutions</th>
<th>Out-of-State institutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>46.1%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>15.7%</td>
<td>2.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>33.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
<td>.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian</td>
<td>46.7%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American Indian</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>19.9%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alien</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>46.6%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Board of Higher Education Records, 2012

Within the total enrollment of Hispanic students in Illinois’ higher education institutions, 62% of Hispanic students in Illinois attended a community college in the fall of 2011. Hispanic, Native Hawaiian, and American Indian students had the lowest enrollment percentage of students enrolled in Illinois’ public colleges and universities—16%, 16.6%, and 16.9%, respectively.

Hispanic enrollment at community colleges also represents the largest racial minority group in Illinois’ public two-year institutions. Hunter-Anderson (2008) has calculated that
Latina/o student enrollment in Illinois’ community college system has grown over 75% between 1990 and 2006. The enrollment data shared below (Table 1.6) indicate that Latina/o students are more likely to enroll in community colleges rather than four-year public universities. Illinois is home to the third largest community college system in the United States. Since Latina/o students have become the second largest student population enrolled in Illinois’ community colleges, an important aspect is to examine in depth their experiences at two-year institutions. The primary focus of my dissertation is to capture Latina/o students’ pre-college aspirations as well as their progress towards successfully transferring to a public university or college.

**Significance of Study**

Latina/o students are more likely to begin their post-secondary education at a community college, especially in Illinois, rather than at a four-year public college or university. Figure 1.1 is an adaptation of Sólorzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera’s (2005) Latina/o educational pipeline model, which reflects the Latina/o student enrollment in Illinois’ higher education system. The enrollment percentages of Latina/o students at all segments of Illinois’ higher education system were used to calculate the number of students out of 100. Of 100 Latina/o students enrolled in Illinois’ higher education system, more than half (58) of Latina/o students were enrolled at community college in the fall 2011. In comparison, 16 Latina/o students were enrolled in Illinois’ public universities.

Community colleges provide Latina/o students with critical access to pursue an education beyond high school and to transfer to a four-year college or university. For many Latinas/os, however, this dream of attaining a post-secondary dream remains elusive rather than attainable (Sengupta & Jepsen, 2006). For example, Horn (2009) found that among a cohort of first-time
beginning community college students who initially intended to transfer to a four-year institution, only 15 percent had successfully done so within three years of beginning college.

**Figure 1.1 Illinois Postsecondary Educational Pipeline for Latina/o students, Fall 2011**

The low transfer rate is of concern to students beginning their postsecondary experience at a two-year public community college.

Scholars have explored the barriers and challenges that Latina/o students experience in community colleges within the U.S. Southwest (Alexander, Garcia, Gonzalez, Grimes, & O’Brien, 2007; Davila, 2011; Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007; Ornelas, 2002; Ornelas & Solórzano, 2004; Rendón, Justiz, & Resta, 1988; Rivas, Pérez, Alvarez, & Solorzano, 2007; Sanchez, 2012), however research on Latina/o students’ experience at community colleges in the Midwest remains scarce and warrants further scholarly investigation due to Latinas/os high enrollment at these institutions. This study will contribute to the existing literature of community colleges by focusing primarily on the pre-college accounts, college experiences, and post-secondary aspirations of Latina/o students attending a community college in the Midwest. This case study of 16 Latina/o students at a community college will provide insight into the post-secondary aspirations and the barriers that they encounter while trying to transfer to four-year institution. My hope is that this case study will help faculty, administrators, academic
professionals, local leaders, and students develop strategies to promote success among Latina/o students’ efforts to transfer to a four-year university.

**Summary**

In this chapter, I provided the demographic context in which Latinas/os have become the largest minority racial group in the United States. In comparison to other racial groups, Latinas/os continue to represent the youngest subpopulation across the nation. National estimates indicate that Latina/o population will continue to grow. In addition, this chapter discussed how the rapid growth of Latinas/os has contributed to their highest enrollment in K-12 as well as in higher education. Based on national and Illinois enrollment figures, Latina/o students are more likely to enroll in community colleges than four-year colleges or universities. This major enrollment increase in community college warrants further exploration of their college experience and aspirations. The achievement disparities among Latina/os while at community college also deserves further investigation by examining the experiences and resiliency of students that have persisted during their tenure at a community college.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The previous chapter framed the important role that Illinois community colleges are serving in educating 62% of all Latina/o students enrolled in a post-secondary education (Illinois Board of Higher Education, Fall 2011). In national and regional studies, researchers have also documented the exceptionally high degree aspirations of Latina/o students attending community colleges (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2007; Hagedorn & Cepeda, 2004). For this reason, the transfer function still remains an important component of the community college experience, especially for Latina/o students. Because the growth of community colleges will continue as well as the low persistence rate, the need to explore campus climate as well as the transfer experience of Latina/o students attending community colleges is warranted. In this chapter, I begin by providing a historical overview of the evolving nature of community colleges in the United States and Illinois. Then, I review literature on the transfer function, coupled with critiques by scholars that have questioned community colleges’ ability to meet its transfer function. I continue by reviewing literature that examines the transfer experience of Latina/o community college students followed by the literature on the academic failure of Latina/o students. Finally, I discuss Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS), which offers the theoretical framing for this study.

Historical Evolution of Community Colleges in the United States and Illinois

The origin of America’s junior colleges, now known as community colleges, dates back to the early 20th century (Eells, 1931; Koos, 1925). At the end of the 19th century and early in the 20th century, the United States experienced a number of social, economic, and technological changes that played an important role in increasing the pursuit of higher education (Meier, 2013). Meier (2013) refers to this era as the “Second Industrial Revolution” due to the extensive impact
these innovations had on the demand for higher education. First, the U.S. economy was shifting from a predominantly agrarian economy to an industrialized and globalized economy. Second, an energy revolution occurred which shifted the source of power to carbon and petroleum-based technologies rather than animal, human, wind, water, or timber based ones. Third, people were migrating from small rural farming towns to large urban centers in the United States as an influx of new immigrants arrived from Europe. Lastly, there were also important technological advances such as the launching of the first satellite by the United States that ignited interest in pursuing an education beyond high school. All these shifts in demographics, economy, and geographic location increased the demand for educational services. Meier (2013) writes, “These innovations led to the creation of a new mass consumption society and a growing middle class that demanded more educational services and credentials to provide them with relative economic security in the increasingly competitive industrial society” (p. 10). This growth in demand promoted educational reformists to devise a strategy that would increase the efficiency of educational institutions through the creation of junior colleges (Beach, 2011). University of Chicago President, William Rainey Harper, and Stanford President, David Starr Jordan, advocated for the creation of institutions that would be primarily responsible for offering the first two years of higher education and upon completion of their liberal arts education, students would then transfer on to a university.

Ratcliff (1994) describes the historical development of community colleges in seven phases throughout the late 19th century and towards the 20th century. First, the rise of the research university coupled with an emphasis on delegating the responsibility to fund and regulate institutions of higher education at the local level, also known as local community boosterism, became the driving source for the creation of junior colleges. According to Ratcliff (1994), the
growth of community colleges in the early 20th century was due in large part to the educational reforms of the Progressive Era which called for the restricting and expansion of public educational system, professionalization of teacher education, and the vocational educational movement. The final two important events that contributed immensely to the access and comprehensive mission of community colleges occurred post-World War II with the rise of adult education and the growing emphasis of open admission to higher education. All of these events contributed extensively to the expansion of community colleges and its current diversity in curriculum. Ratcliff writes, “A hallmark has been avenues of public access to education at all levels. At the postsecondary level, the comprehensive community college has made a singular contribution to this adaptiveness and pragmatism” (p. 3).

The social and economic events that have led to the growth of community college were also fueled by important state legislative policies that have promoted the growth of community colleges in the United States (Cohen, 2001). The growth of community colleges was often prevented or promoted by critical policies at the regional level. For example, Cohen (2001) describes specific statewide legislative policies that promoted or inhibited the development of a comprehensive community college system in 15 states. California, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, and North Carolina were leaders in promoting the development of a comprehensive community college system.

Federal policies also played a major role in the development of community colleges throughout the nation. Most of these policies were enacted mid-twentieth century and were a direct response to social, political, technological, and economic factors affecting the nation, such as the return of World War II veterans and the Civil Rights Movement. In 1944, the federal government passed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act commonly known as the G.I. Bill. This
federal policy provided financial support to World War II returns pursuing a college education. Cohen (2001) writes, “Each veteran was authorized to attend any college or university that would admit him, and the government agreed to pay the tuition, pay for books and supplies, and pay a monthly stipend for living expenses” (p. 18). Due to the admission criteria of universities, many veterans decided to attend community colleges rather than four-year institutions. More than 2.2 million veterans attended college under the GI Bill (American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), 2014). The Civil Rights Acts of the 1960s and 1970s prohibited public institutions of higher education to discriminate on the basis of race during their college admissions process (Cohen, 2001). The Higher Education Act of 1965 and its subsequent amendments dramatically influenced the development of community colleges. Lastly, the federal government also passed legislative policies promoting the development of vocational training at community colleges such as the Vocational Act of 1963, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, the Workforce Investment Act, and the Perkins Vocational Act of 1998 (Lovell, 2001). The intended aim of these vocational funding policies was to support programs that developed the existing workforce.

Illinois was the birthplace of the first community college in the United States (Krebs, Katsinas, & Johnson, 1999). Despite not having the legislative policies, funding, or lobbying representation, Illinois community colleges grew because of the demand for transfer and occupational education. Krebs et al. (1999) write, “The idea of good high schools providing a two-year general education program was catching on quickly. At the same time, a need to provide occupational education beyond high school was being recognized” (p. 21). In 1931, Illinois adopted its first Junior College Act, which publicly acknowledged and permitted the development of one junior college in the city of Chicago. Although this legislative policy was a
major victory for community colleges, it didn’t offer funding or promote the expansion of community colleges beyond the Chicago city limits. The lack of financial support by local and state funds created a landscape in which community colleges were created, shut down, and reborn. Krebs et al. (1999) write, “Any review of Chicago City College system introduces one to an entangled mosaic of names, dates, and landmarks of Chicago’s history. A two-year college would open, then close or perhaps move, later to be replaced or merely renamed” (p. 21). In 1937, Illinois passed a second Junior College Act, which encouraged the development of community colleges beyond the city of Chicago. Although the amended Junior College Act permitted the establishment of junior colleges as well as the use of secondary schools to offer two years of post-secondary curriculum beyond the city of Chicago, it did not offer any source of funding to support the growth of community colleges in Illinois. In 1943, junior colleges in Illinois were eligible to receive funds generated by local taxes via the passage of House Bill 401, which authorized local school boards to levy a tax for the construction and funding of junior colleges. Krebs et al. (1999) write, “Specifically, this bill authorized any district maintaining a junior college (outside of Chicago) to vote for a special tax rate ‘not to exceed 35 cents’ educational purposes. For building purposes, an additional tax rate ‘not to exceed 15 cents’” (p. 22). House Bill 401 provided community colleges in Illinois the necessary funds to support the growth of the state’s two-year institutions.

In 1947, the Higher Education Act for American Democracy by the President’s Commission on Higher Education published a report known as the *The Truman Commission Report*. The Truman Commission Report served as the diving board into complex and sensitive issues of higher education. Most importantly, the report offered groundbreaking recommendations on how to improve college access and equity through the expansion of
community colleges. The report also popularized the term “community college.” The Truman report offered recommendations that would address racial, religious, antifeminism discrimination while also addressing the financial barriers attributed to low-income students. Gilbert and Heller (2013) highlight the report’s recommendation to address the financial barrier for students by eliminating tuition costs for those seeking to attend two-year institutions. They write, “…the report suggested education to the 14th grade should be tuition free with additional provisions of financial assistance made for students in the 10th through 14th grades who would be unable to continue education without it” (p. 431). The Truman Commission presented a radical way to utilize community colleges in an effort to address the college access and financial inequities persistent in the post-World War II era. In addition, the report legitimatized the development of a comprehensive community college mission statement that consisted of vertical, vocational, adult education, and responded to the local needs of the community (Beach, 2011). Many of the report’s recommendations also encouraged and validated the efforts of leadership at the community college to expand access to a large segment of the population in the United States. Gilbert and Heller (2013) elaborate, “Leaders of junior colleges thrilled with the attention of the Commission—by being placed at the crux of higher education’s future, community colleges were offered the public recognition that they had sought for years” (p. 432). The Truman Report cemented the critical role of community colleges in expanding access to higher education through its comprehensive mission statement while also addressing the myriad of barriers students encounter while pursuing a post-secondary degree.

**Critics and Proponents of Community Colleges**

Since its inception, community colleges have been a highly debated area for researchers, educators, and administrators. Critics of community colleges often cite empirical data on high
attrition, low retention, and low transfer rate to reinforce their opposition towards community colleges (Beach, 2011; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1987; Grubb, 1991). Proponents of community colleges underscore community colleges’ adaptive and multidimensional curricula as well as versatility to serve the diverse needs of the surrounding community (Cohen, 1990; Eaton, 1994; Grubb & Lazerson, 2005; Rendón, 1993). In this section, I will outline the major theoretical frameworks that inform proponents and opponents of community colleges.

Pincus (1994) categorizes critics of community colleges into three groups: mainstream, structural, and elite. Mainstream critics generally support the mission and potential of community colleges in their potential to improve the lives of community members, but also believe that there must be improvements made to enhance the educational opportunities of students. Pincus writes, “They are aware of the empirical data showing race, class, and gender bias in the community colleges but believe that these institutions can be reformed to provide more equal opportunity” (p. 624). Structural critics believe that community colleges are not able to address the social and economic inequality in the United States because these institutions are deeply embedded within a highly stratified society. Moreover, structural critics also argue that community colleges are tools used to reproduce social and economic inequality. Pincus (1994) writes, “…structural critics argue that community colleges are part of a stratified system of higher education that reproduces the race, class, and gender inequalities that are part of the larger society” (pp. 624-625). Structural critics contend that in order to address the stratification of society there must be radical transformation in politics and economics. Lastly, Pincus describes elitist critics as individuals that view all aspects of community colleges as second-rate and inferior institutions of higher education. The majority of these critics often are not associated with two-year institutions. He writes, “Elitist critics tend to argue that community colleges are
inferior because they do not measure up to the academic model of prestigious four-year colleges and universities…” (p. 624).

Dougherty (1994) also defines the landscape of those that defend and oppose community colleges. He organizes critics and proponents of community colleges in theoretical paradigms of: pluralist functionalism, instrumentalist Marxism, and institutional theory. He also argues for a fourth group in order to address the shortcomings of the ongoing debate launched towards community colleges, which he calls state relative autonomy. State relative autonomy refers to the notion that those who benefit the most from community colleges are local government officials, educators, school superintendents, high school principals, and local business leaders. He writes:

Local educators founded community colleges in good part because this brought them professional prestige and gave them access to college-level jobs. By establishing a community college, local principals or superintendents could attract the acclaim of their peers and of the professional elite at the universities. (p. 27)

The functionalist advocates defend the community colleges and underscore the increase in enrollment among community college students. Marxist instrumentalist are highly critical of community college and view this institution as a tool to reproduce class differences through its occupational education and transfer program. Lastly, institutionalist critics argue that the hierarchal nature of higher education places community colleges in a disadvantaged position that will continue to reproduce unfavorable student outcomes. Dougherty writes, “Within this Darwinian universe, universities are at the top of the food chain, securing the best students, the most revenues, and the greatest prestige” (pp. 25-26).

Herideen (1998) offers a balanced blend of critique of and advocacy towards community college in her two-year ethnographic study that examined nontraditional adult women students
enrolled at a community college. Through her research, she advocates for a framework that acknowledges the structural and institutional level elements that inhibit community colleges, but also highlights the important role these educational institutions play for underrepresented and nontraditional segment of the population. She calls her position towards community colleges as one of a critical lover. She writes, “This works fits within the project of how education and schooling can remedy rather than reproduce existing social inequalities. I call my stance a critical lover’s perspective” (p. 4). Rather than entirely dismissing community colleges on the grounds that these institutions serve to reproduce inequality, Herideen views these institutions of higher education as important access points to college for underserved segment of the population. She writes, “The community college is an important, unique and enabling public space for nontraditional students and needs to be recognized as such” (p. 16). Her critical lover’s perspective offers a delicate balance between being supportive of community colleges but also being critical of the persistent challenges that students entering community colleges face.

Rendón’s (1993) examination of community colleges also operates from the position of a critical lover. She writes, “But what die-hard proponents of community colleges often do not understand is that critics like myself are not out to destroy community colleges. In fact, I want very much to make them better” (p. 6).

Cohen (1990) also supports the critical role that community colleges play as institutions of higher education that are open access and multidimensional. In his case for community colleges, he underscores that elimination of these institutions would also take away the only option that many students have of pursuing a postsecondary education. He writes:

For most of the community college students, the choice is not between the community college and a senior residential institution; it is between the local college and nothing.
Therefore, comparisons of relative progress are useful only to the extent that they guide changes in institutional policy. (p. 439)

In this dissertation, I will not argue to dismantle community colleges’ existing efforts to assist students in their transfer aspirations, rather I document and highlight the barriers that Latina/o students encounter while enrolled at a community college in the Illinois. My hope is that this case study will provide stakeholders with valuable insight into ways to improve their existing programs.

Transfer Function at Community Colleges

The transfer function has played a critical role in community colleges since its emergence in the early 20th century. Eaton (1994) cites student enrollment surveys between 1907 and 1940 that indicate that student enrollment reflected transfer enrollments of 60 to 70 percent. Eaton also underscores that the transfer function played a vital role in community colleges. She writes, “Although transfer has never been the exclusive function of the junior college, it was the dominant function within the two-year institution” (p. 29). In the 1960s, a shift in the dominance between vocational and transfer education occurred. Vocational education became a dominant aspect of two-year institutions. Eaton writes, “Also known as career, occupational and technical education, vocational education replaced the transfer function as the dominant community college function” (p. 30). Furthermore, the ability of community colleges to support students in their pursuit to transfer to a four-year institution has been a major point of contestation among researchers. A number of studies have examined factors associated with student transfer from community colleges to four-your universities (Anderson, 1981; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Dougherty, 1987; Wang, 2012; Velez, 1985). In this section, I will provide a brief review of the literature on the transfer function as well as the factors associated with it.
Among scholars that challenge the transfer function of community colleges, Clark (1960) is the most cited author for his conceptualization of the cooling-out function of community college. More specifically, “…the cooling-out process in higher education is one whereby systematic discrepancy between aspiration and avenue is covered over and stress for the individual and the system is minimized” (Clark, 1960, p. 576). The cooling-out process is one in which students enrolled at community college are redirected to take more vocational or technical courses rather than pursuing the transfer track. The cooling-function operates within a series of interconnected events that gradually push students away from transfer education and towards vocational education. Clark describes the cooling-out features as consisting of alternative achievement, gradual disengagement, objective denial, agents of consolidation, and avoidance of standards.

The primary features of the cooling-out process are gradual disengagement and objective denial. Gradual disengagement refers to the series of events that stall students’ educational pursuits towards a degree. This feature of the cooling-out function can manifest itself in a variety of ways. For example, students taking developmental courses before enrolling in college-level courses experience delay in their progress towards a degree. The second important feature of the cooling-out process is objective denial. Objective denial refers to the use of institutional requirements and bureaucratic procedures to attribute failure to the student rather than on the institution, its culture, or its personnel. Clark writes, “Record-keeping and other bureaucratic procedures appeal to universal criteria and reduce the influence of personal ties, and the personnel are thereby protected. Modern personnel record-keeping, in general, has the function of documenting denial” (p. 575). According to Clark, the transfer function is undermined by the
cooling-out function, which serves to divert the aspirations of community college students while maintaining its commitment of open access.

Over the past two decades, there have been a number of modifications made to improve the transfer process for students beginning their educational experience at a two-year institution. Dowd and Melguizo (2008) conducted a statistical analysis of two national longitudinal data sets to examine changes in the socioeconomic composition of community college transfer students between the late 1980s and 1990s. According to the literature, scholars (Astin & Oseguera, 2004) have argued that the improvements in the transfer process coupled with rise in tuition have caused a middle-class takeover at the community college. To examine this middle-class takeover, Dowd and Melguizo (2008) examined which socioeconomic groups benefited the most from the strengthening of course articulation agreements, transfer policies, and pressures of rising tuition costs at selective institutions. Contrary to the middle-class takeover, Dowd and Melguizo found an upper-class takeover of the transfer process towards selective institutions. Those that have benefited the most from the enhancements made to improve the transfer process for students starting their educational journey at a community colleges are the most affluent while the students from low-SES continue to encounter barriers in their efforts to transfer. Dowd and Melguizo explain, “The disappointing findings concerning the extremely low and stagnant enrollment of the poorest students among transfers suggests that policies based primarily on reducing structural and informational barriers to transfer are not enough to address inequities in transfer access” (p. 397).

Wang (2012) also found that among a national sample of baccalaureate aspirants beginning at community colleges, those from high SES were most likely to successfully transfer to a four-year university. Wang writes, “Baccalaureate aspirants with higher SES are more likely
to successfully transfer to four-year institutions, essentially the first step towards their degree
goal, than their counterparts from families of less favorable socioeconomic status” (p. 865).

Wang found that Black students were the only racial group to have a significant negative impact
on the probability of transferring to a four-year university. The key aspect of Wang’s study is
that students from low-SES continue to experience barriers that inhibit their ability to
successfully transfer to baccalaureate-granting institutions. Wang writes:

The sorting mechanism based on class might persist to perpetuate social inequality to
some degree, not only between community college and four-year university
enrollees…but also among students who were hoping to use community colleges as an
alternative route to the bachelor’s degree. (p. 867)

To help strengthen the transfer function of community colleges, Eaton (1993) argues that
a general education, which focuses on developing habits of thought among all students attending
a community college despite their educational foci, must be created. She characterizes habits of
thought as a curriculum focused on encouraging students to develop holistically rather than
solely focusing on course content. She writes:

General education would be less focused on curriculum issues and more concerned with
helping students develop ways of approaching information and experience that strengthen
their reasoning capacity, their awareness of relationships and responsibilities in a social
and civic context, and their attention to values and moral issues. (p. 28)

The development of habits of thought is one effort to improve the transfer function of
community colleges by establishing a minimum level of educational expectations for all
students. Recently, there has been an increase in the scholarship that examines the transfer
experience of Latina/o students at community college. The following section will discuss several studies that explore the transfer experience of Latina/o students in the Southwest.

**Transfer experience of Latina/o students at community colleges**

Rendón and Nora (1989) conducted a literature review of research about Latina/o students enrolled at community colleges. In their comprehensive review, the authors found that there were few studies that captured the experiences of Latina/o students at community colleges. The studies that did exist often were limited by inconsistencies in definition, sampling, methodology, and sample size. Rendón and Nora argued that the research of Latina/o students at community colleges was under-examined by scholars. In order to improve the educational success of Latina/o students at community colleges, Rendón and Nora encouraged researchers to focus time and energy in exploring the complex experiences of Latina/o students at two-year institutions. They write, “The future success of Hispanics in community college is largely dependent on whether empirical information is available to be used as a base for the colleges to make systematic curricular reforms, and devise academic and student support interventions” (p. 22). In the past two decades, researchers have responded to Rendón and Nora’s plea to increase the amount of scholarship being conducted about Latina/o students attending community colleges. The following section will provide a review of scholarship documenting the experience of Latina/o students at community colleges.

Alexander et al. (2007) conducted an ethnographic study of Latina/o students attending a community college in Texas. The purpose of their study was to explore the barriers that Latina/o students experienced in their attempt to transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution. Through the use of informal interviews and participant observations, the authors identified eight major barriers to the transfer process for Latina/o students. These eight barriers consisted of: Latina/o
students’ unfamiliarity with academic requirements and procedures to transfer, lack of adequate high school preparation, high enrollment in developmental rather than transfer courses, limited English-competency, limited financial resources, hostile campus climate, higher priority on employment than school, and few faculty and staff role models. The authors offer recommendations on how to address these barriers such as implementing transfer centers, simplifying state policies on course articulations, and the development of courses that develop faculty-student mentor relationships.

Crisp and Nora (2010) have also argued that research specific to Hispanic students attending community colleges is in its infancy. To shed light on to the experience of Latina/o students, Crisp and Nora conducted a quantitative study to examine factors influencing the persistence and transfer decisions of Latina/o students at community colleges. They used longitudinal data collected for the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study starting in the 2003-04 academic year. The purpose of study was to examine demographic, pre-college, socio-cultural, environmental, and academic experiences that impact success of Latina/o students through the second and third years of community college. Of their total sample, 41% of participants attended a community college classified as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI); half of the respondents indicated that their parents did not attend college. The authors found that the academic preparation of students in high school mathematics courses was strongly associated with Latina/o student success in both years two and three of community college. They also found that parental education levels were positively related to success for Latina/o students attending community college. Enrollment as full-time students was incredibly important. They write, “…the odds of being successful were found to be 2.75 times as large for students who enrolled in college full time…” (p. 186). Conversely, they found that delayed enrollment into a
postsecondary institution immediately after graduating from high school negatively impacted likelihood of transferring or earning a credential. Crisp and Nora also examined if Latina/o students attending HSIs were more likely to persist and transfer. In their third year of community college, the researchers found that attending a HSI had a positive affect on Latina/o students’ academic success. Crisp and Nora speculate that attending a college with a more welcoming and culturally sensitive climate would foster a sense of belonging. Their study, however, did not explore Latina/o students’ perception of campus climate or sense of belonging.

Hagedorn, Cypers, and Lester (2008) also examined factors affecting transfer for urban community college students. The authors reported data collected through the Transfer and Retention of Urban Community College Students (TRUCCS) project, which was a five-year initiative to study goals, success, and academic patterns of community college students. The purpose of the study was to identify factors that promoted success of different types of community college students. A major finding had to do with the low transfer rate of Latina/o students in comparison to other racial groups. Hagedorn et al. write, “Despite many programs to assist specifically Hispanic students, they do not transfer in equal proportions to their representation” (p. 659). The authors also found that students that successfully transferred had higher English and math placement courses, were twice as likely to have passed a chemistry, economics, or biology courses, were continuously enrolled, and completed courses that were designated to those pursuing the transfer option. Hagedorn et al. underscored the impact of academic preparation on those that are seeking to transfer to a 4-year university and more importantly that the transfer function needs to improved. They write, “We must acknowledge that transfer rates are lower than optimal and that many students are not succeeding. The roots of the problems are academic, and only academic solutions will make a difference” (p. 661).
Pérez Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, and Solórzano (2006) examined the existing research literature about Latina/o students on critical transitions within each segment of the educational pipeline—K-12, community college, undergraduate, and graduate schooling. In addition, the authors offered concrete recommendations on how to improve the educational attainment of Latina/o students. The report focused specifically on Latinas/os enrolled in community colleges in Los Angeles, California, but their findings underscore the major cracks in the educational pipeline for Latinas/os as well as the existing disparities in Latinas/os’ educational attainment in comparison to their counterparts, especially among those that begin their post-secondary education at community colleges. The authors cite the following factors for the low transfer rate of Latina/o students: inadequate high school preparation, bias on the part of counselors and faculty, and an unwelcoming campus climate. Most importantly, they emphasize how institutions are not validating the high aspirations of Latina/o students to transfer. They write, “Transfer rates for Latina/o students indicate that community college system is not taking the needs of Latina/o students into consideration an therefore is not adequately preparing them to transfer to four-year colleges or universities” (p. 6). Pérez Huber et al. recommended that community colleges infuse a transfer culture, increase the accessibility of information about the transfer process, and developing support programs and services to increase the transfer rates, especially among underrepresented students. The authors use Ornelas’ (2005) definition of transfer culture, which is:

A campus-wide effort that normalizes and ensures that students who intend or aspire to transfer will in fact make this critical transition to the university. That is, a transfer culture involves a campus-wide effort by administrators, counselors, faculty, and students to normalize the transfer process at a community college. (p. 6)
Pérez Huber et al. emphasized the critical role that instilling a transfer culture will have in improving the transfer rate for Latina/o students.

Rendón (1993) presented a compelling argument to increase the number of students who transfer, especially among students of color. She provided national statistics as well as case studies of successful partnerships of community colleges and flagship universities. In her article, Rendón argued that community colleges and their transfer function play a critical role in increasing the number of students attaining a bachelor’s degree. She states:

At the heart of this close scrutiny is the transfer function, for it is precisely this function that leads to the baccalaureate—a symbolic prize that has the most potential to facilitate social and economic mobility for the poor, the disadvantage, and people of color. (p. 5)

Rendón powerfully argued that the stakes are too high for students of color and low-SES to be diverted or cooled-out from their aspirations to attain a baccalaureate degree. She recommended that faculty and administrators should offer focused counseling and encouragement to students of color in their efforts to transfer to a four-year university.

Rivas, Pérez, Alvarez, and Solórzano (2007) examined the experiences of Latina/o students who transfer from the California Community College (CCC) to the California State University or the University of California. More specifically, the authors explored the role of CCC in the postsecondary education of Latina/o students, CCC’s transfer function, and the experiences of Latina/o transfer students at four-year institutions. The authors cited the following reasons why Latina/o students attend community college immediately after high school: academic preparation, proximity and affordability, residency status, and first generation college status. The authors used enrollment, attainment, and state level data in California’s community college system to further understand the transfer process of Latina/o students. They found a
mismatch between Latina/o students’ aspirations and the actual number of students that successfully transfer to a baccalaureate-granting institution. This mismatch was attributed to transfer misinformation, negative experiences between students and their faculty and counselors, and the need to strengthen partnerships between community colleges and four-year institutions.

Suarez (2003) conducted a case study to examine the factors that contributed to the forward transfer of Latina/o students from a California community college to a four-year university. The case study consisted of interviews with 10 Latina/o students, six administrators, and two counselors. In her data analysis, Suarez found 12 factors that contributed immensely to the successful transfer of Latina/o students from community college to four-year university. She divided these factors into three categories of individual, institutional, and environmental. Within the realm of the individual, participants cited personal drive, rigorous academic preparation, and academic/career goals as important factors in contributing to Latina/o students’ forward transfer. At the institutional level, participants identified the following factors to forward transfer: institutional commitment to transfer, validation by staff and faculty, role models, community college flexibility, transfer as a shared responsibility, and support programs for minority students. In the category of the environment, Suarez highlighted the need to provide financial support to students, geographic proximity of the transfer institution, and a strong support system. Contrary to previous research, Suarez found that personal and financial hardship served as critical sources of motivation among participants. She noted:

Students seemed to develop an ‘anything is possible’ attitude after having experienced many years of either having to provide for themselves or observing their parents struggle to overcome many barriers, such as adjusting to a life in the United States or economic hardships. (p. 109)
Suarez’s finding of an “anything is possible” attitude emphasizes the need to further understand students’ backgrounds and how it shapes their decision to pursue a post-secondary education as well as their future aspirations.

Valadez (1993) conducted ethnographic interviews among nontraditional students, administrators, and faculty in order to explore how a community college in a small rural county was providing opportunities for minority students to achieve their academic and professional goals. In his analysis of 47 interviews, he found that participants reported that day-to-day interactions were instrumental in either promoting or hindering the academic success of minority students. He reported, “The findings of this study indicated that the extent to which students could achieve upward social mobility was either facilitated or hindered by the day-to-day experiences with the institution” (p. 39). The day-to-day experiences consisted of social interactions between students and faculty, interaction with counselors and advisors, and student performances on assessments. Valadez also emphasizes the importance of valuing the cultural background of minority students. He claims, “By denying the coherence and significance of the culture and values of minority and nontraditional students, institutions shift the responsibility of academic failure onto the characteristics of the students and their cultures and absolve themselves of their institution blame” (p. 41). Other scholars have also emphasized the importance of validating the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of Latina/o students.

Rendón and Valadez (1993) published a subset of a larger study that included data collected from students, faculty, and administrators in six southwestern community colleges on the multiple factors influencing student transfer. Rendón and Valadez used a component of the larger study to examine how college culture affected student achievement and progress. In their analysis of the data, the following five themes emerged: importance of the family, economic
considerations, knowledge of the system, cultural understanding, and relationships with feeder schools and senior institutions. With respect to the importance of the family, the data in the study indicated that family had a particularly strong effect on decisions Latina/o students made. A key aspect of their findings was the need for faculty and administrators to improve the campus cultural sensitivity and awareness of Latina/o students. They state, “Generally our study revealed a lack of knowledge about and sensitivity to students’ cultural backgrounds….The absence of cultural knowledge on the part of some faculty contributed to an unwelcoming environment for Hispanic students” (p. 33). Rendón and Valadez argued that these five factors contributed to an institutional culture that failed to cultivate a transfer culture for two-year institutions.

Ornelas and Solórzano (2004) conducted a case study that examined the barriers of Latina/o students encountered during their transfer process at a community college in California. Their case study consisted of in-depth interviews and focus groups as primary methods used in the data collection phase. At the time of the study, the research site was considered a Hispanic-serving institution with Latinas/os representing 70% of the total student population. Ornelas and Solórzano interviewed students, counselors, faculty, and administrators about the transfer process for Latina/o students enrolled at the community college. Among student respondents, the researchers found that the barriers inhibiting the transfer process for Latina/o students included: lack of institutional commitment to the transfer function, student uncertainty about career and academic goals, being first-generation college students, ambiguity about the financial aid process, inadequate K-12 public education, and the multiple responsibilities outside the classroom. To overcome these barriers, student participants reported having to utilize multiple information sources about the transfer function. Student participants also indicated the following
as sources of inspiration to overcome transfer barriers: support from family and friends, beating the odds, and serving as role models to their family members. Ornelas and Solórzano explain:

Also, significant for them were the continued support and encouragement they received from their families and friends. Students expressed their feelings as a strong sense to ‘prove them [society] wrong,’ a sense of responsibility to become role models to their younger siblings or their children, and a commitment to their community to succeed. (p. 238)

Ornelas and Solórzano’s case study of a Hispanic-serving community college sheds light on important micro-level barriers that Latina/o students encounter during their transfer process. They also encouraged researchers, faculty, and administrators to understand the particular needs of their student populations in order to improve the transfer function at community colleges. They suggest, “Therefore, when developing an effective transfer function, it is imperative for college personnel to understand the characteristics and distinct needs of students. An effective transfer function should reflect the diverse backgrounds and needs of students it serve” (p. 247).

Ornelas and Solórzano bring to the forefront barriers to the transfer function of Latina/o students, but also underscore the motivational factors fueling Latina/o students to overcome these challenges. The authors highlight the need for other institutions to further examine the transfer experience of Latina/o students.

**Explanations for Academic Failure**

Students’ academic failures have often been be described in two ways—nature and nurture. Coleman’s (1966) report served as the catalyst finding students’ responsible for their academic failure. Opponents of the nature argument for academic failure have argued that the environmental factors are responsible for students’ academic failure. In *Culture and Power in the*
Classroom, Darder (1991) provides a critique of the two dominant explanations for the underachievement of students. Darder posits that both arguments unjustifiably blame the student for their academic failure. She reveals, “Although it may not seem apparent at first place the burden of the responsibility of academic failure on the students’ shoulders” (p. 2). She also challenges the traditional educational practices that often reproduce the underachievement of bicultural students (i.e., students of color). She problematizes meritocracy, intelligence testing, tracking and ability grouping, teacher expectations, and the curriculum. Darder advocates that these educational practices have been detrimental to bicultural students and have perpetuated educational inequality.

**Latina/o Parents Don’t Value Education**

Valencia and Black (2002) debunk the myth that Mexican Americans are indifferent and devalue education. In their article, Valencia and Black examine several sources (e.g., early master’s theses and published scholarly literature) that contribute to the myth that Mexican American parents devalue education. Valencia and Black contextualize the long historical roots of this myth and argue that reproducing the myth fails to recognize Mexican American parents’ deep-seated appreciation towards education. They argue:

To attribute the persistent and pervasive achievement gap between Mexican American students and their White peers to a value orientation of Mexican American indifference to the importance of education is baseless, irresponsible, and racist. Furthermore, and very importantly, this assertion of not valuing education is a myth. (Valencia & Black, 2002, p. 92)

The long-lasting myth that Mexican American parents do not value education, at the exclusion of structural, economic, and cultural barriers that often prevent their participation, does not align
with Mexican American parents and advocates’ historical record of struggling to attain equal educational opportunities through protests, courts, and the electorate.

Since the 1920s, Mexican American parents have brought forth 35 school desegregation lawsuits all across the nation and for some of these, they partnered with African Americans (Valencia, 2008). The highest number of initiated desegregation court cases for Mexican Americans was in Texas (n=23) followed by California (n=7), Arizona (n=4), and Colorado (n=1).

Deficit Theory

In addition to debunking the myth that Mexican Americans devalue education, Valencia (2010) dismantles the prevailing and ongoing social construction of deficit thinking. According to Valencia, deficit thinking “is an endogenous theory, ‘blames the victim’ for school failure rather than examining how schools are structured to prevent poor students and students of color from learning” (p. xv). In his book, Valencia addresses three different adaptations of deficit thinking—the genetic pathology model, culture of poverty, and the “at-risk” label. To examine these three variants of deficit thinking, he exhaustively reviews literature surrounding deficit thinking, historical documents, and original research. Moreover, Valencia provides an alternative solution to deficit thinking—democratic education. He writes, “A democratic education has two main objectives: (a) developing an understanding of democracy through the experiencing of democracy, and (b) developing the skills of informed and responsible citizenship by exercising citizenship” (p. 153). Valencia, however, warns about the difficulty of implementing anti-deficit framework in the classroom and scholarship. He explains, “Unfortunately, deficit thinking fits current education policy and practice and neatly meshes with admissions to higher education and the configuration of the job market” (p. 152). Despite the uphill battle to debunk the prevailing
myth of deficit thinking, Valencia proffers seven components to nurture a democratic education (i.e., optimum learning environment, nature of classroom authority, inclusion, meaningful curriculum, development of citizenship skills, unalienable rights, and equality).

Social Class

There has been extensive literature examining the impact of socioeconomic status on educational attainment and college readiness. There are a number of ethnographic studies that have focused on the educational experience of low-income students. One of the most notable works is by Lareau (2011). Lareau (2011) conducted intensive observational research and interviews of 12 families of various socioeconomic statuses, when their children were nine and ten years old (i.e., 6 White, 5 Black, and 1 interracial). This sample was part of a larger study of 88 children from the middle class, working-class, and poor class. From the outset of the study, Lareau was interested in identifying ways parents’ social class impacted their children’s life experiences. Based on her observations, Lareau found that parents, depending on their social class, raised their children differently through different cultural practices. Middle- and upper-class families provided their children with established, organized forms of leisure activities controlled by the parents, which she labeled concerted cultivation. On the other hand, poor families utilized a natural growth process that centered on clear boundaries and directives. Children in poor families had more control over their leisure activities. The differences between concerted cultivation and natural growth were a direct result of economic constraints. She writes:

In sum, there were social class differences in the number of organized activities, pace of family life, economic strain of family life, time spent in informal play, interest on the part of adults in children’s activities, domination by children’s activities of adult lives, and the amount of autonomy children had from adults. (Lareau, 2011, p. 36)
In addition, Lareau documented how class shaped the logic of child rearing in the home and most importantly, how these differences were not given the same value within school. The cultural practices of the middle and upper class were highly valued and adopted as the standard outside the home. She explains:

> When children and parents move outside the home into the world of social institutions, they find that these cultural practices are not given equal value. There are signs that middle-class children benefit, in ways that are invisible to them and their parents, from the degree of similarity between the cultural repertories in the home and those standards adopted by institutions. (Lareau, 2011, p. 237)

Although Lareau’s ethnographic study did not examine the child rearing practices of Latina/o families, it offers important insight into how income shapes cultural practices within the family. More importantly, Lareau shows how family cultural practices, such as those based on concerted cultivation, are bestowed advantages beyond the home sphere.

**Reproduction Theory**

One of the leading structural explanations for school failure is firmly grounded on the concept of reproduction theory. Reproduction theory evolves around the notion that schools are instruments, used by the dominant group, to maintain and reproduce social inequities. Scholars have devoted considerable energy in examining how schools reproduce inequity by focusing on social and economic capital. Bourdieu’s (1977) work is a classical piece in understanding cultural and social reproduction. In much of his work, Bourdieu examines how people employ existing systems, particularly in the sphere of education, to reproduce economic privilege and power hierarchies. He writes, “…it becomes necessary to study the laws that determine the tendency of structures to reproduce themselves by producing agents endowed with the system of
predispositions which is capable of engendering practices adapted to the structures” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 487). Bourdieu focuses primarily on the cultural habits (e.g., reading, attending museum or concerts) that distinguish the rich, middle, and low-income class. These cultural practices produce different forms of cultural capital that vary drastically between class, age, and gender (Bourdieu did not reference race). Moreover, the educational system privileges a set of cultural practices and capital that falls primarily within those in the middle and high classes. Bourdieu (1977) explains, “The educational system reproduces all the more perfectly the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among classes (and sections of a class) in that the culture which it transmits is closer to the dominant culture…” (p. 493). Moreover, he argues that the educational system is able to disguise its social reproduction of social class inequality with its cloak of meritocracy and its claim of economic mobility.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) also argue that the educational system serves to reproduce social and class hierarchy. They examine a variety of educational, occupational, social mobility, and intergenerational class statistics and studies through a social reproduction lens. Moreover, Bowles and Gintis posit that a meritocracy ideology conceals the truth that the U.S. educational system is rooted within a capitalist economy based on unequal distribution of labor force and class inequality. They write, “We shall argue that beneath the façade of meritocracy lies the reality of an educational system geared toward the reproduction of economic relations only partially explicable in terms of technical requirements and efficiency standards” (Bowles & Gintis, 1976, p. 103). According to the authors, the U.S. educational system serves to reproduce economic inequalities and unevenly cultivate personal development of students through the implementation of differential socialization patterns, tracking, inequalities of financial resources, and differences in course content and expectations. These differences in educational experience
are disguised behind the illusory ideology that schools serve as an equalizing force in a capitalist society.

**Resistance/Opposition Theory**

Although reproduction theory problematizes the meritocracy ideology of schooling, students, as well as their parents, irrespective of their economic status, are not passive actors in their educational experiences. Students react to their educational experience either positively or negatively. Scholars have documented students’ negative, often referred to as oppositional, response to their educational experiences (Foley, 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu 2008; Willis, 1981). Theses scholars document how students respond to their educational experiences and positionalities to the larger society.

For example, Willis (1981) examined the educational experience of 12 non-academic working class male students—lads—from 1972 to 1975 in England. Willis was interested in how these lads actively transitioned from school to work. Willis employed ethnographic observations, interviews, and group discussions to examine how these participants transition from youth to adulthood. These lads created a counterculture that situated itself in opposition to authority and rejected conforming to a school-based identity, which they referred to as being a “‘ear’ole.” The lads invested considerable energy and resources towards exerting their own autonomy within the school. To combat the formal structure of school, the 12 lads exercised an important counterculture skill called “having a laff.” According to Willis (1981), having a laff is, “a multi-faceted implement of extraordinary importance in the counter-school culture…But it is also used in many other contexts: to defeat boredom and fear, to overcome hardship and problems—as a way out of almost anything.” (p. 29). Willis’ ethnographic study provides a persuasive example
of how students, despite their socioeconomic status, participate actively in their resistance to an educational experience that seeks conformity and exerts authority. Willis (1981) explains,

…the lads of this study have adopted and developed to a fine degree in their school counter-culture specific working class themes: resistance; subversion of authority; informal penetration of the weaknesses and fallibilities of the formal; and an independent ability to create diversion and enjoyment. (p. 84)

In this study, the lads integrated a counter-culture that opposed the formal structure of the educational system. A study examining the oppositional culture of U.S. students is provided by the work of Fordham and Ogbu (1986).

Ogbu (2008) posits a cultural-ecological model that helps articulate minority students’ response, especially oppositional collective response, to their educational experiences. Based on his ethnographic fieldwork in Stockton, California (1968-197), Ogbu observed that Black and Mexican American students did not want to complete their school assignments or speak in standard English because they viewed this behavior as “acting White”. In addition, Ogbu’s cultural-ecological model was informed by his review of a number of ethnographic studies of U.S. minority students. Ogbu’s cultural-ecological model is divided into two parts—(a) societal and school factors, called the system; and (b) minority community factors, called community factors. According to Ogbu (2008), “The model is intended to help study and understand the various factors that influence minority school performance” (p. 11). Moreover, this model provides a framework to examine the various factors that influence minority students’ responses to school.

Ogbu’s co-authored piece with Fordham (1986) examines one component of his cultural-ecological model. In this seminal article, Fordham and Ogbu (1986) argue that instrumental
discrimination did not fully account for the academic success and failure of 33 Black eleventh grade high school students in Washington, DC. To help frame how participants responded to their education experience, Fordham and Ogbu offer three different classifications for minority groups—autonomous minorities, immigrant minorities, and subordinate or caste like minorities. Subordinate minorities consist of minority groups that were involuntarily and permanently incorporated into U.S. society through slavery or conquest (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986). Fordham and Ogbu argue that their participants’ response was a form of adaptation to the subtractive and substandard schooling experience in high school. They write:

In sum, the low school performance of Black children stems from the following factors: first, White people provide them with inferior schooling and treat them differently in school; second, by imposing a job ceiling, White people fail to reward them adequately for their educational accomplishments in adult life; and third, Black Americans develop coping devices which, in turn, further limit their striving for academic success. (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, pp. 179-180)

Fordham and Ogbu also reference two important factors responsible for the intragroup difference in academic success—oppositional collective and oppositional cultural frame of reference. Both of these elements were evident in their analysis of varying degrees of academic success among participants and their responses to the burden of acting White. They write, “In the case study of Capital High School in Washington, DC, we showed that coping with the burden of acting White affects the academic performance of both underachieving and high-achieving students” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 202). Fordham and Ogbu present a framework that explains intragroup differences in academic success by examining how minorities actively opposed or accepted their subtractive education. Their oppositional framework has received numerous
critiques that question its ability to articulate the intra-group differences towards schooling especially the development of oppositional stance towards education (Sanders, 1997). In his study, Sanders (1997) found that African American student with a high awareness of discrimination were also high-achieving students. He writes:

The finding that the majority of high-awareness students were also high-achieving ones suggest that a keen awareness of racism and discrimination may not lead, as Ogbu attests, to mental withdrawal among some African American adolescents. Rather, in some instances, this awareness leads to the promotion of greater academic effort on the part of these youth. (Sanders, 1997, p. 90)

There are other scholars that have challenged traditional forms of explaining academic failure of students of color, especially among Latina/o students. Participants in this case study further complicate Fordham and Ogbu’s oppositional framework to describe the educational failure of underrepresented students. In this case study, there were participants that encountered incidents of racism and used these encounters to fuel their educational and career aspirations rather than forming part of a counterculture of opposition.

**Challenges to Reproduction Theory**

Stanton-Salazar (2004) broadens the theoretical framework of social capital by inquiring if working class youth can exert an authentic form of social capital. In his review of social capital literature, he posits that traditional theoretical understandings of social capital are discussed without consideration of existing institutional structures that perpetuate socio-economic, power, and authority hierarchies. He asserts:

Whatever its form, capital within a particular social system and institutional context embodies a particular intergroup relation between those who have it and those who don’t;
it also embodies a particular process oriented toward continually protecting and reproducing such unequal relations. (Stanton-Salazar, 2004, pp. 24-25)

Stanton-Salazar argues that working-class youth are able to contribute their form of social capital and moreover are able to benefit tremendously from a school environment that encourages strong connections between peers and teachers. Stanton-Salazar also offers an alternative lens to view social capital within a context that considers the multiple forms of hierarchy that are being continuously reproduced.

In her theoretical critique, Yosso (2005) challenges scholars who position the cultural capital of the White middle and upper class as the standard. Yosso posits a new framework, under the theoretical guidance of Critical Race Theory, upon which to view cultural capital in a perspective that places equal value and consideration on non-traditional forms of cultural wealth. Yosso (2005) writes:

Indeed a CRT lens can ‘see’ that communities of color nurture cultural wealth through at least 6 forms of capital such as aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial, and resistant capital…These various forms of capital are not mutually exclusive or static, but rather are dynamic processes that build on one another as part of community cultural wealth. (p. 77)

Yosso also questions social reproduction and builds off resistance theory by offering a new paradigm that places value on nontraditional forms of capital that are often overlooked and ignored by scholars and social institutions.

**Positive Identity**

Flores-González (2002) explored the identity development of 33 (23 students and 10 former students) inner city and low-income Puerto Rican youth in Chicago, Illinois. Previous to
Flores-González’s ethnographic study, scholars focused primarily on examining Latina/o youth through the experiences of Mexican American students in the Southwest. Flores-González’s ethnographic work brings the educational experience of inner city Puerto Ricans living in the Midwest to the fore. Based on her yearlong ethnographic observation (1992-1993), both in and out of school, Flores-González divided her participants into three groups—stayers, leavers, and returners. A stayer was a participant who remained enrolled in high school and never dropped out. A leaver was someone who dropped out of school and did not obtain a General Equivalency Diploma. A returner left high school, but reenrolled in school after a break. Flores-González employs role-identity theory to explain why the Puerto Rican youth in her study stay, leave, and return to high school. According to Flores- González (2002), “A role-identity is a self-definition or an understanding of who one is as a result of occupying a particular role or social change” (p. 14). Role-identity tends to be fluid as well as hierarchical and a number of factors (e.g., prestige, social support, commitment, role performance, presence of identity-enhancing or identity-threatening events) influence its ranking. Flores-González explains how identity theory helps account for high school graduation and dropout among her participants. She writes:

Those who become school kids (stayers) have drastically different experiences in school than the street kids (leavers and returners). The difference in experiences has to do with the presence or absence of the factors needed for the development of identities…Essentially, the stayers become school-kids because they have access to the conditions conducive to the development of their socially appropriate role as students.

(Flores-González, 2002, pp. 23-24)

Flores-González challenges previous structural explanations that attribute academic failure solely on the person or concentrate solely on how schools reproduce socio-economic stratified
societies. She directs the conversation to a topic that considers how low-income and minority concentrated schools lack the prestige, resources, and identity-enhancing events critical in cultivating a school-based identity that propels students to successfully matriculate through high school.

**Theoretical Framework**

The design of this case study is based on Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS). EMSS is a theoretical model that incorporates a set of concepts and relationships that focus primarily on the academic success of students. This framework allows the researcher to develop local student success models (LSSMs) based on the observations and data collected, which can be used to gather insight on how to promote academic student success in educational institutions. Padilla writes, “The EMSS then can be used to develop local student success models (LSSMs) that are based on empirical observations at a particular school or campus…The LSSMs in turn can be used to drive implementation models to promote student success on a particular campus” (p. 8). In the mid-1980s, Padilla (2009) was asked to develop a framework that would explore the success of students enrolled at a community college in Arizona. In his review of the literature of students at community colleges, Padilla found the existing scholarship focused heavily on the student dropout rate, so he devised a framework that would explore student success, rather than departure, in order to improve overall academic success among community college students. He writes:

To promote student success one also must understand why many students, some of them under the most challenging circumstances, are able to complete all program requirements and actually graduate with a diploma or degree. If one can understand how it is that such
students achieve their success, one can develop strategies and practices that will enable
more students to perform as the successful ones do. (p. 9)

The following section will highlight four major assumptions that inform the Expertise Model of
Student Success (EMSS) as well as the methods and procedures that will be used to develop the
local student success model.

Padilla’s Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS) is predicated on four important
assumptions. First, there must be an acknowledgment made by the researcher that the
phenomenon of why some students succeed while others fail still warrants further consideration.
The second assumption is that a series of barriers impede student success, which vary in degree.
Padilla (2009) writes, “In short, all students face barriers: some more, some less. Not all students
face the exact same set of barriers or with the same degree of severity. But all students face some
set of barriers to their progress and graduation” (p. 23). The third assumption is based on the
notion that students who are successful are students who become experts at being students.
Padilla explains student expertise to consist of both informal (heuristic) and formal (academic)
knowledge which students acquire while at the educational institution. He also underscores the
important value of students’ development of heuristic knowledge in order to attain academic
success. He elaborates, “Yet overcoming many of the barriers they face throughout their career
as students depends on accurate heuristic knowledge…Heuristic knowledge, therefore, is central
to student success” (p. 25). The fourth assumption focuses on the necessary actions or the will to
act taken by the students. Padilla explains, “To overcome such barriers the student also must take
effective actions. The set of effective actions determines a student’s behavioral repertoire for
success” (p. 26). These four assumptions shaped Padilla’s conceptualization of the EMSS.
Padilla’s EMSS is also framed within three important parameters. The first one is that barriers to success exist at an educational institution. The second is that knowledge in both heuristic and academic form will need to be acquired in order to attain success. Lastly, students must take action using their accumulated knowledge to overcome barriers to their success. Padilla (2009) writes:

To overcome these barriers, students must know about effective solutions and then actually implement them. If students are able to amass the required heuristic knowledge and indeed take effective actions, they will be able to overcome or avoid the barriers and, if they also have acquired the required academic knowledge, eventually graduate. (p. 27)

These three parameters are essential in the development of a local student success model, which represents a modified version of EMSS that reflects the students’ experience at a particular institution. Padilla writes, “They (LSSMs) speak to the nature of the black box experience on a given campus and how it is that some students on that campus can be successful in completing their program of study to graduate” (p. 28). To develop LSSMs, Padilla states that researchers must acquire data that informs them on the barriers to success for a given student population, identify informal knowledge that these students have acquired to overcome these challenges, and identify the actions that these students have taken to prevail over these obstacles. Padilla’s Expertise Model of Student Success offers an important framework to explore the barriers that Latina/o students encounter while pursing their aspirations to transfer from a community college to a four-year university. The preferred data collection method to develop the EMSS has been qualitative inquiry because of its ability to explore participants’ responses in depth. This case study will expand the theoretical understanding of scholars that are interested in learning about the college experience of Latinas/os attending a community college in the Midwest.
Summary

The literature reviewed focused on several aspects of community colleges and the experiences of Latina/o students. First, I provided a brief historical account of the formation of community colleges in the United States and Illinois. I outlined the philosophical arguments used by critics and proponents towards community colleges. In addition, I examined the literature on the overall transfer function of community colleges as well as transfer experiences for Latina/o students. The existing literature on the transfer experience of Latina/o students has primarily focused in the Southwest states of California, Arizona, and Texas. The need to further explore the regional differences of community colleges is a critical aim of this dissertation study. I also reviewed literature that discussed the academic failure of Latina/o students. Lastly, I explained Padilla’s Expertise Model of Student Success, which will serve as the conceptual framework guiding this case study.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of Study

The overarching purpose of this case study is to conduct an in-depth exploration of the college experience of Latina/o students that have persisted from semester to semester at a community college in the Midwest with a keen focus on their pre-college and community college experience as well as their future plans. The specific aims are: (1) to reconstruct Latina/o students’ pre-college experiences and their influence on their current educational pursuits, (2) to understand their current academic, personal, and social engagement with a community college, (3) to generate a descriptive report that captures Latina/o students’ personal experiences, barriers, and engagement at a community college. The sub-questions guiding this study are:

1. What are the challenges that Latina/o students encounter while at a community college?
2. What type of knowledge do Latina/o students acquire to overcome the existing barriers to their academic success?
3. What actions are Latina/o students taking to overcome barriers to their academic success?

The significance of this study lies in its potential to expand the theoretical understanding of Latina/o students’ academic experience enrolled in a Midwest community college.

Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

Mayan (2009) encourages researchers to fully explore the ontological and epistemological assumptions surrounding the traditional forms of research in order to situate one’s research design and attain methodological coherence amongst the theoretical paradigms, methods, and research question that direct a research study. The ontological and epistemological
assumptions of this study center around the view that social phenomena are complex, multilayered, and context-based. Figure 3.1 offers a visual of my attempt to achieve methodological coherence by displaying how ontological and epistemological assumptions frame this case study. As shown in Figure 1, the ontological and epistemological assumptions create the boundaries around which the study is framed. For example, my own ontological assumption evolves around the assumption that multiple realities and truths exist, which are context-based and structured around factors such as class, race, gender, age, and sexuality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The epistemological assumption informing this study views the relationship between the researcher and participant as dialogical (Hatch, 2002). Lastly, Delgado Bernal’s (1998) concept of cultural intuition has played a critical role in shaping the research questions, theoretical framework, researcher-participant relationship, and future data analysis.

Figure 3.1 Overview of Case Study
Cultural intuition came into existence as a critical response from Chicana/o educational scholars’ active attempt to problematize colonizing methodologies that served to perpetuate deficient-based assertions about Latinas/os in educational research. Delgado Bernal’s (1998) cultural intuition, which is a reinterpretation of Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) concept of theoretical sensitivity, is based on four major sources—one’s personal experience, existing literature on a topic, one’s professional experience, and the analytical research process. The major strength of cultural intuition lies in its ability to recognize and validate the subjectivities of the researcher and foster a dialogical relationship between the researcher and participant. She writes, “…my concept of cultural intuition is different from theoretical sensitivity because it extends one’s personal experience to include collective experience and community memory, and points to the importance of participants’ engaging in the analysis of data” (pp. 563-564). I intend to adapt a cultural intuitive approach to all phases of this research study.

As seen in Figure 3.1, a constructivist research paradigm informs this study. A constructivist paradigm views the nature of reality (ontology) as one that emphasizes the construction of multiple realities (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Moreover, the view of what can be learned (epistemology) focuses primarily on human interaction and how this relationship creates knowledge and understanding. The relationship between the researcher and participant is viewed as dialogical and co-constructionist. The case study’s research question is informed by the underlying assumption of the need to understand the complex and multilayered experiences of people. This epistemological approach seeks to explore, understand, and capture the rich realities of participants with respect to a particular phenomenon and context. Hatch (2002) writes, “Qualitative studies try to capture the perspectives that actors use as a basis for their actions in specific social settings people” (p. 7). Rather than seeking to make generalizable claims, this
underlying assumption seeks to showcase the participants’ unique perspective and commonalities with others in similar contexts. Qualitative methods are usually used for identification, description, and explanation-generation (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Polkinghorne (2005) emphasizes the strength of qualitative inquiry. He writes:

A primary purpose of qualitative research is to describe and clarify experience as it is lived and constituted in awareness. Human experience is a difficult area to study. It is multilayered and complex; it is an ongoing flow that cannot be halted for the benefit of researchers. (p. 138)

The purpose of this study is to explore the college experience of Latina/o students in a community college in the Midwest, so a qualitative inquiry offers the best approach to achieve the research purpose, questions, and aims of this study.

**Theoretical Frameworks**

The notion that people and cultures are unmistakably influenced by the interaction of race, gender, sexual orientation, and class has greatly informed the development process of this case study. The interconnectedness of people and larger social dynamic issues is evident in the field of education. For example, Carspecken and Apple (1992) pointedly highlight how a phenomenon in an educational setting is not an isolated entity; rather it must be situated into its social relations to a highly stratified and unequal U.S. society. They write:

Education does not stand alone, a neutral instrumentality somehow above the ideological conflicts of society. Rather it is deeply implicated in the formation of the unequal cultural, economic, and political relations that dominate our society. Education has been a major arena in which dominance is reproduced and contested, in which hegemony is
partly formed and partly fractured in the creation of the common sense of a people. (p. 509)

The reality that educational institutions do not operate in a vacuum has shaped the type of theoretical frameworks that inform this study. The work of critical education scholars has greatly influenced the conceptualization of this study especially its shift away from deficient- and culturally-based assumptions that attribute academic failure on the individual rather than institutional policies and characteristics (Darder, 1991; Valencia, 2010; Valencia & Black, 2002; Yosso, 2005; Yosso, 2006; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Moreover, scholars’ work on resistance and oppositional theory has enhanced the analysis of this study (Foley, 2010; Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu 2008; Willis, 1981).

The theoretical framework of this case study, Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success, has been used to develop a local student success model (LSSM) that explores the barriers, knowledge acquired, and actions taken by Latina/o students in their efforts to be academically successful in a community college. To develop a LSSM, Padilla requires researchers to identify barriers to success for students, document the forms of heuristic knowledge students develop, and the actions students take to overcome barriers. Padilla’s EMSS enables researchers to focus on capturing the success of students by exploring how students utilize their accumulated knowledge, both academic and heuristic, to overcome the barriers to their academic success. Padilla writes, “Identifying the barriers, knowledge, and actions amounts to capturing the knowledge base possessed by successful students (experts) at a particular campus” (p. 28). Padilla’s reference to successful students is broader than solely the inclusion of high achieving students. He encourages researchers to select participants based on their experience rather than academic aptitude. He writes, “All students potentially have knowledge
about the barriers and the knowledge and actions needed to overcome them. What is important is that students have sufficient experience on campus to be able to provide accurate and comprehensive exemplars for the matrix” (p. 31). Padilla’s EMSS model views students’ experiences as central to the development of a local model that uncovers the barriers, but also the actions taken by students to overcome these challenges. The objective of EMSS is to conceptualize a local model that offers recommendations on how to improve student success based on the data collected of experienced students. Instead of using the term “barriers” during my interviews with participants, I elected to use the term “challenges,” so as to give participants an opportunity to describe a wide range of issues or topics that they found difficult, but surmountable. During my first two interviews with participants, they readily shared with me the numerous challenges that they encountered while at Midwest Community College because of their level of openness with the term “challenge” I continued using this term rather than “barriers.”

**Figure 3.2 is a visual of Padilla’s Expertise Model of Student Success.**

Source: (Padilla, 2009, p. 27)
Methodology

I employed a qualitative methodology to explore in-depth the college experience of 16 Latina/o students that have been successful and persisted at a community college in central Illinois. More specifically, a case study methodology allowed a rich exploration of Latina/o students’ pre-college, college, and future aspirations within a particular site. The purpose of this study was not to generate generalized statements, rather it was to describe the complex academic experiences of Latina/o students within a particular site, context, and time. Creswell (2013) defines case study as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information…and reports a case description and case themes” (p. 97). Stake (1995) offers a similar definition of case study research. He writes, “Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances” (p. xi). Yin (2009) emphasizes, “a case study’s potential contribute to our understanding of an individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (p. 4). Creswell (2013) articulates the unique features of case study research. First, its focus begins with an individual, group of people, or organization. A case study, however, is conducted within certain parameters. Second, the intent of conducting a case study is vital to this type of methodology, which can be either intrinsic or instrumental. Third, case study research offers an in-depth understanding of the case. Fourth, a wide range of analytical techniques can be used in case study research. Fifth, researchers place tremendous value on being able to describe and interpret the case rather than generating generalizations.
The intent of this study was not to address a particular problem or issue rather it was to understand in-depth the college experiences of Latina/o students within a particular context, which is at a community college in the Midwest. For this reason, I chose an intrinsic case study. Stake (1995) defines intrinsic case as cases “we are interested in it, not because by studying it we learn about other cases or about some general problem, but because we need to learn about that particular case. We have an intrinsic interest in the case…” (p. 3). Since the aim was to explore the experience of Latina/o students at a community college, this case study primarily rests on the experiences shared by 16 Latina/o students. A focus on narrative research is of critical importance for intrinsic case study research (Creswell, 2013).

A unique characteristic of case study research is its focus on a particular individual, group, or entity and its ability to maximize our understanding of a case. To help achieve our understanding of a particular case, Stake (1995) describes the value of progressive focusing. Progressive focusing is a technique used to create flexibility during the research process, which encourages researchers to modify research questions especially if the ones created earlier do not address the realities of the case. He writes, “Initial research questions may be modified or even replaced in mid-study by the case researcher. The aim is to thoroughly understand case. If early questions are not working, if new issues become apparent, the design is changed” (p. 9). The emphasis is placed on the interpretation of the uniqueness of a case rather than its ability to be generalized to other contexts. The emphasis on particularization of a bounded system is a source of tremendous value that can help our in-depth understanding of Latina/o students in a community college in the Midwest.
**Strengths and Limitations of Qualitative Inquiry**

The strength of conducting a qualitative inquiry based study is its built-in capacity for a researcher to perform an in-depth exploration of phenomenon within a particular context, time-period, and participants (Stake, 2010). Moreover, qualitative inquiry can be characterized as being interpretive, experiential, situational, and personalistic. These unique characteristics allows for a researcher to generate findings that help conceptual frameworks or create rich and thick descriptions of a phenomenon. The limitation of the qualitative inquiry is its inability to generate findings that are generalizable beyond the context upon which the inquiry was conducted. Moreover, an argument can be made about the problematic level of subjectivity and interpretation exercised by the researcher (Stake, 1995). Scholars, however, have argued that the level of subjectivity has greatly enriched the conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and write-up of a study (Crabtree & Miller; 1999; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Another often cited limitation of qualitative research is that its exploratory nature often generates more questions than solutions and answers (Stake, 2010). Yin (2009) cites a criticism against case study research as being its labor-intensive nature. Polkinghorne (2005) also reminds researchers engaging in qualitative inquiry that their analysis and interpretations rest heavily on their participants’ ability to recall aspects of the lived experience. If participants experience difficulty in discussing their lived experiences, it might compromise the richness and breadth of your data. Lastly, important contributions of case studies are often slow to be recognized by traditional disciplines (Stake, 1995).
Research Design and Methods

Research Setting

The setting for my research project was at a mid-size community college in central Illinois that will be referred to as Midwest Community College (pseudonym). Midwest Community College is situated in a town that is also home to the flagship institution of the state of Illinois that will be called Central University (pseudonym). There are a number of students that enroll at Midwest Community College with aspirations of transferring to Central University. The close proximity to Central University has provided a unique context in which students at both institutions exchange important information and resources. Midwest Community College is also surrounded by a number of other state colleges and universities in Illinois. In the fall of 2013, the total credit-seeking student enrollment was 8,437 at Midwest Community College. Midwest Community College’s total enrollment number has decreased over the past couple of years. In the fall of 2009, total enrollment at MCC was at 9,633 students. Of those attending Midwest Community College in the fall of 2013, fifty-two percent were female. With respect to enrollment status, sixty-three were enrolled part-time and thirty-two were full-time students. Seventy percent of the students enrolled at Midwest Community College were 24 years old and under.

The Latina/o student enrollment represented 6.54% of the total student population at Midwest Community College. A total of 550 Latina/o students were enrolled in the fall of 2014. There were only two other racial groups that had a larger enrollment number—Whites (62%) and African Americans (18%). Table 3.1 provides the percentage of student enrollment by race and ethnicity. Latina/o enrollment at Midwest Community College has increased steadily over the past fourteen years. In the fall 1999, Latina/o enrollment was at 178 students and represented two
percent of the total student population (n=8,143) (Illinois Board of Higher Education, 2000).

Midwest Community College has also engaged in a number of recruitment and marketing strategies targeting the Latina/o population in their district.

**Table 3.1 Percent of Undergraduate by Race/Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black or African American</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latina/o</td>
<td>6.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race and Ethnicity Unknown</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonresident alien</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Selection Criteria**

Mayan (2009) encourages researchers engaging in qualitative inquiry to intentionally consider their sampling. She writes:

The researcher chooses individuals and contexts by asking: ‘What kind of characteristics of individuals am I looking for?’ ‘Who can give me the most and the best information about my topic?’ ‘In which contexts will I be able to gather the most and best information about my topic?’ (pp. 61-61)
Hatch (2002) also recommends researchers to develop the criteria for participant selection based on the nature of the study and its theoretical assumptions. The overall purpose of this case study was to examine the college experiences of Latina/o students at a community college that have completed at minimum of one academic year of college, so a purposeful sampling (Patton, 1989) was used. The following criteria in this case study has been established:

(a) self identify as a Latina/o;
(b) between the ages of 18 and 24;
(c) part or full-time student at a community college;

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) assert that the common number of participants in interview studies vary between five and twenty participants. Based on Kvale and Brinkmann’s recommendation, a sample size of 16 participants was selected for the interviewing component of this case study. Upon receiving access and commencing the data collection process, I employed a snowballing technique (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to identify and recruit possible participants that met the criteria outlined above in an active effort to expand the participant pool (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Creswell (2013) posits three major considerations in devising a solid purposeful strategy, which vary depending on approach. He writes, “They are the decision as to whom to select as participants (or sites) for the study, the specific type of sampling strategy, and the size of the sample to be studied” (pp. 154-155). In this case study, the focus is primarily on learning about the college experience of Latina/o students in a particular context, so a maximum variation among this student population was of importance.

**Participants**

Based on the above criteria, I was able to secure a total of 16 Latina/o students to be part of this study. Of these 16 participants, there was a gender balance of eight males and eight
females. The age of participants varied between 19 to 26 years with a mean age a little under 21 years old (20.68). Of the sixteen participants, seven were born in Mexico. Four were born in the state of Illinois. The remaining five participants were born in one of the following states: Texas (n=2), California (n=2), and Georgia (n=1). All but two participants considered themselves to be first-generation college students. Of the two that identified as second-generation college student, one participant had a mother that earned a certificate as a medical assistant at Midwest Community College and the other participant’s mother was in the process of completing a doctoral program.

All participants were at least in their second year of college. One of the participants was in his fourth year at the community college. I selected students that were both full-time and part-time. At the time of the data collection phase, four participants were enrolled part-time and twelve were full-time. Since the objective was to obtain a maximum variation, I actively sought out participants that were not involved with the Latina/o-focused organization on-campus because a large number of my participants drew upon this available pool. All sixteen participants’ level of involvement with on-campus students’ organizations varied between low, moderate, and high. Of the 16 participants, seven were not actively engaged in the Latina/o student organization. An important point of clarification needs to be made; five out of the seven participants increased their involvement with this organization throughout the data collection phase of the study. The focus of analysis was based on their previous experiences at Midwest Community College, so I did not conduct an analysis on how participants changed over time. Lastly, an unintentional consequence of seeking to increase maximum variation among participant pool was that I was able to secure participants with varying levels of academic
preparation. I was able to understand their level of academic preparation through a series of questions posed in the first interview protocol, which explored their pre-college experiences.

The completion time for the three-interview sequence depended heavily on participants’ availability and willingness to complete the study. The completion time for the data phase ranged between 3 to 15 weeks. All but one participant completed all three interviews. One participant was not available to complete the last interview of the study. She had several family and academic commitments that often conflicted with our scheduled appointment. After over two months of being unsuccessful in meeting for our last interview, I asked over email if she would give me consent to discontinue our third interview, but if I could still use the content of our previous two interviews in the dissertation—she consented. Participants were recruited primarily through the use of well-known and respected advisors, faculty, and administrators as well as attending a Latina/o student organization. I also obtained referrals from existing participants in the study.

Access to Research Setting

Gatekeepers were an important aspect of securing participants for this qualitative study. For this study, I was able to secure buy-in from a Latino professor in the department of humanities. This professor also served as the faculty advisor for a Latina/o student organization on-campus. He was extremely welcoming and an important advocate for my research study. During the tail end of the spring 2014 semester, he invited me to attend a general body meeting, so I could introduce myself, my research topic, and connect with potential participants for this case study. Because of this professor’s willingness to serve as key advocate for my research study, I had access to large pool of possible participants. At a typical general body meeting for this student organization, an average of 25 Latina/o students attended the meeting. The faculty
advisor also invited me to a couple of their organization’s events such as an ice cream social and a pizza party. This professor also referred Latina/o students to meet with me. Because of this professor’s willingness to advocate for this research study, I was able to secure over forty percent of my total participants. I was also able to interact with a large number of non-participants by attending their general body meeting. This professor also served as spokesperson among other community college administrators and faculty. He encouraged me to share my research study with on-campus administrators. Because of his referrals, I was able to obtain a strong note of endorsement from the Director of Student Life to conduct the investigation at the community college. The Director of Student Life instructed me to email the Director Institutional Accountability and Research (IAR) to commence the administrative process to secure approval to conduct the study. He also encouraged me to include his endorsement of the study on the email to the Director of IAR.

The process for securing research approval at Midwest Community College was seamless and without any complications. Within a couple of weeks, my dissertation research study was approved. In the month of May 2014, I began to secure participants for the three-interview protocol of the research study. The ease of securing research access to Midwest Community College was a great relief, given the high volume of research requests I submitted and were denied throughout the state of Illinois’ community college system. Over the course of the spring 2014 semester, I submitted research requests to 2 different community colleges designated as Hispanic-serving as well as to City Colleges of Chicago. All three requests to conduct research at a community college were denied. The process of securing a research site took the majority of the spring 2014 semester.
Sources of Data

The data collection for this case study consisted of: (a) three in-depth one-on-one interviews with each participant (Seidman, 2006), (b) participant observation, (b) document analysis, and (c) researcher’s journal.

Three-Interview Series

Polkinghorne (2005) warns about the limitations of conducting a single 60-minute interview. He writes, “Too often, interview-produced data contain only initial reflections of participants without exploration into the depth and breadth of the experience” (p. 142). To avoid this pitfall, Seidman (2006) outlines an interview protocol that conducts a series of three separate interviews with each participant. He argues that this type of interview protocol allows a researcher to explore the holistic experience of participants. He writes, “People’s behavior becomes meaningful and understandable when placed in the context of their lives and the lives of those around them” (pp. 16-17). In the three-interview series, the first interview establishes the context of the participant’s experience, which is referred to the focused life history. The second interview centers on asking concrete details of the participants’ present lived experience in the topic area of they study—details of experience (e.g., reconstructing their day as a college student at a community college). The third interview encourages participants to reflect on the meaning of their experience—reflection of the meaning (see Appendix A to review the interview protocol for each phase). The common thread among all three interviews is the emphasis on exploring the meaning created by the participant and the context in which the meaning is shared. To accomplish the objective of each of the three interviews, Seidman (2006) recommends that, “the three-interview structure is at its optimal when researcher spaces each interview between 3 days to a week apart” (p. 210). The intended aims of implementing a multiple interview sequence in
this case study was to build a strong rapport and trust with participants as well as have an infrastructure to clarify and expand on themes.

In adhering to Seidman’s three-interview series, I was able to generate a total of 2,600 minutes of recorded conversation between the 16 participants and myself. The average time for the first interview was 70 minutes. The second interview lasted an average of 66 minutes. The third interview was the shortest—an average time of 30 minutes. Despite the final interview lasting less than half the time of the previous interviews, it tended to be one of the most moving and inspirational ones out of the three-interview series. Many of participants felt extremely comfortable sharing personal challenges that were impending their academic and professional lives. For example, three participants disclosed their undocumented status with me in the last interview. Prior to the last interview, we spent a total average time of over 2 hours without the topic of undocumented status emerging as a challenge until the last interview. The original intent of this dissertation was not to solely examine the experience of undocumented Latina/o students’ but this challenge emerged as a salient theme for five out of 16 participants throughout our interviews.

**Participant Observation**

In addition to the three-interviews, I also conducted participant observations at the campus events as well as the Latina/o organization’s meeting during the end of spring of 2014 and fall of 2014 semester. According to Jorgensen (1989), participant observation allows researchers to fully observe and unpack a phenomenon within its particular context. He writes, “The methodology of participant observation is exceptional for studying processes, relationships among people and events, the organization of people and events, continuities over time, and patterns, as well as the immediate sociocultural contexts in which human existence unfolds”
Creswell (2013) extends the value of participant observation by highlighting its built-in capacity to allow researchers to use their five senses while observing a phenomenon. Creswell underscores the need for a researcher to ground their observations on their research purpose and questions.

Creswell (2013) proffers four types of observation with varying levels of involvement by the researcher (i.e., complete participant, participant as observer, nonparticipant/observer as participant, and complete observer). The type of engagement I exercised with participants is best characterized as being a nonparticipant/observer. Creswell defines this type of observation; “the researcher is an outsider of the group under study, watching and taking filed notes from a distance. He or she can record data without direct involvement with activity or people” (p. 167).

A major strength of being an observer is that the researcher is able to devote his/her focus on observing the interaction of the participant rather than actually participating. The challenge of concentrating on observation is establishing a rapport. However, I established and cultivated a rapport through the three-interview series, which allowed me to become a privileged observer (Wolcott, 1988). A privileged observer is someone who has gained the trust of participants. For this reason, I conducted participant observations after the three-interview series. I established an observational protocol using the recommendations provided by Creswell (2013), which account for both reflective and descriptive observations.

**Document Research**

The purpose of this case study was to examine the experience of Latina/o students within a particular site—a community college in the Midwest. To fully understand this experience, I collected and reviewed documents that pertained to the site’s Latina/o students’ population. More specifically, I compiled documents from the site’s website, student handbook, annual
reports, enrollment trends, articles, and campus resources that discussed the Latina/o student population. These documents offer important insight into how this community college acknowledged its Latina/o student population and created an academic and social support infrastructure for Latina/o students. Mayan (2009) writes, “Documents can be important for telling a cultural story, providing the context to the research question, or tracking the development of a project” (p. 82). The selection of relevant documents will illuminate the past, present, and future context in which Latina/o students are pursuing their postsecondary education. I’ve adapted Mayan’s (2009) document analysis template to help chronicle items reviewed for the case study.

**Researcher’s Journal**

Stake (2010) underscores the importance of researchers documenting their scholarly investigation through the use of one or several journals. He writes, “All researchers, young and old, should keep at least one journal, better two or more” (p. 99). There were several benefits of keeping a researcher journal. First, I was able to document all aspects of the actual research process (e.g., contact information, appointments, interaction with gatekeepers and participants). In this journal, I also recorded ethical and procedural concerns that emerged throughout the research process. Lastly, these journal entries heighten my reflective awareness at all stages of the case study from its inception to its analysis and write-up.

**Data Analysis**

The aim of the data analysis in a case study is to produce a detailed description of the case and setting. To achieve this aim, Stake (1995) proposes two strategies that researchers can conduct during the data analysis phase—direct interpretation and categorical aggregation. He states that both of these analytical tools are used in a case study, but one usually takes
precedence over the other, given the nature and focus of the research question. He writes, “The nature of the study, the focus of the research questions, the curiosities of the researcher pretty well determine what analytical strategies should be followed: categorical aggregation or direct interpretation” (p. 77). The purpose of this case study was to understand the experiences of Latina/o students so direct interpretation analytical strategy was employed during the data analysis phase of the study. “In direct interpretation…the case study researcher looks at a single instance and draws meaning from it without looking for multiple instances. It is a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways,” according to Creswell (2013). The purpose of this case study was not to draw generalizations, but to explore and produce rich descriptive narratives of the complex lived experiences of Latina/o students attending a community college in the Midwest. The focus, however, needed to be kept in the forefront in order to navigate the mass volume of data produced by the data collection process. Stake (1995) warns about this challenge. He writes, “Full coverage is impossible, equal attention to all data is not a civil right. The case and the key issues need to be kept in focus” (p. 84). Direct interpretation with a concentration on the experiences of participants in a community college helped guide the analytical interpretation and the production of thick description of the participants’ narratives. Ponterotto (2006) offers a working definition of thick description. He writes:

Thick description refers to the researcher’s task of both describing and interpreting observed social action (or behavior) within its particular context….Thick description accurately describes observed social actions and assigns purpose and intentionality to these actions, by way of the researcher’s understanding and clear description of the context under which the social action took place. (p. 543)
The aim of direct interpretation is to develop thick description of the experiences of Latina/o students’ at a community college. In addition, direct interpretation offers a valuable opportunity for researchers to engage in the progressive focusing of the research question and sub-questions.

In an attempt to interpret themes across responses and observation, I also engaged in cross-case synthesis. Yin (2009) refers to cross-case synthesis as an analytical technique of comparing multiple cases. In this study, I analyzed the responses and observations of all 16 participants in an attempt to capture points of divergence and convergence. Yin (2009) writes, “…the technique treats each individual case study as a separate study. In this way, the technique does not differ from other research synthesis—aggregation findings across a series of individual studies” (p. 156). The purpose of engaging in a cross-case analysis is an analytical effort to capture the complex and holistic experiences of the Latina/o students at a community college. For example, if all participants responded that they viewed the campus climate at Midwest Community College as a welcoming one for Latina/o students, than this would be a cross-case theme that would be included in the final write-up.

**Ensuring Goodness of the Case Study**

Several scholars have urged researchers engaging in qualitative inquiry to replace the terms used to refer to trustworthiness of a qualitative study such as validity and credibility (Arminio & Hultgren, 2002; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006; Marshall, 1990). Moreover, these scholars advocate for a terminology that is grounded within the scope of qualitative inquiry rather than being imported from positivist centered inquiry. Jones et al. (2006) write:

Though some qualitative researchers use rigor as a criterion for judging their work, in order to move research in higher education away from using quantitative criteria to judge
the worthiness of qualitative work, we promote describing it on its own terms and as such embrace the concept of goodness. (p. 119)

I embraced this philosophical stance of using terminology unique to qualitative inquiry, so I intend to use goodness rather than trustworthiness or credibility. To ensure the goodness of this case study, multiple data collection methods (i.e., three-interview series, participant observations, document/archival, and researcher’s journal) was employed in order to confirm interpretations (Patton, 1999).

In addition, Jones et al. (2006) encourage researchers to engage in a systematic approach to reflexivity. This type of reflexivity requires a scholar to be involved in self-reflection as well as reflection with other researchers, participants, and theoretical frameworks. Hertz (1997) eloquently articulates the value of engaging in reflexivity. She writes:

Reflexivity implies a shift in our understanding of data and its collection—something that is accomplished through detachment, internal dialogue, and constant (and intensive) scrutiny of “what I know” and “how I know it.” To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience while simultaneously living in the moment. (pp. vii-vii)

The process of engaging in reflexivity is ongoing and begins at the early stages of developing a research protocol and continues into the final write up of an inquiry. Kleinsasser (2000) refers to reflexivity as a form of methodical process that enables the researcher to learn about him or herself while also generating deep and rich understandings of the research question, ethical dilemmas, and participants. She writes, “Reflexivity enables the researcher to untangle personal and theoretical commitments and scrutinize ethics and epistemology” (p. 161). Guillemin and Gillam (2004) expand on the value of employing reflexivity to address ethical dilemmas both in the practice (i.e., microethics) and procedural incidents (i.e., procedural ethics). “Reflexivity in
research is not a single or universal entity but a process—an active, ongoing process that saturates every stage of the research” (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004, p. 274). The use of a researcher’s journal provided me a valuable opportunity to document and bridge microethics and procedural incidents as well as my ongoing reflection on all phases of this case study.
Chapter 4: Challenges

In this chapter I will address one of the central research questions of this study: *What are the challenges that Latina/o students encounter while at a Midwest community college?* An analysis of the second interview responses, which focused on the college experiences of 16 Latina/o students revealed that these participants navigate a number of challenges. Some of the challenges common across all participants were: financial barriers, time management, and negotiating multiple responsibilities. However, there were important intra-Latina/o differences that also warrant further exploration. These differences were based around participants that considered themselves commuters, new arrivals to the area, or townies. Within these three different groups, their understanding of off- and on-campus resources varied. They also articulated engagement with campus in a very different manner. The aim of this chapter is to discuss both challenges that were consistent among all 16 participants, but also to bring intra-group differences to the forefront in the type of obstacles participants encountered at Midwest Community College.

**Financial Constraints**

One of the major challenges that all 16 participants shared throughout the three-interview process was the financial constraint of affording their college education. Furthermore, participants voiced the difficulty level of having to shoulder the financial burden for both academic and non-academic costs that would accrue throughout the academic year, despite attending a financially affordable community college. Even among students that received financial assistance either through federal aid or scholarships, they communicated a major concern over their financial responsibilities. Ana, a second-year student at MCC, discussed the challenges she will encounter as she continues to further her education. She explained:
I think well I mean the main one will always be like the economic um perspective of things because I mean I provide for myself I don't really other than scholarships and like financial aid and loans that I've gotten stuff I mean that helps, but mainly just for school and stuff. But unfortunately there is more to that than just going to school and paying just for school I mean there is rent and all of that.

Other participants just provided short responses when asked about the challenges they experienced at Midwest Community College. For example, Victor, a second year student at MCC, simply replied, “Financial. Financially. That's the only thing.” Victor is currently enrolled at his second institution of higher education. He received a student-athlete scholarship to attend a community college near his home in Chicago. After two years at the college near his home, Victor decided to transfer to Midwest Community College because he heard very positive feedback about the college and it was also an opportunity to move away from Chicago.

Ana and Victor were not alone in voicing concerns over the financial burden shouldered by Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. Some participants even discussed having the added financial responsibilities of supporting their families. This financial responsibility was particularly common among participants that identified themselves as commuter and townies. For example, Gabriel, a second-year student pursuing a degree in elementary education, underscored the burden of helping his family out, especially since he lives at home. Gabriel shared:

I mean we are not like the wealthiest of people, so financially like I tried what I can like with scholarships and all that. But it's also like I kind of have to work to help out home. And then my parents of course they want me to get an education, so it's like if we can't
afford like a big time university at least start off at Midwest Community College and get your gen eds you know. Just stay in school.

During her first year at Midwest Community College, Ana lived with her older sister and brother as well as her two nieces and two nephews. Their apartment was located 30 miles south of campus, so Ana would have to commute to attend class. While attending MCC, Ana also helped babysit her nieces and nephews while also working to bring additional income to the household. Ana elaborated in detail the financial responsibility of bringing in an additional income to support her family as well as the additional household tasks she as asked to complete. Ana shared, “While I was living with her, I took a lot of responsibilities. Not only did I go to school, work part time and pay some bills, I also took care of her kids.”

But not all students felt the financial burden at the same level of intensity. Students that identified themselves as undocumented strongly voiced concerns over their ability to fund their college education, especially since they were ineligible to receive federal because of their immigration status. Maya, a third year student at Midwest Community College, recalled the heartbreaking account of researching, locating, and applying for financial aid from the federal government, but then finding out that she was ineligible to receive any federal aid because of her undocumented status. She revealed:

I found myself having to research so much to find out about even that there is a financial aid because my parents didn't even know that that even existed. To the point where I tried applying for it and I wasn't even able to receive it.

Additionally, students that received merit-based scholarship reported that this type of funding served as an incredible resource in promoting their academic success because they were able to enroll full-time without having to worry about the financial burden of being a full-time student.
Brenda, a second-year undocumented student, talked extensively about the economic relief of being awarded a scholarship based on her academic achievements while in high school. She commented:

Yeah. I mean, I always wanted to, but the whole Social Security number thing, I always felt "It's not an option." It's nothing that I could do. Especially with not being financially able to, I guess. That was always my major worry. But then I got a scholarship that paid for my tuition, so that was something that completely took me off guard and it made me more comfortable knowing that my parents weren't going to be having to pay out of pocket or anything like that.

Brenda elaborated further on her academic scholarship serving as a major source of financial relief because she could devote her attention to her academics rather than stressing about her financial responsibilities. She replied:

Because my school was getting paid for, my tuition, I didn't feel as stressed in that aspect. I just figured, I got to pay for my gas, my books, supplies. And that was stuff, my personal income covered, so I never had to ask my parents for anything. So financially, I never really had that big of a problem with or a struggle with, excuse me.

There were also participants that received merit-based scholarships increasing Midwest Community College’s appeal. Susana, a second year student at Midwest Community College, shared how receiving a scholarship awarded to the top percent of the high school graduating class became a very important factor for attending Midwest Community College. She would be able to save a lot of money by attending MCC. She explained:

I got a scholarship--the Board of Trustee Scholarship and that paid full tuition and fees for two years and then I knew I was getting FAFSA, so I could just save that money for
when I go to the university or I use it for my housing too so that was a win win for me I guess.

All participants cited Midwest Community College as being a very affordable option for students interested in obtaining a college education. Many of them shared that Midwest Community College’s affordability was a major reason why they enrolled at the institution. Despite Midwest Community College’s affordable tuition, participants in this study discussed the difficulties of paying for their college education. The impact of their financial constraints varied considerably based on participants’ immigration status as well as receiving funding in the form of merit-based scholarships. Participants that identified themselves as undocumented students revealed the hardships of overcoming the tragic reality that they were ineligible to receive federal aid. The undocumented students in the study shared how they were able to receive in-district tuition, but were unable to obtain any federal assistance because of their immigration status. Participants that didn’t struggle financially were students that were recipients of either merit-based scholarships or underrepresented student scholarships offered by the institution. These two different types of federal aid paid recipients’ tuition for two full academic years. Participants that were recipients of these two forms of scholarships were able to enroll as full-time students and make progress towards their course work of interest. The following section will elaborate on the impact immigration status had on participants even among households were participants had legal residency, but had siblings or parents that were undocumented.

**Residency Status—Undocumented Status**

Out of the 16 participants in this study, five participants revealed that they were undocumented students. In the interview protocol, I did not include a question asking participants to reveal their immigration status. All of the five undocumented student participants
disclosed their status during the course of our three interviews. Interestingly enough, two of the five revealed their undocumented status on the last interview of three-part sequence. There were powerful responses that spoke to these five participants’ immigration status throughout the three-interview protocol. This section is devoted to the five participants that revealed their immigration status in an effort to unpack key challenges that they encountered in their pursuit of a college education.

Four out of the five participants knew they were undocumented at a very young age. Early on, they began to navigate the numerous legal and symbolic restrictions imposed upon them. For example, Brenda, a second year student at Midwest Community College, shared all of the important milestones that mark the coming of age for teenagers that were denied to her. A symbolic moment for young adults is obtaining their own driver’s license. Unlike many of her high school friends, Brenda was unable to apply for a driver’s license because of her undocumented status. The restrictions imposed on Brenda also affected the social aspects of being a teenager in high school. Despite Brenda taking an active role in a fundraising campaign for the high school senior trip, she was unable to participate in the trip because it required flying on a plane, which was off limits to her. These restrictions imposed on her would often serve as a harsh reminder of her undocumented status. Brenda has lived in the United States for most of her life and excelled academically in high school—graduated in the top ten percent of senior class, but she was often reminded of the legal and symbolic constraints imposed on her because of her undocumented status. Brenda movingly disclosed:

I think I always knew, but it wasn't until I got to high school and saw "Oh, I can't get my driver's license. I can't get my permit. I can't go on the senior trip," because you're flying, you don't, my passport was expired. It was all those little things. I always knew, but it
reminded me. I can't do this because I'm illegal. I can't go on these trips because I can't fly. So it was definitely hard in those situations.

When I asked Brenda to reveal her challenges at MCC, she responded in chilling detail the costly risks she was willing to endure in order to obtain her college education. Since she lived forty-five minutes south of Midwest Community College, Brenda had to commute without a driver’s license to attend college. Every time she commuted to MCC she would run the risk of being pulled over, detained, and deported. Brenda recalled:

Okay. So just like what I struggled with. Okay. To begin with, when I started Midwest Community College I didn't have a driver's license. So every day I would come to school thinking "I'm going to get pulled over, they're going to ask 'Where's your driver's license' and that's going to lead to hefty fine..." I just always imagined the worst. So that was always my main struggle and worry, I guess. Worry more than a struggle, not having a driver's license to get to school.

Brenda and I continued to discuss the daily risk she would take to obtain a college education. Regardless of the risk of deportation, Brenda achieved perfect attendance during the course of her two years at Midwest Community College. Most importantly, Brenda shared the tremendous sense of relief when she was finally able to apply for a driver’s license because her application for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) had been approved.

Moises: And then driving without a license?

Brenda: Oh, well that, once I did get my DACA number that's something that I'm very grateful for, just knowing that the worst that can happen is that if I speed or something, I get a ticket. I'm not getting deported.

Moises: It's terrifying.
Brenda: It is. It was awful. And like I said, I always imagined the worst. I would get into my head these scenarios that, I don't know if they could or could have not happened, but the more I thought about the matter, it just got worse and worse and worse and worse. So yeah, it was very frightening. But once I did get my Social Security number, I didn't worry about it any longer.

For many of the undocumented students in this study, they revealed that their status prevented them from obtaining financial support to pay for their education. Luz, a third year student at MCC, disclosed that a major challenge at MCC was financial aid because of her status. She revealed, “So um like financial stuff like you can't get any federal help.” Maya, a third year student at Midwest Community College, disclosed the gut-wrenching moment when she realized that wouldn’t be eligible to receive financial assistance from the federal government. She was responding to the question of how college is different to a first-generation Latina student. Maya recalled:

Just imagine yourself starting from scratch like to the point where like you don't even know how to apply to financial aid or what you need to do to go to college. You just have to start from scratch. I don't know if a lot of other ethnicities have to do that. I don't receive financial aid, so that's a huge set back also.

For Maya, the realization that she would not receive any federal assistance to pay for her college education propelled her to find alternative solutions to the financial constraints imposed on her. During first two years at MCC, Maya would often work over forty hours a week to have enough income to pay for educational and living expenses. To ensure she worked a minimum of forty-hours a week, Maya juggled two part-time jobs while attending MCC as a full-time student.
Other undocumented students were able to obtain a merit-based scholarship that paid for tuition at MCC.

The undocumented student participants also talked about being ineligible to participate in federally funded college student support services because of their status. Despite meeting the eligibility criteria, undocumented participants were not able to apply for student support programs that promoted the academic success of underrepresented and first-generation college students. Luz, a second year student at MCC, recounted the moment she found out that despite being a Latina first-generation college student, she would be unable to take part of the TRIO program, which is a federal student services program devoted to college students from disadvantaged backgrounds, at Midwest Community College. She mentioned:

Like just recently so I don't know what semester or what year I was going to join the TRIO program and I filled out the application a long time ago and I just I think I didn't follow through the whole thing or was like, "Ahh too many things to try to get done." So this semester I followed through because they sent me the application. And I was like, "Oh now they want me to be in it." So I went in and stuff and like in the same day they were like, "Oh we need this information and blah blah blah." Now I'm more like open to say, "Like I can't." I'll say that it's not in my case. That's not what I can give you. And um so they were like, "Oh we can't help you. Unfortunately you can't be part of it because it is connected to federal stuff. Well that really sucks.

Luz’s account of submitting an application to TRIO is multi-layered and warrants further unpacking. Luz was one of the participants that didn’t reveal her undocumented status until the last interview of three-part series. She has never felt comfortable sharing her status with peers, teachers, or administrators. In the past few years, Luz learned the strategy of disclosing just
enough information in order to access and obtain critical resources. The TRIO program was one important resource she wanted to use. Despite moving beyond her comfort zone, she was denied access, which served as a reminder of her tenuous situation as an undocumented student at Midwest Community College.

Unlike the four other participants, Pablo was the only participant that found about his undocumented status during his teenage years. While a sophomore in high school, Pablo was asked to complete a college application as a course assignment. He completed most of the application, but needed to include his social security number. Pablo told his teacher that he didn’t know his social security number. His teacher assured him that he would be able to obtain the necessary information from his mother. When Pablo asked his mother, she told him for the first time that he was an undocumented immigrant, so he didn’t have a social security number. His mother also commented that he might not have the opportunity to attend college. This was a crushing revelation for Pablo. Pablo’s level of academic engagement in high school took a costly blow when he found that he was undocumented. He didn’t see college as option for his future. This caused him to become disenchanted with the notion of pursuing a college education. He chose to disengage from his academics. The most disheartening outcome of this situation was that Pablo lost complete focus and motivation to excel in the classroom. He went from a rising star to an academically mediocre student. He earned a below average GPA during the course of his remaining years in high school. The only classes he excelled in were math and anatomy—he earned A’s. In high school, he took the ACT and received an average score of 24. Despite not performing well in his courses, Pablo demonstrated exceptional promise. He disclosed with me, “Everybody tells me I’m smart, but I just didn’t try in high school.”
Pablo was also the only participant to not give his consent to having our interviews digitally recorded. All of my encounters with him are based on copious notes taken during and after our meetings. Pablo’s hope for the future, especially obtaining a college education, became renewed when he learned about the enactment of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals. Initially, Pablo’s family was very reluctant and afraid to apply for DACA, so they waited until other families applied and were accepted to the program. His family had major fears of being targets for deportation. Upon his DACA application being accepted, Pablo enrolled in Parkland College.

This section on immigration status underscored important legal, financial, and student service programs restrictions imposed on participants that identified as undocumented students. Their education experience varied considerably to participants that were either born in the United States or were able to obtain legal status. Despite the numerous challenges, these five undocumented students discussed the importance of underscoring their resiliency to overcome these constraints regardless of the numerous reminders that they aren’t afforded the same privileges as U.S. citizens, despite living a majority of their lives in the United States. Brenda eloquently discussed this issue:

Many kids are here since birth you know. I mean they get brought and just months old and they don't I mean it's not their fault, but yet they are still be punished in a way so that kind of sucks. I don't know. I have hopes that something good will happen.

There were also other participants that were born in the United States, but had siblings or parents that were undocumented. These participants were also very cognizant of the major constraints their family members faced. Martin shared:
I have a cousin that's illegal that would love to go to college. He's playing football, he's 6'5", he would love to go play football at some college, but he can't because he's illegal. He's about to graduate from high school and he's going to go into the military so he can get his papers.

Gabriel, a second year at MCC, revealed that his younger siblings are undocumented and the challenges they encounter.

Gabriel: Yeah. But unfortunately my two brothers were born in Mexico, so they don't have the benefits that I do.

Moises: Are they older than you or younger?

Gabriel: No they are younger, so when they asked my parents, "So which one was born here?" They always assume it's the little one, but it's actually me.

Gabriel also shared how he shouldered the responsibility of driving his younger brother around as a precaution so his brother did not have to drive without a driver’s license.

Moises: Are you the one ending up driving them around? Or do they drive?

Gabriel: I take the youngest to school cause my parents since they work around the same time they don't have time to or it's kind of out their way. But since I have an hour in between when I start classes and when he starts classes, I just take him to school. And then I come here to Midwest Community College.

Omar, a documented resident, was very cognizant of the challenges that undocumented students encounter. Most importantly he underscored the additional effort undocumented immigrants need to exert in order to overcome the numerous restrictions imposed on them. He said:

In the way that you can work, in the way that you can be help to the government, all that. It depends on your residency status here. But it could be that, for example, if, as a Latino,
for example, you could be legal here but if your parents aren't legal, they don't a job or a job that pays well so they could help you with your education at a university. And when you arrive at the university basically you have to commit yourself twice as much to work and study so you can help yourself.

Participants that were born in the United States or secured legal status were aware of the constraints imposed on their family members. Most importantly, they became advocates for removing such limitations. Omar shared his aspirations of becoming an immigration lawyer, so he could provide Latinas/os with the legal aid with their residency status. He stated:

Well, like I said before, I am a person that when I see, I always have to change it for the better. I have seen a lot of treatment of us all of us, Latinos, as they treat us differently because of piece of paper. And so, I had an opportunity that I would like to change all that. Make everything different. So that no one is suffering for any reason. Because Latinos are in all these different countries for different reasons and it's not their fault that our governments in our countries are corrupt and not offer good opportunities for the families. That's a reason why we're here and it’s not because of another reason. And everything else, I've seen that most people try to take advantage, but they are just trying to improve their situation.

While the constraints imposed on participants with respect to their immigration status was not an item that was explicitly outlined in the three-series interview protocol, it emerged as a salient theme that participants felt comfortable revealing about themselves or their loved ones. For this reason, it is important to understand and further explore how students’ immigration status heavily impacts their college experiences.
Work Commitment

Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation of the number of hours participants worked during the week while also enrolled at Midwest Community College. Of the 16 participants in this study, 13 participants worked between 8 to 40 hours a week. The other three participants shared that they didn’t work while attending MCC. Of the participants that worked while studying, seven participants worked between 30 to 40 hours a week (54%). Four participants worked between 20 to 29 hours a week (31%). Only two participants worked under 19 hours per week (15%). Among participants that worked while attending MCC, eighty-five percent worked between 20 to 40 hours a week. Of those that worked between the 20 to 40 hours a week, participants stressed the difficulty of managing their employment and academic commitments.

**Figure 4.1 Provides number of hours participants worked on weekly basis**

![Bar chart showing the distribution of hours worked by participants.]

Ana, a student that commuted to campus, also managed a thirty-hour workweek schedule and discussed the challenge juggling academics and work. She commented:

Let me flashback a little to my first semester. I feel like I was well prepared. The thing with me, a lot of my friends get mad because they're like "You don't even have to study and you get good grades" or whatever. But it's because I pay attention the first time in
class. I don’t think I really had an issue. I guess my biggest issue was not whether I was prepared or not, it was just the time that I had. My first semester I know I was working pretty much every day, even if I had class that day, I still worked.

Ana felt academically prepared for the rigors of her course at MCC, but felt overwhelmed by her employment commitment. Victor, a fourth year student, described his multiple work arrangements during his first year at MCC. He stated:

Moises: Did you work outside your federal work-study?
Victor: Yes.
Moises: So you had basically three jobs?
Victor: Basically three jobs, yeah.
Moises: Where, what was your third job?
Victor: I worked at a restaurant. I’m the manager there. So it was pretty hectic.
Moises: And they were all part-time jobs? And two of them were on campus and one was off-campus?
Victor: One was, yeah.
Moises: How many hours, all together, did you work a week?
Victor: Almost 40.

Omar discussed how his grades suffered because of the numerous distractions he encountered during the second semester of his first year. In particular, Omar referenced work as a reason why he didn’t perform well academically. He disclosed:

Omar: Well, the first semester, I was really happy with it. I had better grades than I received in high school. In high school I always had B’s and C’s. And in the first semester, I was very surprised because in all of my classes I received A’s. It was
something I wasn't expecting. I was very surprised. And in the second semester, I did have a little more, maybe I was too confident about my first semester. And in the second semester, I did go down a little bit. I had...in general, I had a little bit more distractions and I did have more B’s and C’s, the same as in high school. But the first semester, it was better.

Moises: And those distractions, what were they?

Omar: Sometimes going out with my friends or working sometimes, or both work and school; work added up and I didn't know which one to do first or I did assignments late.

Martin reverse transferred to Midwest Community College from Central University because of financial constraints. He talked extensively of the responsibilities of having to work at his family business. He commuted from a nearby town to campus on a daily basis. He was unable to be involved with campus events or organizations because his commitment to the family business. Martin feared that his commitment to the family business denied him valuable opportunities to grow as a student and as a professional. Martin revealed:

I'm scared. I'm literally scared for the future. I'm scared for my future. I'm worried about it all the time. There's times I feel like I don't know what I want to do anymore cause I haven't committed to one thing. You know what I mean. I haven't given the full effort. I just been going to school and getting the grades and that's it. The way my counselor says it to me, "Once you leave this campus, school mode shuts off. Your future shuts off and you're at the store. And you are in work mode." And she has a point. And it's just like all I'm doing right now; I'm doing homework and turning it in. I'm not focusing on myself. My dad thinks it's just not school anymore. This is where my career starts. This is where my future starts and he doesn't understand that.
At the time of our interview, Martin was committing thirty-hours a week to his family business. He actually reduced his normal hours of 40 hours, so he could devote more attention to his academics. He planned on transferring back to the University of Illinois at the end of academic year. His commitment to the family business affected his academic and career development. Martin was unable to maximize his experience as a college student. He felt a deep sense of responsibility to his family, but understood that his commitment to the family store was detrimental to his progress as a college student and ability to establish peer and professional networks. He devoted a considerable amount of attention and focus on the family business rather than on his career path in journalism.

A large number of participants in this study reported working a substantial amount. Their employment status depended heavily on both the academic load and living expenses that they incurred while studying at MCC. Some students talked about the benefits of securing on-campus employment, but also highlighted the limitations of only being able to work a maximum of 19 hours per week for minimum wage. The high number of employment hours among these participants is not an anomaly but a common trend among community college students. According to the American Association of Community Colleges (2014), among community college students enrolled full-time, 22% are employed full-time and 40% are employed part-time. Employment status increases for community college students enrolled part-time. Among part-time students, 41% work full-time and 32% work part-time. However, it is important to highlight that these participants cited familial responsibilities as a driving force in their employment status.
Limited Availability of Academic Space

In this study, a majority of participants discussed the challenges of locating a place to study after hours of operation at Midwest Community College. There were differences between students that commuted and those that resided in the campus town. Participants that lived within the campus town shared how difficult it was to access an academic space, especially after the MCC’s library closed at eight o’clock in the afternoon. In this study, twelve participants lived in the campus town. Of these twelve, five were raised in the campus town and seven were new residents. The remaining four participants commuted between 15 and 45 minutes to attend Midwest Community College. All four had off-campus employment in their hometown, which made it difficult to commute back to campus for either studying or taking part in extra curricular events. For this reason, participants that commuted to campus were less likely to voice concerns over finding a location to study because they either studied in-between classes or found an alternative option such as the public library or a community center in their hometown.

For participants that lived in the campus town, they viewed the limited open hours of Midwest Community College as a major challenge towards their opportunity to complete work or study for exams. Emily, a reverse transfer student from a Private University in Chicago, underscored the challenge of locating a quiet, spacious, and academically nurturing environment to complete her academic tasks. When asked to describe some challenges, Emily responded:

I think space. It's pretty big compared to the community colleges I've seen in Chicago, but it's not as big as like a big university campus. And like the library I guess, even though the library's not as spacious as the Central University one. And the hours, the Midwest Community College one I think closes at 9. And so like, I don't know. That's basically when I study. I'm used to studying at night…It's like I know a lot of people
work, especially community college students, a lot of them have full-time jobs, so they
go to class and go straight to work, it would be a lot more convenient if they could go to
the library after work if they wanted to.

Emily talked in detail about the importance of finding a space that would be open late, so she
could complete her course assignments and study for exams. Additionally, Emily elaborated on
the need for academic spaces that were both accessible and convenient. She was not the only
participant that raised the unintended consequences of solely offering day and early evening
access to the campus library. Victor, a Chicago-native, shared that despite his effort to study at
Midwest Community College, he would be unable to concentrate. For this reason, Victor studied
at the local University library. In a conversation with me, he said:

Victor: I can't study here.

Moises: You can't study at Midwest Community College?

Victor: I can't study here. I tried once. I go study at the Central University quiet library.

People here study not that much. But when you go to Central University, when there's a
large amount of group people, sitting there quietly doing their test or studying, it kind of
pushes you like "Yeah, I should be doing to same thing."

When participants were asked if they would utilize an academic space if it would be open late at
Midwest Community College, most (especially those that lived in the campus town), all said yes.
Gabriel, a townie, described how finding a quiet place would give him an alternative to studying
at home—a place filled with distractions. Gabriel lives with his parents and two younger
brothers. In our conversation, he responded:

Moises: What if they opened up a space here for you to study late? Would that be
something that you would utilize?
Gabriel: Probably.
Moises: Yeah?
Gabriel: Yeah. I'll use it. I mean sometimes at home like my parents are doing something or my brothers are doing something and it's kind of distracting. And it's like if I had a place to go, I would go so a place here would be nice.

Jorge was another participant that communicated a strong interest in utilizing an academic space if it was kept open late into the night. He said, “I think so. Yeah I would definitely. Yeah I just like it when it's quiet. Yeah. And it's open late then that's more convenient for me. Yeah.” Jorge and Gabriel were among many of the participants that lived in the campus town, who voiced a strong interest in utilizing a study room at Midwest Community College, especially if it was kept open late into the evening.

For participants that commuted to campus, they weren’t concerned about the limited availability of academic spaces because many either studied while on-campus or found another alternative place to study at their hometown. Another commuter participant, Luz, discussed the time constraints of carpooling to campus. She was unable to attend alternative locations because of her carpooling circumstances. When asked if she would study at alternative locations that had longer hours of operations, she said, “To study? Maybe not. Maybe. If I was by myself, commuting by myself, more than likely yes. Just the fact that I'm commuting with someone else kind of restrains me from doing things like that.”

Ana, a participant that also commuted, elaborated on how she knew about alternative studying places in campus town, but they would a major inconvenience to use because she lived more than thirty minutes away from the campus town. She shared:
Ana: No, I didn't. I think the main reason for that was I commuted, so I didn't have time for all of that.

Moises: But have you heard of students using the Undergraduate Library at Central University?

Ana: Yes, I've heard of that. Yeah, actually, I know a couple of people that do that. They do live here.

Brenda, another commuter participant, underscored the importance of informing her peers, especially if they were working on a group project, about the time constraints she had due to her daily drive. Brenda mentioned:

Yep. And I would kind of make it a point to let them know that I did live far, so I wasn't really willing to come back and forth, so I would tell them "If we can do it after class or on days that I'm here but after my classes." And it was never an issue, they were very understanding and I think it was probably because of how far I drove.

In this study, participants that lived in the campus town discussed the challenge of finding an alternative to the limited availability of the Midwest Community College’s library hours. Among the participants that shared this challenge, some of them were able to find alternative solutions to the obstacle. Participants that commuted to campus didn’t see the limited access to quiet space as a major concern because it would be a significant inconvenience to drive to campus just so they could study. It is important to highlight that challenges to academic success carried different levels of intensity for participants. There were some challenges that resonated deeply with some participants, but others saw it only as a minimal obstacle. A challenge that a majority of participants referenced was time management. Given their hectic schedules, participants often
shared that their time management skills were under constant development even among those that excelled academically.

**Time Management**

A major challenge for participants was time management. As mentioned before, participants worked a tremendous amount. Some participants were also asked to shoulder additional familial responsibilities that often reduced the amount of time they could devote to their academics. In this section, I will highlight some of the excerpts that focused on time management as a central concern for participants. In our interview, Ana shared,

It's just, like I said, time management and having so much going on was something difficult for me, at sometimes it was really hard to handle, and like I said, I wanted to give up and I thought "No, I can work anywhere and just get some money." There were some almost breaking points while I was here, like I said.

In her first-year at Midwest Community College, Ana was living with her older sister in an eight-person household. She also worked almost thirty hours a week. She also became the family babysitter when her sister was at work. This type of family responsibility and time commitment created a high level of stress and challenge. Susana, a second year student at MCC, also disclosed the difficulty of managing time and overcoming procrastination. She also described the increase in autonomy and flexibility college students have compared to their high school years. She disclosed:

Because I do have like extra time like I could be studying right now for that test that's in two days, but then I haven't relaxed and had time to myself yet, so I'll just do that instead. Or I'll pick sleep over studying a lot. [laughs]. And in school like everything was due in high school it was due the next day so I was like I have to get this done, but I think I was
like slacking off kind of, but I still get everything done and I'm still getting good grades.

But I am procrastinating a lot more.

Susana was an academically strong participant. She had been in the Dean’s list all of her previous semesters at Midwest Community College. She, however, admitted to the difficulty of time management as well as the vulnerability involved in procrastination. Time management, especially among this group of participants, is a challenge that needs to be a central component in student support services at two-year institutions.

**Multiple Identities**

An unexpected finding was that participants in this study had to negotiate multiple identities that played a major influence in their academic performance. Many participants, especially students that commuted or were raised in the campus town, had a deep sense of family responsibility. This familial responsibility took on different forms and varied with respect to time commitment. For some participants, it meant serving as a babysitter for their younger family members while, for others, it meant being a chauffeur. This study included two participants that were married. Of the two that were married, one of them had a five-year old son—Chela.

Participants did not only see themselves as students at Midwest Community College. They were proud to be Latina/o students at MCC, but also identified a number of other responsibilities that went beyond their status as a college student.

Chela, a Texas’ native and third year student at MCC, returned to college after becoming a single parent. Before enrolling at MCC, Chela worked full-time at a local chain restaurant. The birth of her son became a source of inspiration and really propelled her to seek out opportunities to improve their lives. In our interview, Chela revealed:
Chela: [laughs]. Um I guess when I was working at KFC and then being with my Ex. It was really bad. I just didn't want that to be like my rest of my life. And then I was tired of being the only one struggling do you know what I mean. So now I like I can be very excessive with the studying.

Moises: How about having your son?

Chela: What do you mean having a son?

Moises: Has that changed your way or approach towards education?

Chela: Ohhh. I gotcha. Yeah that was a big thing too. I didn't want him to grow up like with me working at fast food. Not to like...I'm not looking down on people who do that, but I just want didn't want to do it. [laughs].

Chela views Midwest Community College as a vehicle that will enable her to reach her educational and career goals. Her sole identity is not of college student, but of a mother trying to raise her son and give him the opportunities that were not readily available to her growing up.

Other participants talked about the enormous sense of responsibility of being a role model to their younger siblings. Omar, a second year at Midwest Community College, shared how keenly aware he was of how his younger siblings mirrored his actions. He disclosed to me:

Well, one of my brothers always wants to do what I’m doing. He always tries to do things like me. He basically wants to, for example, to give an example, to do what I'm doing.

And sometimes I consider it not so good because I would like for him to always do all the good things I’m doing not the bad. And he always, at the same time, he would like to be a lawyer too, according to what he believes now.

Some participants served as translators for their parents. Gabriel, a second year at MCC, shared how serving as the family interpreter helped him break out of his shyness. He recalled:
But since I'm the oldest and since my parents didn't know like English, so every time we had to be or go somewhere it was like, "Hey you tell them what we are saying." So I've slowly like gotten out of it, but I'm still kind of what would you might call an introvert.

Participants who were new arrivals to the campus town also shouldered the responsibility of mentoring and guiding younger siblings. For example, Victor talked about how he was able to help his younger sister while she attended summer orientation at the Central University. He commented:

Yeah, she had her orientation. I took her, I did everything for her, helped her with FASFA, I helped her with scheduling and everything.

This was the first time that Victor mentioned having to help out his family while in college. He transferred from the Chicago area to Midwest Community College. Victor devoted a lot of attention on his academic tasks as well as numerous employments. Despite being busy with his multiple commitments, Victor still found time to help guide his younger sister through the orientation process. Family responsibility was a major form of identity that participants shared throughout the interview process. Their deep sense to help out their family either through employment or obtaining a college education, resonated among all participants despite being new to campus town, commuter, or townies.

**Community Climate and Campus Climate**

All sixteen participants viewed the campus climate as both welcoming and supportive for Latina/o students. Participants talked extensively about how approachable and willing to help instructors were at Midwest Community College. When asked how satisfied they were with their decision to attend MCC, fourteen participants rated their decision a 5 out of 5. Two participants rated their satisfaction of attending MCC a 4 and 4.5 out of 5, respectively. When asked if they
experienced a racist encounter while on campus, a majority of participants replied with a no. For example, Martin, a reverse transfer to Midwest Community College, replied to the campus climate question of racism by underscoring the friendlier nature of MCC compared to his previous institution. He commented:

No. If anything people are friendlier here than the Central University. It's not that people at the Central University are not friendlier, but I feel like they just keep more to themselves. People over there [Central University] you would say clique and once they find their group they just stick to their group.

Other participants attributed the welcoming campus climate to the growing enrollment of Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. William, a second year student at MCC, provided insight into the positive campus climate at MCC, especially for Latina/o students. He disclosed:

I guess for us it's just normal now though. Because there's so many Latinas/os just getting, there's more and more each day. So that's why people are just kind of starting to like "Okay, they're here. Might as well let them be." Not any more of like, there was a few little, because back then, it wasn't, not many Latinas/os went to college, and now, about something like 68 percent of Latinas/os are going to school, which is good.

The enrollment percentage of Latina/o students is closer to six percent rather than sixty-eight percent, which William stated. Over the course of the past eighteen years, Latina/o enrollment has seen the largest percentage of change in student enrollment. Between 1999 and 2014, Latina/o enrollment jumped from 235 to 550 students at Midwest Community College. Over the past 15 years, Latina/o enrollment has changed almost 134%. The Latina/o presence at Midwest Community College is growing and Latina/o students are reaping the numerous benefits of
seeing a college campus that reflects their ethnic identity. Omar provided a concise reply to why he viewed Midwest Community College as a welcoming place. He shared with me:

Yeah, I feel very comfortable. I feel basically, I don't know. But I feel comfortable, at the same time, it could because there are a lot of Latinos and you always have that. And when there are more Latinos, you feel at home. It's like being in your own element. It's not like if you go to a place where there are all Whites, everyone is White. And MCC is a really good college. In my time begin here, I've had very a good experience and I've enjoyed it a lot.

A welcoming college campus environment doesn’t emerge on it’s own. A welcoming environment is a culture that is created by a network of people actively seeking to improve the academic success of all students, especially underrepresented students that haven’t experienced the same type of academic success as their peers. A network of faculty and administrators working as a collective group to address issues of equity and access is evident at Midwest Community College.

The campus climate at Midwest Community College was far from perfect. A few participants did recall incidents around racially insensitivity both in the classroom as well as on campus. These racially charged incidents surfaced for participants regarding issues of undocumented status, intelligence, and leadership potential. Martin described a racially charged debate that emerged in his political science when one of his fellow classmates began to vehemently voice his disdain and opposition for “illegal aliens.” Martin felt insulted by the stereotypical portrayal painted by his fellow classmate, especially since his adopted brother is an undocumented immigrant. Martin recalled the incident:
Or someone's, like ehhh, you have a right to your opinion, but...especially in my political science class. When they start talking about the DREAM Act and stuff like that, I'm just like you know I have a brother that's doing that right now. And there's a kid, he was completely bashing it, he was completely against it, he was just like "Why are we letting all these people have a chance to become legal when they've been living here illegally and breaking the law and blah blah." And I'm like there's so much you just don't know. You act like these people are criminals, like they're actually trying to do anything wrong, like they have a choice too, sometimes. I'm like you can't blame someone that came here when...

Martin elected not to engage in the debate because he didn’t feel the comments made by his classmate were valid or legitimate. When asked if he interacted in the class debate, Martin replied, “No, I didn't. Like I said, for that very reason. It came to a point where I could tell that his opinion was more just personally driven than factually based, and those are the opinions that I'm not going to argue with that opinion if it's not a legitimate.” Martin also viewed the campus climate as a very welcoming, but also drew attention to the subtle incidents of racial insensitivity that occurred in the classroom.

Another participant highlighted an unpleasant exchange between her and an English professor. Chela shared with me how her English instructor attempted to compliment her on strong writing skills, but made the stereotypical assumption that Chela was raised as an English language learner. This assumption was far from the truth. Chela’s native language is English and she entered school already knowing English from her U.S. born mother. Chela felt insulted by the erroneous assumption made her English instructor. She shared with me:
Chela: Yeah. Do you know what I heard also too in my English 101 class the teacher was like oh you write well for English being your second language. It's not my second language! I don't know that took me off guard. It took me back.

Moises: So just complete ignorance about the differences among Latinas/os.

Chela: Yeah. And that thing that she said also felt like an insult. But I mean I was getting an "A" in her class, so it wasn't like I was getting a "C" or something. And she's like, "You are doing okay for somebody that [English is not her first language]" Do you know?

Moises: Yeah.

Chela: It was frustrating.

The exchange between student and instructor carries much significance. The instructor and student interaction can serve as source of motivation and validation or leave a student feeling academically incompetent and insulted. Instructors were not only ones that participants voiced as undermining their potential as college students. A participant communicated that administrators as well as peers underestimated their academic and leadership potential. Maya, a third year student at MCC, held several leadership roles in student government and other organizations. She explained that one of the challenges she has endured while at MCC was feeling undermined by peers and administrators. She retold of one encounter with a peer:

I don't feel excluded in the Midwest Community College, but I just feel maybe sometimes I'm underestimated. One of the stories that I remember that I forgot to tell you was when I was being announced as the Honor's Program President. I went to the annual meeting that they were having the first one and as soon as I walked in there was this guy and he kind of looked shocked to see me there. He was like, "Ohh hi Maya. Are you
interested in joining the honor's program? Are you already in the honor's program?" But this was like a group setting, so nobody was talking to anybody he just kind of asked randomly just started asking me that. And throughout the meeting, the director of the honor's program ended up talking a lot about me because I have actually been in the honor's program and had a lot of projects go up on Spark the website for MCC.

Maya also discussed the lack of support she received from a mentor while being involved in student government. She mentioned:

It makes me feel like it's a bittersweet feeling. I'm so proud of myself for doing it and at the same time I need more people to lead, so that we can make a change. At the institute, there were a lot of students that their parents were lawyers, doctors, and already graduated and stuff. I can definitely see the difference there. I felt like my advisor underestimated me. He was an administrator and when I was senator everything was fine. I thought he believed in me, but throughout time I felt like he didn't believe in me so much.

Participants reported few incidents that were racially charged or that questioned their presence at Midwest Community College. Participants shared a substantial amount of positive encounters between faculty, administrators, and peers. Among the Latina/o students in this study, racially insensitive encounters while on campus were few and far between. Participants were more likely to cite racist and hostile encounters in the surrounding campus town than at Midwest Community College campus.

Participants shared numerous incidents that were both racist and discriminatory towards them while they worked and socialized in the campus town. Participants were more readily able to disclose incidents that were hostile in the surrounding town, especially in their work
environments. Chela described the racist and sexist work environment she had to endure while working at a local fast food restaurant. She recounted:

Chela: Sure. When I used to work in KFC there was um one of the managers he would always used to say things like, keep in mind I was born in Texas, so any way, but he would say, "Yeah I never been with a Mexican girl before." Like things like that it just like okay I don't care. And then he started putting his hand like on the small of my back and just kind of like, "Dude we're not... We don't talk outside of work. I'm not flirting with you. I don't know where you are getting this."

Moises: You don't have that type of relationship with him.

Chela: Yeah. And then um there was another time when the tomatoes were rotten and he said, "You are Mexican. Why don't you go pick tomatoes!"

Maya, a third year student at MCC, also described the work environment as hostile and racist towards Latinas/os based on her experience as waitress. She commented:

Because to me it's like or I just feel like I'm at a different level now than before.

However, maybe at work in the community when I'm working I do feel that. As a waitress, I gotten tables I do feel that hostility, so it's kind of weird because as a student I've taken the initiative of a leader and I'm not looked at maybe as hostile because people already have a name to my face, but if you take me to a work place where I work on everyday basis I do feel hostility of the way people might look at me or even try to interact with me. I've had people complain about my work ethic and I don't really think I did anything wrong.

Victor, a fourth year student, offered an insightful explanation to why felt more comfortable on campus than the campus town. He rationalized:
Moises: Okay. Did you ever feel like you were excluded by others because of being Latina/o?

Victor: Sort of here a little bit more than home. Majority Caucasian here.

Moises: In what way?

Victor: I feel like I get looked at more here than I would up there. Especially when I'm off campus. When I'm on campus it's a little bit different. Of course diversity and everything's in there. But off campus, it's like you go to downtown Champaign, they look at you and you're like "Ehhh." Like "What is he doing here."

Much of the scholarship regarding campus climate has been focused on college students attending four-year institutions (Chang, 1999; Chang 2002; González, 2002; Harwood, Choi, Orozco, Browne Huntt, & Mendenhall, 2015). The participants in this study, however, enrolled in a two-year institution and have multiple commitments that have forced them to devote considerable amount of time either working or studying off campus. Given their high amount of time-spent off-campus, they were more likely to encounter racist and hostile interactions while living and working off campus. The experiences of participants in this study extend the body of literature of campus climate by focusing attention to incidents of racism and hostility off-campus and how these hostile encounters impact their educational trajectory.

**Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter was to examine the challenges that resonated with all 16 participants. Challenges such as financial constraint, work commitment, campus climate, and negotiating multiple identities were shared among all 16 participants. There were other challenges that varied in impact based on the following status of participants: commuter, new arrival, and townie. Participants that commuted to campus perceived the limited access to
academic space as a major roadblock. Students that were new arrivals and townies communicated the importance of finding an alternative solution to the limited library hours of Midwest Community College. Another major challenge among participants was the community climate. Participants spent a large amount of their time either working or socializing off campus so they cited incidents of racism and hostility off campus. As a whole, participants viewed the campus climate as both welcoming and supportive of Latina/o students. Participants were able to name specific faculty and administrators that advocated, mentored, and supported Latina/o students.
Chapter 5: Student Engagement and Resources

In this chapter, I offer an in-depth exploration of the level of student engagement as well as off- and on-campus resources shared by all 16 participants. Participants’ levels of engagement on campus played an important role in the type of access they had to academic resources. Participants also communicated a number of off- and on-campus resources available to help promote their academic success. There were three scale questions that were used to determine students’ level of engagement, sense of fit, and satisfaction at Midwest Community College. I also asked every participant to describe a typical day as a student at Midwest Community College to help inform me of their level of interaction with peers, instructors, and administrators. Based on participants’ responses, I created three different levels of engagement consisting of the following: low, medium, and high. This chapter will focus on participants’ levels of engagement and how their involvement at Midwest Community College influenced their fit and satisfaction with Midwest Community College. This chapter will explore students’ levels of engagement (i.e., low, medium, and high) with respect to peer networking, involvement in student organizations, and interaction with faculty and administrators. I will also underscore the type of resources that participants highlighted throughout the interviews.

Three Levels of Engagement

The interview protocol enabled me to examine participants’ overall academic and non-academic engagement at Midwest Community College. There were a series of questions that asked participants to disclose their interaction both in the classroom and on-campus. Participants were asked to summarize a typical day for them on-campus, engagement in the classroom, and involvement with campus organizations. Based on their responses to these questions, I was able to determine their overall levels of engagement. A key point of emphasis is that overall level of
engagement was examined beyond the context of the academic setting. The questions asked of participants focused on their involvement with instructors, administrators, peers, and student organizations. Based on this all-encompassing framework of student engagement, if participants shared engagement beyond the context of the learning environment, their level engagement would be considered either medium or high engagement. A major element that differentiated medium from high engagement was participants reporting frequent involvement with peers and staff members. Participants that displayed a high level of engagement also held key leadership positions in campus organizations prior to our interview. All participants were consulted about the level of engagement that was attributed to them based on their responses.

Due to the three-interview protocol, the time for completion of all three interviews varied between three weeks and four months. Because of the extended interaction with participants, I was able to observe how participants’ engagement evolved from either low to medium or medium to high. Since the interview protocol focused on exploration of previous experience and engagement, I devoted the analysis of participants’ responses to their level of engagement solely on their previous experience rather than considering how participants were changing during the course of the three-interview sequence.

A total of 7 participants exhibited a high level of engagement through their active involvement and leadership roles in campus organizations. Participants with high level of engagement frequently shared accounts of their interactions with peers, professors, and administrators at Midwest Community College. A total of 6 participants communicated a medium level of engagement, which consisted of intermittent involvement with campus organizations, peers, professors, and staff members. The remaining 3 participants displayed a low level of engagement at Midwest Community College their level of engagement focused
specifically on their academic commitments and infrequent involvement with peers and campus organizations.

**Table 5.1 Provides a break down of participants based on their level of engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Medium</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chela</td>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>Emily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>Reyes</td>
<td>William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Victor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>Ana</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Susana</td>
<td>Jorge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maya</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

For the participants that displayed a low level of engagement at Midwest Community College, their primary focus was their academic commitments. Their involvement beyond academics was infrequent or a rarity. These participants also cited other familial or work commitments that took precedence over campus involvement. Martin is a perfect example of a student that displayed a low level of engagement. Martin is a reverse transfer student from Central University. He transferred to Midwest Community College due to the high cost at his previous institution. On top of his academic responsibilities, Martin committed extraordinary amounts of time and resources at his family’s store. Martin frequently cited his work responsibilities to the family store as a major reason why he had to maintain a low level of engagement at Midwest Community College. He commented:
Yeah, I'm just more focused on what I got to get done. I have a busy schedule, I know I have stuff to do. And I hate to let people down. I'm a really busy person, I have my store, I have prior commitments to my father and you know how, not only is he your boss, but he's my dad. So if I bail out on that, the punishment is twice as bad, pretty much. The effects are twice as bad. So it's just I have prior commitments and I don't want to let anyone down. I don't want people getting the wrong idea. I feel like there's been times where people get the wrong idea, where I'm like "No, I can't, I have stuff to do." They feel like I'm trying to avoid them, you know what I mean? I really feel like ties have been cut with people just because of that. The plain and simple fact that I'm just too busy.

Additionally, Martin viewed his enrollment at Midwest Community College strictly in terms of academics. Despite understanding the value of establishing peer-networks, Martin focused on his academic responsibilities rather cultivating relationship with his classmates. He disclosed:

I mean, since college, I don't really get as close to my classmates as I used to. It's just not like high school, you know? High school, you see the same people every week, every day. And here, I could have, I could literally meet a new student in every class. I could have a different student in every class, just for one class, you know? Some students I guess, sometimes, we'll become friends, but for the most part, I'm just here just for school.

With to respect academic engagement, Chela devoted a considerable amount of time and energy to her academics. On a daily basis she attended the students’ tutoring center. She frequently interacted with her course instructors to discuss assignments, tests, and grades. Beyond the realm of academics, Chela reported, however, a low of engagement of with peers and student organizations. She joined the honor’s society but her involvement was minimal. She attributed
her overall low level of engagement as a product of her shy demeanor. In our conversation, she shared:

Moises: To what extent have you been able to make connections with other students in classes?
Chela: Um I don't know. [laughs]. I don't. I'm pretty shy. I guess I don't really speak to anyone.
Moises: So you just keep to yourself?
Chela: Yeah. I don't really make the effort to, which is probably bad.

Chela also revealed that her high academic intensity and competitive nature created a barrier in establishing connections with peers, especially if they were more knowledgeable than her. Our conversation went as follows:

Chela: And it bothers me severely if like somebody knows more than I do.
Moises: If somebody knows more than you?
Chela: Yeah.
Moises: Why is that?
Chela: I don't know [laughs]. I think I just get competitive in class.

Luz, a third year student at MCC, also displayed a low level of engagement prior to our interview. During the course of our three-interview sequence, Luz became incredibly involved at Midwest Community College especially after we completed the interview. The focus of the study was to examine participants’ prior experiences, so her evolving level of engagement was not part of the analysis of this study. Luz spoke extensively of the numerous challenges of being a commuter student, specifically on the days that she had to carpool with others. Since Luz commuted and carpooled, she had time constraints that prevented her from participating in
campus organizations. She also didn’t consider connecting with her peers, especially in the classroom as a vital aspect in her college experience. She replied:

I haven't known them and I've never had that idea that you have to become friends with your people in the class. I didn't, until I hear people say "Oh, get study groups, or get someone, become friends with that one person that's really, that's always at school in case you miss anything you always have that friend." And I never thought about it that way. I was like "I'm not going to talk to these people."

Martin, Luz, and Chela were participants that exhibited low levels of engagement outside the academic setting. Their limited involvement with peers and student organizations also restricted the amount of information and resources they were able to access because they didn’t cultivate a peer network, which for many of the other participants served as an important vehicle to access information.

There were six participants that displayed a medium level of engagement while at Midwest Community College. These participants frequently attended class and moderately interacted with their peers, instructors, and counselors at the college. These participants periodically attended student organizations, but did not hold any leadership roles on campus. All of them emphasized the importance of establishing connections with peers, but to a certain extent. Esperanza relocated to central Illinois with her fiancée and she underscored the importance of establishing connections with peers because she was new to the campus town. She, however, also mentioned how these connections were only helpful to a certain extent. She said:

Yeah, I mean, when I first got here, I felt like it was a five [rating], but I wouldn't say that I would care about it know. I would say it's still pretty important, but it's less important
that when I got here. I think that has a lot to do with when I barely moved here, I didn't
know anyone, so I kind of kept like, you know what I mean, trying to make friends, but
now I don't care so much about that.

Esperanza’s view on making connections changed over the course of her two years at Midwest
Community College. While her thoughts on establishing connections with peers morphed, she
continued to be involved in volunteer efforts throughout the campus town. She served as a tutor
for two after-school programs. She was also periodically involved in the Latina/o Student
Organization. During our interview, she increased her involvement with Latina/o Student
Organization, but again she didn’t take any leadership roles.

Omar is a participant that cited his level of discomfort with his English fluency as a
reason why he has been moderately involved with his peers. Omar arrived in the United States
midway into his teenage years. His English fluency has improved, but he still continues to feel
uncomfortable speaking the language. We ended up conducting our three interviews in Spanish.
We talked about the difficulty of connecting with his peers. He revealed:

Omar: Yeah, it's [connecting with others] a little difficult.

Moises: In what way?

Omar: I don't know. I'm the type of person that when a person doesn't connect with them
then they just don't talk. I just stay quiet and observe. I'm the type of person that doesn't
really trust people from the start. I have to spend a some time to feel comfortable with
them.

Moises: Mhmm. And do you prefer to speak in Spanish or English with your classmates
at Parkland?
Omar: It would depend. Because when I am with White friends, that doesn't matter if I want to speak Spanish because I have to speak English.

Moises: You have no other choice.

Omar: Yes. And the same, the same with my Latina/o classmates. Sometimes in English, sometimes in Spanish. Yeah. But I think the reality is that it doesn't matter much to me.

But sometimes, sometimes I feel more comfortable in Spanish.

Throughout our interview, Omar spoke about the factors that prevented his high level of engagement, including his quiet and shy demeanor, as well as his hesitation in speaking English.

Omar was involved with the Latina/o Student Organization and established a network of peers that allowed him to obtain important information about campus resources.

Reyes has experienced a number of medical complications that have limited his engagement at Midwest Community College. Reyes was born with spina bifida, which caused him to endure a total of forty-nine surgeries over the course of his young life. His medical condition served as a frequent impediment in maximizing his academic potential, but he continued to display incredible resolve in overcoming his medical setbacks. After taking a semester off to strengthen his health, Reyes returned back to Midwest Community College with a renewed sense of focus and purpose to achieve his educational goals. He reported:

More head set. Because as the time I took off, I had plenty of time to think that if I don't get it together, what am I going to do for the rest of my life? Like my family always says "Are you going to work at Walmart?" They tell me the truth. "Are you going to work at Walmart? Sit on the corner?" I don't want to do that. Working at Walmart, of course, if I need the money, but on the corner, I'm not that type of a kid. I would make sure I had money in my pocket.
Reyes also emphasized the importance of establishing connections with his peers in order to help each other understand the course content. He shared:

Pretty much get to know each other. Most of us in class have our numbers now. We each have our number, each other's numbers. So let's say we need to get an assignment done and we need to meet somewhere, we can all meet here, we can meet at Midwest Community College, we can meet somewhere in campus town.

Reyes’ medical condition inhibited his ability to be fully invested at Midwest Community College and caused him to re-evaluate the purpose of his life:

Very very depressed, very very depressed to the point where I just wanted to end my life. That's the point I was it. I was very very depressed to that point. Because I'm thinking to myself "Why did it happen to me? Okay, I know I can't feel my legs down, my knees down, why did this happen to me?"

Reyes strived to be involved as much as possible at Midwest Community College, especially since he is an out-of-state student, but chronic health complications limited the type of involvement he could engage in.

All seven participants that exhibited a high level of engagement reported that connecting with peers was a high priority. These participants were actively involved in and out of the classroom. They held numerous leadership roles in campus organizations. They also became mentors and advocates for other Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. Maya, a third year at MCC, held the highest leadership position of student government and the Honor’s Program. When asked about the importance establishing a peer network, she replied:

If you are involved in different organizations, it's a huge connection boost. If you maybe or it really depends on personality. Maybe if you have the same major you can connect
with them. If you sit right next to each other, you can definitely have a greater chance of connecting with them.

Victor also commented on the importance of being actively engaged outside the classroom setting. He shared,

This time I actually wanted to become more active around the community. And one time I did volunteer for something that made me feel a lot better toward myself. Help kids. Latina/o Student Organization does this thing every year where they help out Latina/o kids' understanding of why education is so important. And it made me feel good after the whole thing, so I just kept on doing it after. And I became more and more and more, more involved.

Participants that demonstrated high overall engagement discussed how their level of involvement on-campus served as an opportunity to meet other Latina/o students and collaborate with other student organizations. Jorge, a fourth year student at MCC, described how his involvement in Latina/o Student Organization allowed him to feel connected to campus as well as collaborate with other. He recalled:

Well like talking about last year I was part of Latina/o Student Organization and that definitely made me feel you know part of the community. We always did events closely with...we co-sponsored events with other orgs [organizations], so we worked together with other orgs.

Participants with a high level of overall engagement viewed their experience at Midwest Community College beyond academic terms. They capitalized on the numerous opportunities to be an active student and most importantly they became key role models at the campus.
Participants’ levels of engagement at Midwest Community College also influenced the importance they attributed to connecting with their peers.

**Importance of Connecting with Others**

One of the three scale questions asked participants in this study to rate how important it was for them to make friends or connect with peers that had similar interests or activities as them at Midwest Community College. The scale question was as follows: *On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, how important is it to you to make friends here, or to connect with others here with whom you share similar interests or activities?* Overall, Latina/o students in this study communicated a high value in connecting with peers that shared similar interest. The average rating for the value of connecting with peers was 4.125. A closer examination of responses based on participants’ level of engagement revealed that the importance of connecting with peers varied considerably between those that reported high, medium, and low engagement. Figure 5.1 provides a breakdown of the median score for participants’ responses to the scale question of how important it was for them to connect with their peers. The overall average for the 16 participants has been included as well.

**Figure 5.1 Provides participants median score on importance of connecting with peers based on their level of engagement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Engagement</th>
<th>Median Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>3.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Average</td>
<td>4.125</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For participants that displayed low levels of engagement, they placed a low importance on connecting with their peers that had similar interests as them. Participants were also asked to elaborate on their ranking. Participants with low engagement levels cited family, work, academic focus, and shy demeanor as reasons why they didn’t place high value on connecting with their peers. For example, Martin often cited his focus on academics as a primary reason why he didn’t place significant importance to connecting with his peers. He responded:

Like I said, right now I'm not making the effort to go out of my way to be friends with anyone. Just if it happens, it happens. If it doesn't, it doesn't. And I'm not against it, I'm not against meeting people. I'm never against meeting people. I would like to meet new people, but like I said, I'm here for school. I'm here for what I got to do.

Martin also had to commit between thirty to forty hours a week at the family business. This type of investment of time and energy often prevented him from connecting peers or being involved with student organizations. Martin gave a rating of 2 out of 5 for how important he viewed connecting with his peers.

Chela is another participant with low level of overall engagement that responded with a low rating of how important she felt it was to connect with peers with similar interests. Chela’s family responsibilities to her five-year-old son prevented her from connecting with others. She replied:

I just don't really like going out either so it kind of makes hard for the whole friend thing.

I kind of just like staying at home and reading or being with my chunky butt [son]. That's pretty much it.

Chela also highlighted her uncomfortable level of interacting with other students that were more knowledgeable than her. She committed considerable time and energy to her courses. During our
first-interview, she commented that she was three chapters ahead in her physics course. She actually received the second highest midterm grade. Her competitive nature created a buffer between her and her peers. Lastly, Chela also commented on how her shy demeanor and personality served as barriers to connect with others. She revealed, “I guess I'm just shy. Or like if I do meet people I feel like my personality is kind of like off-putting to them.”

For participants that shared medium levels of engagement, their average score of 3.91 was a tad bit below the average for all 16 participants of 4.125. Figure 5.2 provides a breakdown of the responses given by participants with medium level of engagement with respect to importance of connecting with peers.

**Figure 5.2 Importance of connecting with peers among participants with medium level of engagement**

Participants, however, stressed the importance of connecting with peers, especially ones that aligned strongly with their curricular and professional interests. Susana, a second year at Midwest Community College, highlighted the value of connecting with her peers in biology course. She said, “I think so both academically and socially cause I've actually made or I do hang out with my bio classmates outside of class now, so it does help both ways.” Susana also
underscored the importance of connecting with peers because of her newfound freedom living away from her parents. She shared:

> It's a lot more important to me now that I'm living by myself you know. It's good to have people you can hang out with. But before I didn't really I guess my parents really didn't allow me to go out, so I didn't really have or I had friends at school, but we never hung out outside of that. But um so it wasn't that important and also I was really busy. Now I am kind still kind of busy, but I still hang out with them on the weekends and then I live with 3 or 2 of my best friends right now so it's a lot easier. We still hang out and have fun.

Susana, however, placed a limit to how important it was for her to connect with peers outside her classroom. She cited her strong academic preparation as reasons why she did not have to regularly make connections or study groups with her peers. Susana earned a place in the Dean’s list the previous two semesters. During her third semester at Midwest Community College, Susana was admitted to the nursing program for the spring of 2015 at Central State University. She recounted:

> Um I study better by myself. I mean if they did ask me I would try to help them and it would help me a little bit like teaching them or telling them how this works, but I do study a lot better on my own because I just read it and then I got it. I don't really have to do anything else.

Among the six participants with medium levels of engagement, only Gabriel gave a rating of 5 for the importance of connecting with peers. Gabriel shared that connecting with others in his area of early education motivated and supported his academic success. Gabriel said:
Yeah they kind of keep you motivated. It makes so that you don't feel like you are alone here cause I know I've had maybe two people in my classroom from my high school. All the other people like I've never met before but you kind of built a relationship and it is just like, "Oh did you do the assignment?" "Yes." "Oh that's great. Let me see what you did and we can compare. Oh I had issues with this one and that one."

Gabriel placed a high value on the importance of connecting with peers in early education, but he also discussed how his quiet and shy demeanor had been roadblocks in optimizing his ability to connect with his colleagues. He revealed:

If I wasn't such an introvert. [laughs]. And so shy and quiet. Because I've had some professors like quiet the entire class so that I can say what I'm saying. Because they say, "You talk so softly." So it's just like me being shy.

Participants with medium levels of engagement on average attributed value in connecting with peers that shared similar interests as them. There were plenty of examples that demonstrated that participants with medium levels of engagement were establishing and nurturing connections with their peers. These participants also described incidents where peer connections allowed them to obtain important information. The important distinction between medium and high is that participants with high engagement went beyond establishing connections. They became leaders among their peers.

All seven participants with high levels of engagement rated connecting with peers a five. Participants viewed connecting with peers as a very important aspect of their experience at Midwest Community College. They also articulated a number of benefits associated with establishing connections with peers. Ana, a second year at MCC, highlighted the motivational factor behind having strong connections with peers and professors. She replied:
Definitely. I think so. The more I formed bonds with both my professors and my peers in the class, the more I wanted to attend class. I looked forward to being there and to either seeing my friends that I'd made or whatever. So I feel that if those connections aren't formed, you don't look forward to going to class, which leads to skipping and you don't really pay attention and are not as motivated to learn the material.

Ana viewed her connections with students beyond the realm of socializing. She offered examples of how connecting with peers served as a source of accountability to attend class and learn the material. Ana’s connections with peers also became an important outlet for her to be engaged on campus. Ana had a very complex understanding of how connecting with students can be multidimensional and serve a variety of purposes. For example, Ana used the value of connecting with people and social media to create a Facebook group so students at Midwest Community College could exchange books amongst themselves. This book exchange gave her peers an alternative to the high book costs at the MCC’s bookstore. She explained:

Actually, my friend and I, we started a Facebook page to where we would post the books that we no longer use, to help each other out. So we made a little group. So let's say my books from previous semesters, I would post it up there. If someone needs a book because they're taking the course, it'd be like "Okay, I'll sell it to you for $20." A lot less expensive than at the bookstore. Because one day we were just at the lounge and we were complaining how expensive it was and my friend went to buy a calculator. And I'm like "Why didn't you tell me that you need one? I have one, I don't need it. I took that course." She was like "Really? This one cost me like $100" or whatever. I'm like "It's all good, just give me like $20, $30 and it's yours." She's like "Okay." She went to return it.
Ana’s conceptualization of connecting with peers went beyond socializing. She created opportunities to maximize the full potential of her contacts. There were other participants that also viewed the importance of connecting with peers in a multitude of ways. For example, William considered connecting with peers as an opportunity to obtain resources and information. He explained, “It's like, for example, buying pencils and you know someone at Office Depot, they'd probably give you some for free. You obtain things fast, quicker, I guess. Easier.”

Maya also underscored the importance of leadership roles she took while connecting with others. More importantly, she highlighted how her presence in leadership roles created a certain expectation that she needed to meet despite the lack of support she received from her advisor while president at student council. She shared:

Another thing was a lot of people look up to me at Midwest Community College. They know me and they say hi to me. A lot of staff members I'm very close to and I just didn't want to just step down.

These seven participants embarked on leadership positions at Midwest Community College. They were able to obtain leadership positions because of their connections with peers and their vote of confidence in being able to execute their leadership role. Participants with high engagement levels viewed the importance of connecting with peers beyond that of just the social realm and because of this, they received a number resources and information that supported their academic success and provided an opportunity to grow as campus leaders. The next section will focus on participants’ involvement with faculty and administrators.

**Involvement with Faculty and Advisors**

There were several questions in the second interview that asked participants to describe the frequency and type of interaction they had with professors and administrators at Midwest
Community College. Participants were also asked to describe the accessibility and approachability of faculty and administrators. Regardless of the level of engagement displayed by participants, they all viewed the faculty to be both readily available and willing to assist them with their questions or concerns.

**Involvement with Faculty**

All 16 participants described in detail accounts of how instructors at Midwest Community College were accessible and willing to help. Participants with low levels of engagement described faculty to be very accessible. Luz, a third year student with a low level of engagement, elaborated on the accessibility of instructor:

Yeah, for the most part, the teachers, one of my teachers is really good about emailing. And the other one I'm always around their office so I think it's really easy to just stop by or I feel like if I could email him he would also respond to me.

Martin, a reverse transfer student from Central University, compared the accessibility of instructors at Midwest Community College and that of his previous institution. Martin described how instructors at Midwest Community College were invested in ensuring students were successful in the classroom. Martin made several comparisons between Midwest Community College and Central University. With respect to approachability and willingness to help, Martin reported:

Yeah. They seem more, here they seem more like they want to see you succeed. Almost like in high school. If they see that you're struggling, they'll come find you, compared to at the Central University, it's more, if you don't want to do this, we're not going to make you do this. It's more individual. The intensity of academics here is a lot different. I felt it
from day one. It's a lot different from the ones at the Central University. By far. It's a lot more academically intense over there.

Martin elaborated further on MCC instructors’ willingness to connect with students by describing how his political science instructor really committed time and effort to get to know his students’ names and greet them outside of the classroom setting. Martin said:

I've never really struggled, especially not here. But I definitely see that my political science teacher, he definitely gets to know his students more. He'll try to remember your face, he'll try to remember who you are. He'll talk to you if he sees you outside of class, he'll say hi, you know. Like I said, they're a lot more approachable, they're a lot more willing to get to know their students compared to the Central University.

Martin demonstrated an overall low level of engagement because of his commitment to the family store, but through his observations he keenly noticed the different type of student interactions between students and faculty at both Central University and Midwest Community College. Martin viewed instructors at MCC to be more accessible and willing to reach out to students, especially students that were struggling academically.

Participants with high levels of engagement maximized the accessibility of instructors. These participants viewed the role of instructor beyond the scope of the classroom. They considered instructors to be important connections to resources and career opportunities. Ana frequently attended instructors’ office hours and capitalized on their career expertise. For example, Ana established a strong connection with her criminal justice instructor. She learned about studying abroad via her criminal justice professor, which he led. Her engagement with her criminal justice instructor extended beyond the traditional classroom setting. She recounted:
I interacted as much as I could, whether it just be catch up on anything. I believe I got really close with my professors, especially my last semester here. My criminal justice professor, I've had him since my first semester here, so I really got to know him. It was pretty great. And also, he was one of the professors that was with us when we went to Costa Rica.

Ana took a leadership role during her trip to Costa Rica. She became the group translator. This leadership role was exhausting, but she found the experience to be incredibly enriching and inspiring. During the course of our interview, Ana was in the process of finalizing her next study abroad trip to Scotland. Her interaction with instructors extended beyond the scope of the course content. She viewed her exchanges with instructors as opportunities to explore other leadership and career opportunities. This type of conceptualization of the instructor role was not common for students among low and medium level of engagement. In particular, Omar viewed the role of the faculty in a strictly traditional role that of the holder of knowledge. Omar described the role of the instructor at MCC solely to be that of teacher. He didn’t consider instructors at MCC to be mentors or gatekeepers of resources. Omar disclosed:

I think that there hasn't been the opportunity to talk with a teacher. I haven't had a very close relationship with any of professors. Midwest Community College, I think it, the teachers are a little different, because at the same, we are a little more adult and the teachers too. And there only exists that respect of attending school and to study and to be respectful of school and to study and that’s it. It's not like in high school, you try to be friends with the teachers for help and all that. It's a little different.
Omar’s interaction with instructors reflected this traditional view of the instructor. He didn’t establish a connection with instructors at all. He viewed instructors as knowledge holders rather than important resources in their development of college students.

**Multiple Forms of Instructor Contact**

Despite how participants’ levels of engagement impacted their view on the role of the instructors, participants discussed in detail the numerous ways that they were able to engage the instructor both in and out of the classroom setting. Participants listed a variety of ways that made it very easy and efficient for them to contact their instructors. Participants connected with their instructors through office hours, email, office phone, cell phone, text message, and online instant messaging. Participants considered the multiple forms of connecting with instructor as a primary reason for viewing their instructors at Midwest Community College to be accessible and approach to students.

One of the most surprising ways students were connecting with instructors was through text messaging. Ten out of sixteen participants shared that their instructors provided students with their cell phone numbers so they could be reached in case of emergency or if a student had a question about the course. For example, Martin described how his instructors shared their cell phones as well as created parameters for the type of exchange between student and instructor.

The following is a conversation between Martin and I:

Martin: It just depends on the day. If I'm waiting till 10:30 at night and it's the night before it's due, yeah they're not going to be very available, but I mean, even some of the professors here, they gave us their phone numbers.

Moises: Really?
Martin: Yeah, I have like three of them that gave us their phone numbers on the syllabus and said "If you ever need anything, just text or call. Don't text or call us just to say hi, obviously, but if you have a legitimate question, yeah you can text us."

Martin was not the only participant that revealed that instructors were willing to share their cell phone numbers with students. Susana also shared instructors were willing to share their cell phone information in case students needed to get a hold of them. She replied to the question of instructor approachability:

I think all of my instructors have been really good. They're always, "Here are my office hours." Some of them you can even text them. They tell you what email is best. There are a couple that I have had contacted, but mostly I don't cause I really don't need extra help or clarification. But all of my instructors have been really like open to like you know come in like if you need help or you are not going it [course material] come in and I'll help you know.

Participants were able to cite a number of ways that they were able to contact their instructors in case of emergency or if they had questions about the course content. Overall, participants described faculty at Midwest Community College to be readily available and willing to help. A summary of the different type ways that participants initiated contact with instructors at Midwest Community College is outlined in Figure 5.3.
Participants described in detail how instructors at Midwest Community College were accessible to students in a variety of ways. The different ways that participants were able to reach out to their instructors really influenced their perception of instructors as being approachable and willing to help. Emily characterized faculty at Midwest Community College:

They were very approachable. They were like really encouraging. One of my bio teachers had candy. She said "Even if you don't want to talk about school, just come by and say hi." So whenever I wanted candy, I would stop by her office and go in and talk to her. They would always encourage us to go talk to them about anything, like classroom material, homework, or even if you just wanted to talk. A lot of them would just say "Come by."

Emily was also a participant that utilized instant messaging to obtain answers to her questions especially after-hours. She shared:

And then I had a few professors who gave us like their email, but it was like their Google, so we could chat with them. So, they were actually on Google Chat. And they would
actually answer. I had a few that would answer me at midnight. Because I guess they were up grading or something. And they would answer me right away.

Based on the question of instructors’ accessibility and approachability, participants cited a number of ways that they were able to interact with professors. Their interaction with professors really helped shaped the positive outlook of faculty members and her satisfaction in attending Midwest Community College. She mentioned:

I've never felt like they were out of reach. And like I said, I think it's just because professor-to-student ratio here at Midwest Community College is very small, so it's definitely nice, I thought it was a very good move in coming here to MCC, just because that student-to-professor ratio was so small that any time you would need to speak to them, they were easily attainable and reachable at all times.

Participants underscored faculty members’ willingness to connect and support their academic success as reasons why they were very satisfied with their decision to attend Midwest Community College. There were participants that attended previous institutions and they also cited the positive interaction they were having at Midwest Community College compared to their previous institution. The interview protocol also explored the type interaction that participants had with their advisors and staff.

**Involvement with Advisors**

Participants’ engagement with advisors varied between low to high. There were participants that met with advisors a minimum of once per semester. On the other hand, there were students that met with their academic advisors more than twice a semester. The average number of times that participants met with their advisor was once a semester. Overall, participants spoke positively about the type of advising they received from their academic
advisors. Participants also underscored how drop-in hours helped simplify their opportunity to meet with advisors. Participants revealed that the quality of advisors varied. There were particular advisors that participants actively sought out for advising and resources.

For the most part, participants commented that their advisors were supportive and encouraging of their curricular and professional goals, regardless of their level of engagement. Chela, a student with low level of engagement, viewed her advisor as available and willing to her despite her limited contact with him. She said:

I think it was last year [academic]. Sorry I'm trying to remember. I guess it went well. He told me I needed to take. He...I can't remember his name. He was really nice and funny. He was cool.

Chela considered her advisor to be helpful as well as providing a friendly environment for her. Other participants highlighted the drop-in hour format as a convenient opportunity to meet with advisors in a timely manner. Esperanza, a second year student at MCC, discussed how the drop-in format allowed her to meet and obtain important course recommendations and curriculum advising. She revealed:

It changes, whoever's available, honestly. But I've seen this one particular counselor more than usual, but it's not because I chose him, it's just because he's the one that was available. Robert…. We discussed what courses I should take. I had asked for help, or advising, because I'm just enrolled in one class a semester and I was kind of asking if he thought that was a good idea, or if I should do more and yeah...I just pretty much getting advising over what classes I should take or how I should approach this one particular class I was having trouble with.
There were a few incidents when participants met with different advisors. For the most part, participants named a specific advisor that they frequently met to discuss course-planning, letters of recommendation, scholarships, graduation requirements, and transfer requirements. Maya shared that she only scheduled meetings with one particular advisor because of the strong rapport they had created over the course of the past three years. She commented:

Mike he is my academic advisor. He's written me letters of recommendation. He encourages me more in the you are Latina/o woman and you need to work hard for the pursuit of happiness. Him and I really talk about that a lot and I think that's helped me out a lot. I don't feel like I could open up like that to anybody.

During her first year at Midwest Community College, Brenda was encouraged by an academic advisor to establish a strong rapport with a consistent advisor throughout her time at Midwest Community College. She took the advisor’s recommendation to heart and created a strong connection with an advisor at MCC. She mentioned:

From the beginning, my very first advisor, her name was Emma, I don't know if you know her. And had told me that a lot of people don't stick with the same advisor, they just go see any random person. And she was like "I advise that you stick to someone that you like."

Brenda intended to stay with Emma, but the advising she received from her was not accommodating of the type of time constraints she would have for the semester. In her first semester at MCC, Brenda’s advisor signed her up for 18 hours that consisted of two science courses, one humanities course, one math, and one English course. During her first week, Brenda felt overwhelmed and stressed. Brenda was able to connect with another advisor that understood
her family and work responsibilities and helped her craft a more manageable schedule. Brenda disclosed:

It [18 hours] was definitely a lot to handle. So then I went back, and I said "Just give me someone that deals with maybe first-time students." So that's how I ended up with Robin. And then I went to the career center to ask about majors and stuff. They helped me. And the lady that was helping me said "If you need to speak with someone in counseling and advising, go to Robin." And that was the person that I had seen previously, so I was like "Perfect!" And then I told her about my situation and of my 18 credit hours in the first semester, and she said that that's something that no one should do and the counselor should have known to not do that. So I just stuck out with here and I loved her. She was a really good advisor.

Brenda created a strong connection with one particular advisor at Midwest Community College. There were several other participants that also created a very close bond with their advisors. Many of the participants recommended their advisor to future students. Victor, in particular, encouraged prospective students to meet with his advisor. We discussed this:

Victor: Yeah, yeah. Anything I ask, she'll answer. She won't beat around the bush, she'll tell you straightforward.

Moises: That's great.

Victor: I recommend that to any of my friends. If you want to see a counselor, go see her.

There were a few incidents where participants had mixed reviews of their advisors. For example, Gabriel discussed how some advisors provided inaccurate information to students, so he went ahead and researched the information he needed before meeting with an advisor. He said:
Well they're are like oh so and so really helps and works with you. And then there are others that don't know what they are talking about or they give you false information. And then you are taking the wrong courses. And so I don't want to be paying money I don't have to pay for classes. So I just look at the book they give us and I just go to the counselor for them to okay it and then I just kind of go about it myself.

Only a couple of participants expressed a negative interaction between them and an advisor. Among those that reported a negative encounter with an advisor, they were successful in locating another advisor to help them through course scheduling and curriculum requirements. Overall, participants referenced advisors at Midwest Community College as accessible, knowledgeable, and supportive. Emily helped capture the sentiments of participants towards academic advisors. She said,

Yeah, I definitely feel more supported here. Like advisors I think talk to you, they encourage us a lot. And they encourage us a lot to get the Associates, but even like, I was talking to my advisor and I was talking to my advisor and I was like "I don't know if I want to go get the Associate's." And she was like "Oh, that's fine, just take your gen eds."

The next section will explore how participants’ level of overall engagement at Midwest Community College impacted their access to peer networks. More importantly, I will elaborate on how access to peer-networks promoted or inhibited participants’ access to resources and information.

**Peer Networks**

A critical element in the exchange of information and resources is peer networks. Participants that demonstrated engagement levels between medium and high often cited resources and information they received through their peer networks. Participants with low levels
of engagement were often not aware of information or resources on- and off-campus. Of the
students that revealed either medium or high engagement, there was a difference in how these
participants navigated their peer networks to promote their academic and professional success.
Participants with high levels of engagement shared the resources they obtained and how they
maximized the information they received.

For participants that reported high engagement levels, they had a clearly defined peer
network that gave them immediate access to information and resources that they readily used.
For example, Maya’s outgoing personality and constant desire to be successful served as
motivation to establish a strong peer network that she would frequently utilize to overcome
financial and time constraints. Maya described how her peer network became a vehicle for her to
learn about the 24-hour access to the Central University Library. Before learning about the
Central University Library, Maya would spend a nights at a local diner. She stated:

I found out about that through friends going there. I didn't know about it. I did not find
out about it through MCC at all whatsoever. I didn't know about it and I just found out
about it through friends basically…My first semester late into the semester I found out
about it before that I was so I did or I came to Champaign without anything and without a
job, so I didn't have internet at home, so I would be going to Mary Anne Diner just to like
3 in the morning trying to do my paper. It felt a little bit uncomfortable because you are
there to eat, but it was like my only resource that I had.

Maya described that the limited availability of the Midwest Community College library forced
her to study at a local diner. But when she discovered the late hours of Central University, she
began to use this new resource because of its availability, Internet access, and scholarly
environment. Maya described:
Definitely their hours. The internet. The computers. Overall, I like the feeling behind the fact that I have things to do like homework and I can see other students around me with the same cause, which kind of pushes me to do my homework. Sometimes if you are at home, you can get distracted and turn on TV maybe you get tired.

Omar is another student that utilized his peer network to obtain information about the Central University. He disclosed, “I have a friend who is at the Central University. In one occasion, he took me with him. And it was a very pretty quiet place to study. Then later on I kept on going to the library with another friend.”

Gabriel exhibited a medium level of engagement. He also had access to important resources and information, but his peer networks were not as clearly defined as participants with high levels of engagement at MCC. For example, he knew of Central University, but didn’t know critical information about parking or its 24-hour access that would allow him to utilize this resource frequently. He shared, “And then hopefully...because I don't know much about it, so I don't know when it's open and when it's not either. I rather just come here or somewhere that I’m familiar with.”

For participants with low engagement levels, their access to information was quite limited. Two of the three participants did not know about the availability of the Midwest Community College. For example, Chela did not know of any academic or recreational spaces off-campus. She only knew of resources available to students at Midwest Community College. I followed up to her response by asking her if she would utilize resources if she knew about them. Chela responded, “Maybe if they were like open like on weekends, which I don't even know if they are. I should probably look into that.” Chela’s low engagement with peers cut her off from obtaining information of different resources available for MCC students off-campus.
Resources

Participants were able to reference a number of resources and programs available to promote their academic success. William shared the peer-tutoring services he utilized for his math course. He revealed:

The Center for Academic Success that was a big help for me especially in math. The teachers [tutors] actually explained it very well. The teacher I had for math I really didn't understand her.

Other participants disclosed their involvement with a Latina/o mentoring program to help increase the persistence rate of Latina/o students. Brenda mentioned:

I was involved with Latina/o Student Organization both years that I was here. My second year I did, well I was, second semester of my first year, and then my second year, I was in the mentoring program, which is what we used to call it, but then it changed to the Latina/o Mentoring Program.

Participants were also able to name faculty and administrators advocating for their needs. Many of the participants attributed Carlos, a professor in the Department of Humanities, as a major reason why they became involved on-campus. Carlos also served as the faculty advisor for the Midwest Community College’s Latina/o Student Organization. Like many of the participants, Brenda described the impact Carlos had on her academic success as well as feeling connected to campus. She revealed:

And here at MCC, a lot of encouragement has come from Latina/o Student Organization. From Maria and Carlos. I have to say the encouragement went to the club as a whole, we were always encouraged "Keep going to school, let's get that graduation rate up amongst us." But, from Carlos also, he's always been such a great motivator. And not just the club,
but to me personally, he's been a great help. I love knowing that he's here to help others, which is wonderful. I think people like him really do make a difference, especially in leading a club like Latina/o Student Organization.

Faculty and administrators at Midwest Community College did more than just advocate for Latina/o students. They disseminated important information about scholarships, curricular requirements, and leadership positions on campus. Maya reflected on how Carlos informed her about the financial incentives of serving as student body president at Midwest Community College. In our conversation, she shared how Carlos gave her information to alleviate her financial woes:

Moises: Okay. Very interesting. So you became involved in student government because you...

Maya: Carlos told me about it.

Moises: Carlos told you about it?

Maya: I'm a very open person because I feel that's the best way people can help you, so right away I met Carlos and told him I'm first-generation college student and I don't really have money for college. I'm coming from a different town, so I might have to pay out-of-district. He told me about student government. He told me that student government for the president they offer a scholarship.

**Fit and Satisfaction at Midwest Community College**

There were two other scale questions that participants were asked to rate from 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest. One of the scale questions asked participants to rate how they felt they fit at Midwest Community College. Based on the average rating (4.56 out of 5), participants perceived themselves to fit strongly at Midwest Community College. A closer examination
between three different levels of engagement revealed that participants with medium and high level of engagement reported a strong fit at MCC. Figure 5.4 provides the average responses for the scale question of fit according to participants’ level of engagement. For participants with low engagement levels, their median rating score fell below that of the overall average of 4.56. Participants with low-level engagement scores often cited an academic fit, but not a social fit. Chela gave a rating of a 4 out of 5 because she connected to the campus through the tutoring center, but she didn’t feel socially connected. Chela disclosed, “Just the whole social part of it.” On the other hand, Martin, another participant with low-level engagement, shared that his high level of academic preparedness did not allow him to feel a strong fit at Midwest Community College compared to his enrollment at Central University. He said, “School, the academic part of it. Like I said, I'm still more programmed towards how the Central University wants their students to be.” Participants with low levels of engagement revealed that their sense of fit at Midwest Community College was below the average of all responses given by participants.

Figure 5.4 The Median Scores for Fit Scale Question According to Participants’ Level of Engagement
Participants with medium and high levels of engagement reported a sense of fit of 4.81 and 4.84, respectively. These participants provided a number of reasons why they felt a strong fit to Midwest Community College. For example, participants underscored MCC’s affordability, small class-size, focus on teaching, welcoming campus climate, student diversity campus resources, peer support, and faculty/staff support as reasons why they attributed a strong sense of fit to MCC. Esperanza, second year student at MCC, rated her fit to campus a 5 out of 5. She shared MCC’s campus diversity as a reason she felt a strong fit to the campus. She commented:

Yeah, I mean it's a very diverse school, so in that sense I feel like I fit in. There's all types of students. There's students who are at the university who are just taking cheaper, easier courses here just to get them out of the way. And then there's other students who, it's so weird...I'm reading this paper that has a lot to do with this. But yeah, I feel like it's a very diverse group and there's all types of people from all types of backgrounds, not just ethnic, but social, like everything. So I feel like I don't stand out, so I fit it, you know what I mean?

Ana underscored her relationships with peers as a major reason why she rated her sense of fit with Midwest Community College a 5 out of 5. She said:

I'd say a five, mainly because I feel like I connected with the people on the campus and I looked forward to coming to school. I already like it but that gave me a little more motivation. Because there were days I just felt like I couldn't go on with it because I was so stressed. But no, I would still come and interactions with other students and all these other clubs, they helped me with the stress, so I mean, I feel like I fit in just fine.

Jorge commented about the support and validation he received from peers and faculty members as leading reason why he felt a strong fit with the campus. He disclosed:
Um peers like the friends I've made. They are all welcoming. I mean I know them. Um I guess the professors that I've interacted with. They think you know I can do it. You know I belong here and this is...you can get your stuff done here.

There were a number of examples participants with medium and high levels of engagement provided to justify their high sense of fit with campus. Participants that reported a rating below a five were asked to explain their reasons as to why they didn’t feel a strong sense of fit. Their responses for not feeling a fit in Midwest Community College were: not being a townie, conservative nature of the town, shy demeanor, and academic intensity. Victor and Emily both were raised in Chicago and moved down to central Illinois for college. They disclosed that being new to the town was a barrier to connect with other students that were raised in the campus town. Emily shared, “Just the not being a townie.” Victor emphasized the conservative nature of the campus town as a reason why he didn’t entirely fit with the campus. He commented,

I'm do not fit in here, because [its] so very conservative. The town, the vast majority are Republicans. Some topics are not my favorite topics. And they'll stand by it. But I mean like, I still like the community, I still love it and enjoy it. I just, the way they are set up politically is just blehhh. I'm not very big into politics.

Maya described her academic preparation and doubt in her academic ability as a reason she didn’t feel like a strong fit at Midwest Community College. She replied, “There's a lot of smart kids, but sometimes I feel like I'm not smart as them. [laughs].”

For the most part, participants were not able to provide an explanation for why they didn’t feel a sense of fit at Midwest Community College. They cited several examples of why they fit at MCC, but couldn’t generate an explanation for why they didn’t fit on campus. For example, Gabriel described, “No I don't. I don't feel like I don't fit here. Yeah.” The next section
will focus on participants’ overall satisfaction with their decision to attend Midwest Community College. The question regarding participants’ satisfaction differs from fit because it focuses on how they decided to enroll at Midwest Community College rather than how they felt as part of the campus community.

**Satisfaction**

When asked to rate their satisfaction with their decision to attend Midwest Community College, participants reported extremely high levels of satisfaction with their enrollment at MCC. Regardless of participants’ levels of engagement, participants viewed their decision to attend MCC in a positive manner. The average score on the satisfaction question was 4.9 out of 5. Participants with high levels of engagement reported a perfect rating of 5 out of 5. Participants with medium and low levels of engagement also reported the same level of satisfaction of 4.83. Figure 5.5 provides a summary of the average rate for participants’ satisfaction with attending Midwest Community College according to their level of engagement. Participants cited a number of reasons why they were satisfied with their decision to attend Midwest Community College. These reasons consisted of affordability, welcoming campus climate, supportive faculty and staff, campus involvement opportunities, campus diversity, small class sizes, and one-on-one interaction with faculty. Ana, a second year student, offered a number of reasons why she was satisfied with her decision to attend Midwest Community College. She said:

Yeah, I really did. Like I said, that one-on-one time with professors, because at U of I students might not get that. So that's pretty tough if you can't communicate with your professor to understand the material, I feel like that is something you need. And it really does prepare you for university once you...attending a community college. Because you know how to approach a professor, and you know what to do, you know how to bond
with other students. So for me, now that I'm at Central State University, I know how to approach my advisors, my professors and I make sure to have that little connection either before or after class, so they know who I am, I know who they are and just, I don't know. To make my presence known.

Ana elaborated on the number of benefits she received by attending Midwest Community College after high school. Ana is a student that demonstrated a high level of engagement throughout her tenure at Midwest Community College. She captured the important skills sets that she was able to cultivate through engagement with peers and staff members. Overall, participants spoke highly of their decision to attend Midwest Community College.

**Figure 5.5 Participants’ Median Score for Satisfaction According to Level of Engagement**

![Bar chart showing satisfaction levels](image)

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I explained the different levels of engagement among participants in this study. There were participants that demonstrated low, medium, and high levels of engagement while at Midwest Community College. Their level of engagement influenced their sense of fit and the value they attributed towards connecting with peers that had similar interests as them. For participants with low levels of engagement, they reported a low sense of fit as well as not
placing much value in connecting with peers. Participants with high engagement levels had the highest level of fit, importance of connecting with others, and satisfaction of attending MCC. Participants with high levels of engagement also described their intricate framework of peer support that exposed them to important information and resources to support their academic success. Participants with high levels of engagement actively sought out resources and opportunities to be leaders on campus. One important finding is that despite participants’ levels of engagement, all reported a high level of satisfaction with attending Midwest Community College.
Chapter 6: Resiliency

The three-interview sequence of this study allowed me to author in-depth and robust individual narratives for every participant. As a result of the richness of the collected data, I was able to produce biographical accounts that give readers an insight to participants’ pre-college, college, and future aspirations. Rather than introducing participants individually, I designed this chapter to focus on the commonalities that fueled their academic success and persistence at Midwest Community College. This approach enabled an exploration of important sources of motivation that participants used to continue along their educational journey to obtain a college degree. A biographical summary of every single participant is located in Appendix B. The focus of this chapter is to spotlight the individual narratives in a manner that captures the tremendous amount of resiliency displayed by all 16 participants. This chapter will focus on three major sources of resiliency—parental influence, exceptionally high aspirations, and trailblazer embodiment. These three elements fueled participants’ determination to overcome a number of challenges they encountered along their journey to obtain a college education.

Parental Influence

Participants in this study referenced a number of ways that their parents played a major role in their early education, especially in the shaping of their educational aspirations. For participants, their parents’ influence on their educational goals was both direct and indirect. They shared that, due to their parents’ educational level and limited English fluency, they were unable to provide them with direct tutoring on homework assignments, especially if the homework assignment was in English. For parents with limited English fluency, they found other creative ways to indirectly shape their children’s early education. These parents would often remind their children of the limited opportunities they experienced in their native country as well
as the numerous hardships they had to endure in order to provide for their family. For example, parents would often ask their sons or daughters for detailed accounts of their school day. This technique of retelling their school day emphasized to participants the value that their parents placed on formal education. Gabriel’s narrative speaks to how retelling his school day to his parents became an important aspect emphasizing the importance of a formal education. For example, Gabriel’s parents work in labor-intensive jobs. His father works at a local restaurant, where he was been able to move up the ranks from dishwasher to cook. His mother worked at a local hotel as a housekeeper and also cooked special Mexican cuisine such as tamales. Both of his parents only attained a minimal level of formal education. They only completed a middle school education. Being denied the opportunity to pursue a college education really has shaped how his parents viewed the significance and value of an education. Gabriel’s mother became a key figure in shaping his educational aspirations. His mother fostered a living environment that emphasized learning. She would often ask Gabriel and his brothers to retell their day at school as well as the subject matter they learned in a detail manner.

There were several other participants that offered detailed accounts of how their parents’ work ethic became a strong source of inspiration to excel academically and overcome the financial and labor intensive hardships that their parents had to endure due to their limited amount of formal educational. For example, Ana was raised in a household of five by a single-mother. Ana’s mother only achieved a ninth grade education, but worked extremely hard to support her four children. Through her work ethic, she inspired Ana to maximize her full potential in the classroom. While growing up, Ana’s mother was emphasized the importance of obtaining a formal education, which was something that she wasn’t able to obtain. Ana’s mom was a single parent that had to raise four children. Ana was surrounded and supported by
extended family that consisted of grandparents, aunts, and uncles. But it did not eliminate her sentiments of feeling different compared to her peers that were being raised in a two parent household. Ana’s mother worked extremely hard to provide for her family. She worked as a migrant worker, cleaned houses, and worked at restaurants. Through her example of hard work, it helped inspire Ana to dedicate herself to learning and setting high educational goals.

Participants frequently attributed their high educational and career aspirations to their parents. Many of the participants observed the long work hours and days that their parents had to devote to their job in order to provide for their families. Participants also commented extensively on how their parents often used themselves as examples of why it was important for their children to attain a college education. Participant also shared how their parents had sacrificed living in their home country in order to provide their children with educational opportunities that did not exist in their country of origin. Jorge’s narrative underscores the role parents played in motivating their children through their deferred educational dreams. His parents’ always emphasized the importance of attaining a college education. They would often use themselves as examples of why Jorge and his siblings need to attain a high level of formal education. Jorge’s father works one full-time and one part-time job at local restaurants. Jorge’s mother also works at a local restaurant with his father. Jorge’s parents constantly remind him of the numerous opportunities available to him that were not present for them in their country of origin.

The powerful accounts of how participants’ parents indirectly and directly shaped their educational trajectory gives insight into why these participants continue to pursue a college education despite the numerous challenges that emerge as they attend Midwest Community College. Participants encountered a number of challenges throughout their time at MCC, but also displayed resolve to overcome these hurdles. One participant, Chela, attributed her motivation to
the birth of her son. Her son has become the primary source of motivation for her. Esperanza also commented on how her parents established a family expectation that all homework had to be complete before playing. Esperanza talked extensively of enormous about the impact both her mother and father had towards shaping her educational aspirations. Both of her parents encouraged all of their children to take advantage of educational opportunities available to them in the United States. Her parents wanted them all to obtain a college education. Esperanza recalled how her father instilled in her a strong work ethic. Her parents were also very involved in their early schooling. The language barrier did prevent her parents from providing them with direct tutoring, but they implemented rules and expectations that all homework needed to be complete every single day. This type of homework expectation underscored the value her parents placed on education.

Of the sixteen participants, twelve (75%) participants disclosed having one or both parents complete less than a high school education. Seven participants (44%) had one or both parents graduate from high school. Of the participants that had one or both parents graduate from high school, only two had one parent that obtained a college degree—Susana and Reyes. Reyes’ mother is currently in a Ph.D. degree program. As for Susana, her mother earned a medical assistant certificate from Midwest Community College. Of the 16 participants, only two reported having a parent that obtained a college degree. There are three participants that were raised in a single-parent household—Ana, Luz, and Pablo. These three participants were not able to provide the educational level of the absent parent so I marked their education level as unknown. Table 6.1 provides a breakdown of the every participants’ parents’ educational level. There are five different possible educational levels consisting of elementary, middle school, high school, high school graduate, and college graduate.
Table 6.1 Parents’ Educational Level by Participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Mother</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chela</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Esperanza</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emily</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jorge</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luz</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maya</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omar</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pablo</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Elementary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reyes</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>Ph.D. student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susana</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>Medical Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victor</td>
<td>High School Graduate</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>High School</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As mentioned above, a majority of participants’ parents attained below a high school level of education. Despite the low level of formal education among parents, participants shared that their parents inspired them to overcome the numerous challenges that a first-generation college student encounters while pursuing a college degree. For example, Luz’s mother would
emphasize the importance of a college education. Luz’s mother constantly underscored the value of obtaining a college education despite not having the information or resources to share with Luz. She also encouraged Luz to pursue a degree in several career paths in medicine and business.

For two participants with a college-educated parent, the trajectory to a college education was always point of emphasis in their household. Both Susana and Reyes had no doubts, concerns, or reservations that a college degree would be the next step after high school. In particular, Susana displayed tremendous academic focus and determination. She graduated in the top 10% of her high school. She also applied and was accepted to several colleges. Her friends always admired her for her academic shrewdness. Moreover, Susana always knew college would be the next chapter in her young life. She was always considered a bright student and determined. Her academic achievements made her a strong candidate for merit-based scholarships. She received the merit-based scholarship for graduating on the top ten percent of graduating class. She also received a private scholarship. For Susana attending college was always the next step after high school. She never had a doubt or reservation about her life after high school. During her senior year, Susana applied to several state universities and in the end elected to attend Midwest Community College because of the financial incentive of having her first two years at MCC paid for.

Reyes also considered college the next step after high school. His mother created a nurturing environment for him to learn and excel academically. Unlike other participants, Reyes had a numerous health complications that inhibited his academic success. Despite his reoccurring health complications, Reyes has remained headstrong on his path to obtain a college education. For Reyes, his mother has been greatest inspiration. She has earned a number of college degrees
and is currently working on completing her Ph.D. She also created a home environment in which a college education was always the next step after high school for Reyes. A college education was never a question or doubt. Reyes always knew that he would attend college due to his low grades he had to start at a community college. He, however, has aspirations of transferring and earning a degree in business administration.

All 16 participants had parents that valued education and more specifically a college degree. Among participants that had parents with low level of formal education, they received an unlimited amount of support and encouragement from their parents. This type of unwavering support became the primary source in shaping participants’ high aspirations. One important distinction, however, is that for both of the participants that reported being a raised in a household of a college educated parent, the path to college was always clear and filled with resources and information necessary to make the transition from high school to college a smooth one. Participants that did not have a college educated parent had to seek out critical information to attain a college education. These participants often cited their peers, counselors, and teachers as their main sources of information. Both of Brenda’s parents frequently emphasized the value of education, but due to only having an elementary education they couldn’t provide her with the resources or information necessary for scholarship or college application process, especially since she is an undocumented immigrant. She had to obtain information on how to apply for college and scholarship as an undocumented student from her counselors. Given that both of her parents did not attain a formal education beyond elementary, they would use themselves as examples of why it was important to pursue a college education. Brenda’s father would constantly remind her of the hardships of working in a factory job. Her parents’ labor intensive employment fueled her academic success. However, she was quite aware that college might have
not been an option for her because of her undocumented status. At a young age, Brenda was aware that she was an undocumented immigrant living in the United States. She had aspirations of pursuing a degree in the health profession, but assumed she wouldn’t be able to go to college because of undocumented status. When she was researching colleges, she found out that many required applicants to submit their social security number, which she did not have. Her dreams of pursuing a college education became a reality when her guidance counselor contacted her and encouraged her to apply to Midwest Community College, which is roughly a 35-mile drive north of her town. The counselor told her that she wouldn’t have to submit information about her residency status. Most importantly, the counselor found that Brenda was eligible to receive a scholarship because of her high academic performance. After her junior year of high school, Brenda had the third highest GPA of her graduating class. She graduated from high school in the top ten percent of her class.

Participants’ parents, irrespective of their educational level, played a central role in shaping their educational and career aspirations. Participants’ resiliency to attain a college education came directly from the inspiration and encouragement they received from seeing their parents’ daily struggles to provide the living necessities for their family. Participants also voiced how their parents shaped their educational goals in both direct and in direct ways. All of the parents attended parent-teacher conferences and often asked their son or daughter to retell their day at school. Other parents’ shared accounts of their deferred educational dreams in order to inspire their children to take advantage of the numerous opportunities available to them in the United States. The next section examines participants’ educational and career aspirations. Moreover, I elaborate on how participants’ high aspirations continuously fueled their will to overcome daily challenges at Midwest Community College.
High Educational and Career Aspirations

The last interview in the three-series protocol focused on exploring participants’ educational and career aspirations. Of the sixteen participants, I completed all three interviews for fifteen participants. I am unable to report on Chela’s aspirations because we were unsuccessful in completing the last interview in the three-interview sequence. We attempted to schedule for over a month, but time conflicts frequently emerged that prevented us from conducting the last interview. The analysis of participants’ aspirations is based on the last interview of participants. Of the fifteen participants, all of them reported having aspirations of obtaining a bachelor’s degree. In addition, all fifteen participants had aspirations of attaining an advanced degree upon earning their bachelor’s degree. Seven participants (47%) revealed their intention to earn a master’s degree. Two participants (13%) disclosed their aspiration of obtaining a law degree. Lastly, six participants (40%) replied that a Ph.D. degree would be their highest level of educational degree obtained. These high educational aspirations resonated deeply with participants. Figure 6.1 provides a visual breakdown of all fifteen participants’ educational aspirations.

Figure 6.1 Participants’ Educational Aspirations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Aspirations</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Master’s</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Juris Doctor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ph.D.</td>
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</table>
Career Aspirations

In addition to high educational aspirations, all fifteen participants expressed a strong desire to pursue distinguished career professions. Omar and Martin mentioned similar career aspirations of becoming a lawyer. Omar has high educational and career aspirations for the future. He plans to transfer to the Central State University to earn a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. After earning his bachelor’s degree, he intends to apply for the law school program at the Central University. He understands that he will need to pass the bar exam in the Midwest. Upon completing his degrees and earning his license to practice law, he sees himself working at foreign consulate in one of the following countries Spain, England or Brazil.

William has plans to become an international sports trainer. He plans to earn an associates degree in kinesiology from Midwest Community College. Upon completing his associates, he hopes to transfer to Central State University’s physical training program. Once he completes his education at CSU, William is interested in obtaining a master’s degree in physical therapy. His career goal is to become a physical trainer on a global scale. He envisions himself working in Europe for the European soccer league.

Victor revealed aspirations to obtain a doctorate in business administration. Ana plans on working for a federal government at an international level after obtaining her Ph.D. in criminal justice. Brenda and Jorge shared similar interest in becoming nurse practitioners. Brenda has high academic and career aspirations. She plans to obtain a bachelor’s of science in nursing. After earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing, she is very much interested in seeking a master’s in nursing. Her ultimate career goal is to become a nurse practitioner, which is a career path she learned about while completing her Certified Nursing Assistant program during high school.
Upon transferring and earning her bachelor’s degree in business administration, Luz would like to obtain a master’s degree as well. Reyes has been motivated by his mother’s current enrollment in a Ph.D. program that he also plans to enroll in a Ph.D. program in business administration.

In our last interview, Reyes revealed exceptionally high educational and career aspirations. He plans on obtaining a Ph.D. degree in business administration. He is inspired by his mother’s and uncle’s paths of earning a Ph.D. Reyes has a dream of opening up a business in Chicago. He feels that he has the resources and support from his parents to obtain his goals. He, however, has yet to share his educational and career goals with his advisors. His focus so far has been on obtaining an associates degree and transferring to college. Reyes also disclosed that he no longer plans only apply to Central University. He declared a plan to broaden his application process to other colleges and universities in Illinois.

Esperanza began to formulate a career path towards becoming a family therapist. Gabriel is passionate becoming a teacher. During our conversation, Gabriel began to learn about the different career paths for educators at both the elementary and college-level. With a fuller understanding of career and degree options, he began to formulate a desire to pursue a path beyond one of just being an elementary teacher. Gabriel came to discover the possibilities beyond the ones he originally had in mind. During our conversation, we also talked about the numerous possibilities available to those that seek an advanced degree. Gabriel was unsure of the educational trajectory available to college students, so we devoted a segment of our last interview to discussing the different levels of educational degrees as well as possible career and employment opportunities for college students. In particular, we talked about the numerous career paths for people that obtain their doctoral degree in education. This became a very intriguing aspect of the conversation because, for the first time, Gabriel was able to visualize the
enormous platform he would be able to attain if he continued his educational trajectory past a bachelor’s degree. In our conversation, Gabriel found that other Latinas/os have had the opportunity to obtain an advanced degree and now are professors teaching undergraduate students. Gabriel’s eyes lit up at the possibilities. With a clearer understanding of the educational trajectory of college students, Gabriel articulated a desire to teach at an elementary school, but he also saw himself pursuing a doctoral degree, so he could be a professor at a college or university. Pablo is drawn to the mechanic profession but has aspirations of becoming an automotive engineer that is responsible for designing long lasting and efficient automobiles. He plans on completing his associate’s degree and transferring to a program with a focus on auto technician engineering. Lastly, Susana learned about her career profession at a very young age through a job shadowing opportunity she had while a senior in high school. She learned about a career profession in nurse anesthesia. She was offered the opportunity to observe surgery procedure in the operating room, which ultimately cemented her path towards earning a Ph.D. in nurse anesthesia.

Susana reported high academic and professional aspirations. She plans on completing her earning her bachelor’s of science in nursing at Central State University. Upon completing her bachelor’s degree, she intends to work at a hospital for a couple of years. After obtaining professional experience, Susana will be applying for a Ph.D. in a nurse anesthesia program in Southern Illinois. She learned about the Ph.D. program in nurse anesthesia while a senior in high school. She was asked to invite a guest speaker to class to talk about her career field interest, so she invited a nurse anesthetist to talk to her class. The nurse anesthetist ended up inviting Susana to a job shadow opportunity. During this job shadow, Susana was able to observe in the operating room a medical procedure as well as the role of the nurse anesthetist. She became
hooked in the medical field and pursuing an advanced degree in nurse anesthesia. After her job shadow experience, Susana began to research requirements to earn a Ph.D. in nurse anesthesia. She also contacted colleges that offered the advanced degree she was interested in pursuing.

Participants’ high educational and career aspirations became a strong source in fueling their resiliency. For many of the participants, these aspirations were shared among their loved ones and faculty members.

For a small number of participants, they felt these aspirations were too ambitious and would attract crushing criticism from their peers or staff members. For example, Victor revealed that his aspiration to obtain a doctor degree would not be supported by his girlfriend. Our conversation went as follows:

Moises: Have you talked to advisors, faculty, mentors, about pursuing a PhD, or is this kind of like the first time that you've talked...

Victor: This is the first time I've openly said it. I'm never going to tell my girlfriend about it.

Moises: Really?

Victor: Really. She firmly believes that she thinks I'm going to just stop at my bachelor's. I just didn't want to tell no one, to be honest. I don't want people to start saying, "first, worry about your master's. First worry about your bachelor's, then worry about your PhD." But I kind of what to think about it all, because if I don't, if I don't think about it, it's going to float away.

Victor communicated the importance of having high educational aspirations drive his future regardless of the criticism or critique it would draw from those around him. If he did not formulate these high aspirations, he would simply not even consider or capitalize on the
numerous possibilities available to him. Esperanza is another participant that has yet to share her career and educational aspirations with her husband because of the overwhelming pressure she would receive to pursue her aspirations. Her husband is a doctoral student in the STEM field at Central University. Our conversation went as follows:

Moises: Have you talked to an advisor, faculty, or mentor, or maybe even your husband about your plans to pursue a bachelor's in psychology?

Esperanza: Yes I have. I haven't...you are the only person that I told about considering grad school though.

Moises: Really?

Esperanza: Yeah [laughs].

Moises: You haven't told him about grad school?

Esperanza: No.

Moises: Why is that?

Esperanza: Because then he's gonna really really push me to do it. And if it's something that I don't want to do then you know what I mean.

Among the participants, there were varying degrees of comfort with sharing their career and educational aspirations with those around them. For a majority of participants, their aspirations were a rallying cry of the numerous possibilities that they could achieve. For a small number of participants, they were undisclosed pieces of information that they kept to themselves because of fear of criticism or exceeding pressures to attain them.

Regardless of their comfort level with disclosing their educational and career aspirations, all fifteen participants had high aspirations that became their source of inspiration to overcome challenges. For example, Omar continues to lack confidence in his English fluency, but revealed
that his dreams of becoming an immigration lawyer became motivational factor in overcoming his insecurities with the English language. He shared,

In the future, finish my profession, study to be an immigration lawyer. And I would like to, well my plan is, after finishing that, trying to work in a foreign consulate. Could be. Right now my plans are three countries that I would like to go to: Brazil, London, England or Spain. In those three countries I would like to develop my profession as an immigration lawyer, my career. So. Right now, it's pretty long, but after I'm ready, I would like to go to a consulate and be able to help Latino people that are in those countries. That's what I'm thinking about now.

**Undocumented Students’ Aspirations**

These high aspirations also resonated profoundly among five participants that reported their status as undocumented immigrants. Despite the numerous restrictions imposed upon them, they revealed exceptionally high educational and career aspirations. The major difference between the five undocumented students and the other ten participants was that these participants were cognizant of the number of legal restrictions imposed on their educational and career aspirations. For example, Brenda reported aspirations to obtain a master’s degree in nursing, but is currently working at a factory because she is unable to apply to a nursing program that awards a bachelor’s of science in nursing. Her parents are in the process of securing residency for Brenda, but they are unsure when her residency application will be accepted. In the meantime, Brenda plans to save up money for the cost of her nursing program. When asked to reflect on her having to put her dreams on hold, she responded:

I think it's just because I have dealt with it [undocumented] my whole life like I don't know I've been not shut down, but I've been restricted I guess. Like so many times like when I
turned sixteen you know I was ready for my driver's license. My parents were planning on buying me a car and then it just didn't happen. So like so many times it's happened, but I just have not allowed it to like upset me anymore. And when I was little I figured you know this is going to be my life. The rest of my life is going to be like that, but fortunately my parents have now become legal and you know they have petitioned for me and my brother, so things are getting better. I know it will get better eventually so I just decide to be positive [laughs]. Rather than be upset cause doing that it's not going to do anything so might as well enjoy the time I have off. And be thankful that I have time off. Some people go directly to school after community college so I guess I'm just thankful that...not that I want to have time off, but I guess you know be thankful that I do get it.

Brenda has managed to maintain a positive outlook in life and continues to see her aspirations as attainable despite having to delay her nursing program to work at a local factory. She plans on saving money while she waits for her residency petition gets approved. Luz is another undocumented student with high aspirations in the face of seemingly insurmountable restrictions. She has educational goals of attaining a master’s degree in business administration. She has dreams of working in the entertainment industry. Luz also powerfully revealed how her undocumented status is a constant reminder of limits imposed on her career and educational goals. Luz, however, refuses to concede to these constraints. Luz continues to push beyond these limits and obtain her educational and career goals. In her young life, Luz has already earned a degree in cosmetology and is on the verge of transferring to a four-year university. When asked to offer other undocumented status words of advice, she said, “That if they really want to succeed um they have the motivation and to go on and I mean like fight for your dreams. Fight for what you want and don't give up. Like it's going to be a rough fight you can say, but it's
possible. Don't give up. Definitely don't give up.” Luz is poised to offer this advice because she has lived it. Luz continues to fight and refuse to give up despite the constant reminder that she is undocumented and ineligible to receive federal aid or obtain specific student support services like the Federal TRIO program.

These five participants disclosed high aspirations similar to those that were either born in the United States or had obtained U.S. residency status. The distinction, however, was that these five participants were keenly aware of the limitations imposed on their educational and career aspirations. These five participants had to maneuver around these restrictions in order to obtain their goals. Regardless of their residency status, all fifteen participants used their high aspirations to fuel their drive to succeed. Most importantly, these participants utilized their aspirations to embark on this journey as trailblazer for their family, peers, and community.

**Trailblazer Embodiment**

All participants emphasized a concept of trailblazer persona. Trailblazer embodiment refers to a number of critical factors that participants have shared that serve as motivational source in fueling their educational and career aspirations. Participants utilized the uniqueness of their lives to inspire their futures. Figure 6.2 provides a breakdown of the six factors that participants revealed as important in attaining a college education. The six factors fueling participants’ trailblazer persona consisted of first-generation college student, disability, first-generation professional, older sibling, Latina/o identity, and Latina/o stereotypes.
Out of the 15 fifteen participants, 13 were the first in their family to be pursue a college degree. Of the thirteen participants that did not have parents with a college education, six of them had parents that only attained an elementary or middle school education. For these 13 participants, their parents’ deferred college dreams became their own. Gabriel shared the incredible responsibility of being the first in his family to attend college. Gabriel shared the awesome responsibility of being the first in the family to attend college in his family. All of his family members look up to him and see him as an important role model. Despite the added pressure of being a trailblazer, he has been able to handle the responsibility in a very appropriate manner. According to Gabriel, he just goes with the responsibility of being the first in his family to graduate high school and attending college.

Reyes is the only participant that was not able-bodied. He shared the numerous surgeries he had to endure to manage his medical condition of spina bifida. He has had to undergo forty-nine surgeries in his relatively young life. He still continues to experience health setbacks, but he...
has remained steadfast in his determination to obtain a college education. Despite his medical condition, Reyes’ parents constantly encouraged him to live an active life. For example, Reyes joined the Boys Scouts of America while in elementary and earned the highest honor in the organization—Eagle Scout. His parents would often remind Reyes that he needed to be a positive role model for the community and show others that despite his medical condition, he could live an active lifestyle. Reyes was involved heavily with the community. He took part in several community service events. His passion, however, has been wheelchair basketball.

Luz is an only child raised in a single-parent household. While she was growing up she witnessed many of her peers drop out of high school and become teen parents. The stereotypes around Latinas/os teen pregnancy and high school drop out became major source of motivation for her college education. Luz made a commitment to attend college and rise above the stereotypical assumptions attributed to Latina/o students. Luz has always been inspired and encouraged by her mother as well as the limiting circumstances of their lives. The hardship that Luz’s mother encountered ignited her passion to obtain a college education. Luz has also been influenced by the number of teen pregnancies and high school dropouts she witnessed while living in North Carolina. Luz strongly believes that a college education would be her way out of the cycle of teen pregnancy and poverty amongst her peers.

Omar spoke highly about his Latina/o identity and the need to provide critical services for Latinas/os. In our interview, Omar directed attention to the financial and political reasons why Latinas/os were forced to migrate out of their home country. Omar also discussed the importance of understanding the displacement of Latina/o families. His strong sense of identity became his driving force in creating a better understanding of Latinas/os as well as to serving as their advocates at the local, national, and global scale. He shared with me:
Well, like I said before, I am a person that when I see, I always have to change it for the better. I have seen a lot of treatment of us all of us, Latinos, as they treat us differently because of piece of paper. And so, I had an opportunity that I would like to change all that. Make everything different. So that no one is suffering for any reason. Because Latinos are in all these different countries for different reasons and it's not their fault that our governments in our countries are corrupt and not offer good opportunities for the families. That's a reason why we're here and it’s not because of another reason. And everything else, I've seen that most people try to take advantage, but they are just trying to improve their situation.

Another important factor in shaping participants’ trailblazer embodiment was their fascination of becoming the first in their family to become a professional. Instead of working in a factory or restaurant, participants revealed the symbolic significance of obtaining a career. For example, Victor wanted to be the first in his family and community to earn a Ph.D. degree. When asked why he was interested in a Ph.D. he simply replied that he wanted to set the educational bar high for his family. He wanted the opportunity to have a title of doctor. He wanted to show others that Latinas/os could also be professionals with high level of education. Victor has the desire and will to pursue his dreams.

Participants also discussed the importance of pursuing a career path that would help the Latina/o community. Emily’s narrative speaks to attaining a profession to help other Latinas/os. Emily’s goddaughter, who has to see a speech pathologist, has inspired her to pursue a profession in speech pathology. She also plans to pursue a master’s degree after working in a government agency, which provides important assistance to low-income families, especially Latina/o families. She has the passion to help others in the community.
Five participants were the oldest of all their siblings. Because of their birth order, they became the role model for their younger siblings. This often propelled them to do well academically and establish a high benchmark for their younger siblings to attain. These participants were also asked to assume a number of responsibilities at a young age. For example, Gabriel was often asked to be the family interpreter and chauffeur. His narrative discloses the following, “He also shoulders some family responsibilities such as driving his younger brother to high school and being the family translator.” Being the first to attend college, Victor was responsible for assisting his younger sister during her college application process. He shared, “Yeah, she had her orientation. I took her, I did everything for her, helped her with FASFA, I helped her with scheduling and everything.”

Participants nurtured this trailblazer mentality and it drove them to overcome a number of challenges such as financial, academic, and social. For the most part these participants were driven by the limiting circumstance that their parents were raised in. Their parents would often remind them of the sacrifices and hardships they had to endure in order to provide the necessities to their family. Participants did not refer to their parents struggle in shame rather they used their parents’ experience of deferred dreams as motivation to fulfill their own. For many of the participants, they had an opportunity to be the first in their family to attain a college education and Midwest Community College became their gateway to achieve their educational and career goals.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the resiliency of fifteen participants using the individual personal narratives drawn from their responses. Based on the analysis of the final interview, I was able to conceptualize three major sources to their resiliency—parental influence, high
educational and career aspirations, and trailblazer embodiment. This chapter focused on how participants were able to draw inspiration from multiple sources in order to overcome a number of challenges they encountered on their journey to attain a college education. Despite many parents not having a college education, they were relentless in their campaign to emphasize the importance and value of a college education. These parents were a major source of inspiration of participants to pursue a college education. Participants also discussed how their aspirations became a vital element in ensuring that both unexpected and expected challenges did not paralyze their journey to future. Lastly, participants disclosed a number of factors that nurture this sense of this trailblazer mentally. These participants have been successful because they continue to enroll at Midwest Community College and work towards their aspirations.
Chapter 7: Discussion and Recommendations

The steady increase of Latina/o student enrollment at community college in the Midwest warrants further exploration from researchers especially given that their persistence rate is the lowest among other racial and ethnic groups. For example, Latina/o student persistence rate at Midwest Community College is the lowest in comparison to other racial/ethnic groups. In the fall 2014, the next-term persistence of first-time Latina/o students was roughly 40%. In comparison, the next-term persistence of all first-term students was 55.6%. Based on institutional data, Latina/o students’ persistence rate historically hovers around 35% at Midwest Community College. To understand the numerous factors and challenges inhibiting Latina/o persistence and success, this study explored the experience of Latina/o students that have persisted and continue to enroll at Midwest Community College. I was also able to document the various challenges that these 16 Latina/o students encountered as they attempt obtain a college education. Most importantly, I was able to capture the different forms of resiliency that these participants employed to overcome their academic, personal, and financial constraints. The purpose of this research study was to conduct a case study at a community college that has experienced a steady increase of Latina/o students and explore the different types of challenges that these students experience while at the community college. Given the three-series interview protocol of this study, I was able to explore critical intra-group differences that directly influenced the level of engagement for all 16 participants. In this chapter, I revisit Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success as well as offer how participants’ intra-group differences help extend the conceptualization of his framework to consider how students’ levels of engagement impacts participants’ access to important peer-networks and resources. In this final chapter, I will be revisiting this case study. I also offer a brief summary of findings and its theoretical implications.
Lastly, I will ground recommendations for policy and practice as well as areas for future research.

**Revisiting the Study**

To better understand the community college experience of Latina/o students, I conducted a case study of a community college in the Midwest. The central components of this case study were the three in-depth interviews with 16 participants. Through these three-series interviews, I aimed to establish a strong and vibrant rapport with all participants. On several occasions, the last interview became one of the most profound and revealing exchanges between the participant and I. For example, Maya and Luz both disclosed their undocumented status during the last interview segment. Martin also talked extensively about his feelings of resentment of having to forgo pursuing his own career interests and passions in order to help out the family store. The interview protocol provided the opportunity for participants to feel comfortable sharing their personal life with me. All of the participants had never been asked to share their stories to others so they considered this process very foreign. Some of them even assumed that their life was not worth the attention because they were still actively pursuing their career and academic goals. I found myself assuring them that their narratives had tremendous potential and significance especially because they were part a small percentage of Latina/o students that continue to persist at Midwest Community College. In the fall of 2012, 39.6% of Latina/o students persisted to the fall of 2013. The three-interview series generated robust and rich data based on the central research questions of this study, which consisted of the following:

1. What are the challenges that Latina/o students encounter while at a community college?
2. What type of knowledge do Latina/o students acquire to overcome the existing barriers to their academic success?

3. What actions are Latina/o students taking to overcome barriers to their academic success?

My research questions emerged from significant exploration of the existing literature of Latina/o students in higher education as well as enrollment trends of Latina/o students in post-secondary education. In Chapter One, I provided the demographic context in which Latinas/os have become the largest minority racial group in the United States. I also discussed how the rapid growth of Latinas/os has impacted all segments of education, which has generated an explosion of Latina/o enrollment from K-12 to higher education. With respect to higher education, Latina/o enrollment growth has been primarily centralized at the community college level—almost 60% of Latina/o students are enrolled in community college. Since Latina/o enrollment is primarily at the community college, I wanted to examine Latina/o students’ educational experiences at a two-year institution. In Chapter Two, I discussed how the literature on Latina/o students framed my research interest as well as research questions. I also explored the brief historical account of the formation of the community college in the United States and in the state of Illinois. Most importantly, I showcased common explanations given to capture the educational failure of Latina/o students. Lastly, I elaborated on Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success and how it helped conceptualize the framing of this case study among students that have persisted, as well as the actions they have employed to overcome challenges that have emerged throughout their tenure at Midwest Community College.

In Chapter Three, I provided the theoretical framework and methodology guiding this case study of 16 Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. I explained the sources of
data used to address the research questions outlined at the start of the investigation. In the first finding chapter, I discussed participants’ responses to the central research question of this case study, which was to document the challenges that Latina/o students encounter while at Midwest West Community. Participants highlighted a number of challenges including: financial barriers, time constraints, and negotiating multiple responsibilities. There were also important intra-Latina/o differences among participants that commute, new arrivals to the area, and townies. In Chapter Five, I discussed how participants’ level of engagement impacted their access to critical information and resources. Participants with high level of engagement also occupied leadership roles both on- and off-campus. Chapter Six offered insight into the different forms of resiliency that have propelled these participants to persist despite the numerous challenges that emerged while attending Midwest Community College.

**Summary of Findings**

The central research question of this case study was to explore the challenges that 16 Latina/o students encountered while pursuing their post-secondary education at Midwest Community College. Based on participants’ responses, there were several challenges that emerged during their tenure at Midwest Community College. An important caveat, however, was that the level of intensity of these challenges varied considerably among participants that were townies, new arrivals, and commuter students. These intra-group differences have yet to be fully explored by researchers. The existing literature, especially the work of Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success has focused on establishing common challenges among participants. The intensity levels of challenges have not yet been fully considered. The 16 participants disclosed several challenges such as financial aid, time management, and negotiating multiple responsibilities. The impact level of these challenges varied depending on the participants’ living
arrangements. There were participants that were new to the campus town. There were also participants that lived in the surrounding towns and decided to commute to Midwest Community College. Lastly, there were students that were raised in the town where Midwest Community College is situated, which I refer to as townies. Within these three different groups, their understanding of off- and on-campus resources varied. They also articulated engagement with the campus in very different ways.

My second research question focused on documenting participants’ access to information and resources necessary to overcome the number of challenges that emerged while pursuing an education at Midwest Community College. Participants’ levels of engagement at Midwest Community College significantly influenced how much access they had to information and resources. Based on participants’ responses, there were three different levels of engagement consisting of low, medium, and high. Participants with medium and high levels of engagement established a strong network of support that enabled them to access critical information and resources necessary to overcome emerging challenges. In addition to access to resources and information, participants’ levels of engagement also shaped their sense of the fit at Midwest Community College as well as the value they attributed to connecting with their peers. The only scale question that was not directly affected by participants’ level of engagement was their level of satisfaction of enrolling at Midwest Community College. All 16 participants reported a high level of satisfaction with attending Midwest Community College.

The final research question explored the different forms of resiliency that participants employed to overcome the wide range of challenges that emerged while attending Midwest Community College. Based on the personal narratives I created for every participant, I was able to draw some common sources of inspiration that propelled these Latina/o students to rise above
the challenges they encountered. A common characteristic among all participants was their high aspirations. All participants had aspirations of transferring to a four-year institution and obtaining a bachelor’s degree. Another large segment of participants had aspirations of obtaining an advanced degree. Participants’ high aspirations reinforce previous scholarship documenting the high aspirations of Latina/o student at two-year institutions (Sanchez, 2012). These participants also cited several others sources of inspiration that encouraged them to overcome a number of challenges as they surfaced. Participants identified parental influence and a trailblazer persona as forms of resiliency they used to push through their academic challenges. Many participants reported that their parents only obtained a minimal level of formal education, but they cherished and promoted the value of a college education. For many participants, their parents’ value of a college education became their motivation to finally achieve an educational feat beyond their families’ grasp. Lastly, participants also disclosed a number of factors that fueled their sense of a trailblazer persona, which consisted of combating Latina/o stereotypes, being a first-generation college student, being an older sibling, Latina/o identity, disability, and their desire to be a first-generation professional. These participants continue to enroll at Midwest Community College and are actively pursuing their aspirations. More importantly, these participants articulated a variety of reasons why they continue to persist despite many of their Latina/o peers dropping or stopping out of Midwest Community College. Many of these participants wanted to fulfill their family dream of being the first in their family to obtain a college degree.

**Theoretical Implications: Revisiting Padilla’s EMSS**

The theoretical framework that guided this case study was Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success (EMSS). EMSS is a theoretical model that incorporates a set of
concepts and relationships that focuses primarily on the academic success of students. This framework allows the researcher to develop a local student success models (LSSMs) based on the observations and data collected, which can be used to gather insight on how to promote academic student success in educational institutions. Padilla writes,

The EMSS then can be used to develop *local student success models* (LSSMs) that are based on empirical observations at a particular school or campus…The LSSMs in turn can be used to drive implementation models to promote student success on a particular campus. (p. 8)

The unique contribution of Padilla’s theoretical framework is its focus on documenting the experiences as well as the responses of Latina/o students that have persisted at a two-year institution. Padilla’s EMSS consists of three important parameters. The first one is that barriers to success exist at an educational institution. The second is that knowledge in both heuristic and academic forms will need to be acquired in order to attain success. Lastly, students must take action using their accumulated knowledge to overcome barriers to their success. These three parameters are essential in the development of a local student success model, which represents a modified version of EMSS that reflects the students’ experience at a particular institution.

Based on Padilla’s theoretical framework, I was able to produce a local student success model based on the 16 Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. These 16 participants fit the criteria of the theoretical framework because they continue to persist in their efforts to obtain a college education while at Midwest Community College. These 16 participants, however, revealed intra-group differences that were not fully captured by Padilla’s (2009) theoretical framework. Padilla’s EMSS offers a strong starting point in which to explore the challenges as well as the ways that Latina/o students obtain information to overcome challenges.
His framework, however, was unable to sufficiently capture the uniqueness of participants or how their low levels of engagement influenced their access to resources as well as their resiliency. Participants’ responses generated a theme of intra-group differences based on their status of being new to the campus town, commuter, or townie. Among these three different groups, they communicated a varying degree of intensity to similar challenges. For example, Latina/o students that were new arrivals or townies voiced strong concerns that the limited availability of the Midwest Community College’s library hours often inhibited their ability to study late in the evenings because of this academic space restriction many identified alternatives to studying off campus. Participants that commuted to Midwest Community College did not cite the limited availability of MCC’s library as a critical impediment in their academic success. Another important distinction between participants was their level of peer networking. For participants with medium and high levels of engagement, they were readily able to access important information and resources so they could maximize their full potential as students at Midwest Community College. In Figure 7.1, I offer a modified version of Padilla’s (2009) EMSS, which provides insight into the different elements that fueled the persistence of participants in this study. These 16 participants were successful because they were able to navigate a variety of challenges, obtain access to critical information, employ different levels of engagement, and exercise a high level of resiliency despite the numerous setbacks that emerged throughout their college experience. This theoretical reorientation moves away from viewing the experience of Latina/o students in a procedural or linear manner. These 16 participants communicated a constantly evolving process of engagement with the college, peers, faculty, and community. Some participants were minimally involved, but still found opportunities to be successful. Participants with high level of engagement were also academically successful as well,
but were very much connected with other non-academic resources that enabled them to maximize their educational experience and become vital leaders off- and on-campus.

**Figure 7.1 Latina/o Students’ Intra-group Differences Visual**

Based on the three-interview format of this case study, I was able to explore in depth all 16 participants’ prior experiences as well as the level of impact emerging challenges had on participants. Not all 16 participants experienced challenges at the same level of intensity. This dissertation extends existing literature by devoting attention to the intra-Latina/o differences that inform administrators and researchers on the importance and value of viewing the college experience of Latina/o students in a holistic and complex manner. Participants reported the impact of challenges with varying degrees of influence. Their access to information and resources also varied depending on how engaged participants were at Midwest Community College. For those that expressed a high level of engagement, they viewed peer networks as an essential element in ensuring their success, not only at Midwest Community College, but their
future academic and professional aspirations. Participants with high engagement also expressed the importance of being leaders both on- and off-campus. Participants expressed similar challenges, but the level of intensity varied significantly. These 16 participants offer us insight into the importance of also exploring intra-group differences when examining the experiences of Latina/o students at a community college.

**The Role of Cultural Capital**

Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen (2012) employed a social network approach to understand the patterns of Latina/o students’ social interaction at three different time periods—before college, during the first-year of college, and future career planning. Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen refer to these moments in the college experience as getting in (entire precollege process), fitting in (process of adjusting to college), and moving on (developing professional and career interests). Based on data collected from 261 Latina/o first-year students at a large selective university in the Southwest, Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen found that participants were encouraged to attend college and employed their social networks to obtain access to a university, but once enrolled at the university they did not have access to the resources or social networks to begin to develop their professional or career interests. These participants were not preparing themselves to “move on.” Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen write, “Latino students in this sample had little access to rich sources of information to develop their future career plans” (p. 192). The authors do provide insight into how educators and researchers can develop the “moving on” aspect of Latina/o students. Rios-Aguilar and Deil-Amen state:

In order to facilitate more postsecondary and occupational success, educators should aspire to assisting Latino students in making their trajectory through college more intentional. And acknowledging and capitalizing on the strong family, community, and
peer ties on which Latina/o students already rely for other support may be a viable option for translating and advancing career-relevant information and planning. (192)

The 16 Latina/o students in this case study offer insight into the value and importance of cultivating an environment that intentionally fosters interaction and engagement between faculty, administrators, and students. These participants had exceptionally high career and educational aspirations. A majority of these participants connected with faculty members and were involved in student organizations that encouraged them to see beyond their immediate academic needs. Many of these participants acquired information and resources that allowed them to maximize their full potential as college students at Midwest Community College. Most importantly, these participants utilized non-traditional forms of capital to fuel their resiliency and determination such as family, being the first in their family to receive a college degree, and serving as role models for their family and community. Yosso (2005) refers to these non-traditional forms of capital as cultural wealth. The 16 participants in this study exercised all different forms of cultural wealth along their journey to obtain a college education.

**Debunking Myths of Latina/o Students in Community Colleges**

There are many myths surrounding Latina/o students at a community college. A prevalent myth is that Latina/o students enroll at a community college because of being academically underprepared. Based on the responses given from the 16 participants, an overwhelming reason why they began their educational experience at Midwest Community College was due to affordability. This study also included three Latina/o students that transferred from a selective four-year institution to Midwest Community College for either a personal or financial reason. For example, Martin was enrolled at Central University, but decided to transfer to Midwest Community to save money. He shared, “I’m going to go to Midwest Community College for a
semester, save some money. Figure some things out.” Another reverse transfer student, Emily, shared that her decision to enroll at Midwest Community College was due to her dissatisfaction with attending an elite private university. She commented:

I wasn't comfortable there. I didn't feel like I was part of the university. I just felt like I was going to a class and coming out and going home. It was really hard for me to make friends, too. And it's hard to be home a lot now and stuff.

Among the participants that enrolled directly from high school to Midwest Community College, their attraction to community college was attributed primarily on affordability as well as proximity to a large four-year university. Only three participants cited low grades as a reason they started their college experience at Midwest Community College. Jorge explains, “For me this was my only option. Eastern State University was probably going to be another one, but then grades played a factor in me going there.” There were three participants that received an academic scholarship because they graduated in the top ten percent of their high school senior class. The accounts shared by these 16 participants challenge the notion that Latinas/os attending community college are not academically prepared or competitive to be admitted to a selective four-year university.

A second myth that these 16 participants debunk is that Latina/o students at a community college have low educational and career aspirations. All 16 participants revealed high educational and career aspirations. A total of seven participants communicated their interest in obtaining a master’s degree. Two participants disclosed enrolling in law school after their undergraduate degree. Lastly, six participants shared pursuing a Ph.D. after earning their bachelor’s degree. Since the age of four, Maya has been interested in becoming a medical doctor. She disclosed:
Well I've been wanting to be a doctor ever since I was like 4 years old. And that's just what it takes to become a doctor. Besides that I like education. I like to learn. I feel like education is the best weapon against a lot of things in the world. I feel like if more people were educated we would be better off. And I want to pass it forward onto other people.

These 16 participants were not simply interested in obtaining an associates or a certificate from Midwest Community College. They had much higher aspirations. They saw a future well beyond the walls of their community college. These 16 participants communicated a bright and ambition “moving on” phase after their time at Midwest Community College. The literature of community college also refers to the phenomenon of cooling off (Clark, 1960), but these participants utilized their peers, faculty, and student organizations to warm up their academic and career aspirations.

**Undocumented Status Revisited**

A whole chapter can be devoted to the impact of immigration status on both undocumented participants as well as participants that had family members that were undocumented. Despite the numerous restrictions imposed on the undocumented participants, they expressed a strong account of resiliency and determination. Participants that identified as undocumented immigrant did not want others to view them with pity, they wanted their stories to serve as a motivation that despite their situation they were still able to accomplish incredible feats. One of those participants is Maya. Maya communicated her dream to become a medical doctor, but she was also cognizant of the long journey she will need to embark upon to achieve her goal. In several occasions, she had to overcome racism and discrimination because of her immigration status, but rather than give up in defeat she rose to the occasion. She shared:

I don't want to be felt or I don't want people to feel sorry for me. I don't want to feel or I don't want other people to feel like I don't deserve to get an American education or
however they want to put it. But I do think that the fact that I am a DACA student has made me who I am today.

Luz is another undocumented student that continued to push beyond the restrictions imposed on her because of immigration status. Luz remarked:

Sometimes I'm just like reserved about that topic. I think it used to be like where I didn't want to mention that because I don't know what would happen and stuff like that. And now I'm like it shouldn't matter like I'm a person like anyone else. My status isn't or doesn't define my goals. It doesn't define my dreams or you know um. But then again it defines if I make it or don’t.

Brenda is another undocumented student with aspirations of becoming a nurse practitioner. Upon earning her associates degree from Midwest Community College, she was forced to put her career aspirations on hold because she did not have required documentation to secure admissions to pursue a bachelor’s of science in nursing. Despite the limitations, Brenda shared why she continued to remain positive. She said:

And I think that's something cause I don't...I'm sure I probably mentioned it throughout the interviews, but I always thought I'm not going to college. There's no way I don't have a social security number. I don't have the money. And like I don't know where these things just come like I got that scholarship that paid for my tuition. DACA happened. And I thought these things would never happen so I mean things just happen that you just don't have an answer for so I pray that these things happen to other people because it's just not fair. Because essentially we are just innocent people trying to do good things like go to school and you know better the country. It's not like we're are smuggling drugs or I guess some people do do that.
The narratives of the undocumented immigrants in this study challenge Ogbu’s (2008) notion of oppositional culture because. Instead of giving up all hope and withdrawing from the educational system, these undocumented students used their limited circumstances as a source of motivation and inspiration. Moreover they have used their immigration status to maximize the educational opportunities available to them.

**Recommendations for Policy and Practice**

Latina/o enrollment in the state of Illinois has experienced the largest percentage of change out of all other ethnic and racial groups. Over the past twelve years, Latina/o fall enrollment at community college in Illinois has increased from 55,222 in fall 2000 to 66,702 in the fall of 2012—a percentage change of 30%. Latina/o enrollment at community college only trails that of White enrollment. While Latina/o enrollment has reached an all-time high, White and Asian enrollment has been on the decline. At Midwest Community College, Latina/o enrollment has increased from 235 students in the fall of 1999 to 550 in the fall of 2014. Over the past 15 years, Latina/o enrollment has changed almost 134%. Latina/o enrollment at community colleges will continue to increase in the near future both in the Midwest and across the nation.

This study helps extend the existing literature of Latina/o students by focusing on an institution that has seen a steady increase of Latina/o student enrollment. The 16 participants in this case study offer important insights into the numerous challenges that they encounter while attending Midwest Community College. One of the major concerns for participants was the financial cost of attending a community college. A majority of participants elected to attend Midwest Community College because of its affordability, but they still expressed concerns over financial constraints. Participants that did not express concerns over their financial situation had secured a merit-based or underrepresented student scholarship that paid for the tuition costs of their first
two-years at Midwest Community College. Participants also discussed the welcoming environment created by both administrators and faculty at Midwest Community College. There were some participants that highlighted racially charged incidents off campus and around campus town. Future research will need to explore how off-campus incidents of racism and discrimination impact student success.

In the following section, I provide a list of recommendations for faculty, administrators, parents, and incoming Latina/o students. These recommendations were developed from participants’ responses to questions on how to improve the learning environment, academic, leadership, and advising experiences of Latina/o students. Participants were also asked to provide words of encouragement for incoming Latina/o students at Midwest Community College.

**Faculty**

- Participants spoke highly of faculty members at Midwest Community College. They viewed faculty as both approachable and willing to help students. Faculty members need to maintain their high level of visibility and approachability. Participants were extremely pleased to be able to utilize multiple ways to contact instructors such as text messaging. Faculty members need to continue to maximize technology to engage students.

- Participants emphasized the importance of making learning both interactive and engaging. They appreciated instructors that were able to infuse real world problems within the course content.

- When issues of the racism or racially charged topics emerge in the classroom context, participants appreciated instructors that were willing to facilitate the conversation rather than ignoring or stifling it.
• Faculty members need to be aware of the important dynamic between instructor and students especially in promoting student success. One participant shared how her instructor’s attempt to offer her a compliment further alienated the student from class. The instructor complimented this participant on ability to write well in English. The instructor did not know that this student was raised speaking and writing in English.

Administrators

• Administrators need to be mindful of the unintended consequences of campus policies such as hours of operation. Participants expressed concern over the limited availability of academic spaces.

• One of the biggest challenges for participants is obtaining access to scholarships, especially for undocumented students. Administrators need to find creative ways to promote scholarship opportunities for Latina/o students.

• Participants spoke highly of counselors that went above and beyond their duties to understand them and their future aspirations. Counselors must continue to provide holistic advising and encourage students to work towards their aspirations. There were several participants that have yet to share with their counselors their academic and career aspirations.

• Counselors need to promote job shadowing and internship opportunities among Latina/o students. Participants that had a job shadowing experience were able to speak clearly and confidently about their future trajectory. Not many participants have had the opportunity to be part of a job shadowing opportunity or internship.

• Participants emphasized the need for students to bounce around counselors until they were able to locate a counselor that fit their personality and particular area of interest.
Counselors need to promote an environment that encourages students to seek out multiple counselors before settling in with a particular one.

- Participants underscored the importance of having administrators advocate on their behalf. Participants were readily able to reference administrators that ensure the success of Latina/o students.

- Participants highlighted the value of being able to connect with a diverse administrative staff. Selection committees must promote and actively recruit a diverse administrative staff, especially given the diverse nature of the student population at Midwest Community College.

Parents

- Participants recalled how their parents often used themselves as examples of why their children needed to obtain a college education so not to work in labor-intensive positions. Latina/o parents need to continue connecting with their children by underscoring the significance of pursuing a college education.

- Participants expressed the challenges of explaining the type of commitment required of them at Midwest Community College to their parents. For the most part, participants’ parents were extremely supportive, but not sure of the investment of time and resources to do well in the classroom setting. Parents need to be informed by administrators of time commitment necessary from students in order to be successful in the classroom.

- Parents also need to be informed of how students’ financial package is determined and what options are available if their child still has an outstanding balance that needs to be paid off. At Midwest Community College, students have a payment plan option, which allows them to pay off the remaining balance in even installments. This critical
information must be given in Spanish so Latina/o parents can fully understand their options to financially support their child’s college education.

- Parents also need to be informed of the different academic options available to their children from certificate to transfer options. This type of information will allow them to serve as advocates for their children’s academic and career aspirations. Administrators at Midwest Community College need to provide information about certificates and degree programs in Spanish. They should engage in outreach efforts that inform Latina/o parents of the different programs offered at Midwest Community College.

**Incoming Latina/o students**

- Participants encouraged incoming Latina/o students to become involved in student organizations as well as with instructors at Midwest Community College. This type of involvement will allow them to become familiar with the different resources available to students.

- Participants also recommended Latina/o student to connect regularly with their advisor and discuss their progress towards transferring or obtaining their desired educational goal. Participants also underscored that Latina/o students might have to connect with several advisors before locating one that aligns with their needs.

- Other participants emphasized the importance of Latina/o students to remain focused on their academics. In addition, participants highlighted the importance of being thoughtful in their course planning and selection process.

- Participants also recommended that incoming Latina/s students focus on reaching their academic and career aspirations despite family and financial responsibilities. Latina/o students need to devote considerable attention to achieving their educational goals.
• Participants underscored the value of utilizing academic and student support services at the Midwest Community College and Central University.

• Participants also emphasized the value of moving beyond one’s comfort zone in order to grow as a person and student.

Recommendations for Future Research and Methodological Implications

The findings of this dissertation have focused on the intra-group differences of how participants encountered challenges as well as their levels of engagement to overcome emerging roadblocks on their path towards obtaining a college education. Participants that expressed a high level of engagement were readily able to access information and resources necessary to persist. Participants with high levels of engagement viewed themselves as more than just students. They strongly considered themselves to be leaders both on- and off campus. In addition, participants expressed differences in the impact challenges had on their educational experiences. For some participants, being new to the campus town brought along a whole set of challenges with respect to encountering racism and racial hostility in the community. For participants that commuted to Midwest Community College, they were not bothered by the limited availability of academic spaces after hours.

The three-series interview format enabled me to explore intra-group difference Latina/o student participants. In addition, I was able to create a strong rapport with participants. For a couple of participants, our last interview became the most revealing and powerfully inspiring conversations between us. Based on the three-series interview, I was able to ask participants about their day-to-day interaction at Midwest Community College. I was also able to ask them about what possible recommendations they would provide to incoming Latina/o students as well as administrators. Not all participants engaged in similar activities. A majority of participants
were active in the Latina/o Student Organization because I recruited heavily from this student population but I was also intentional in recruiting participants that were not actively involved in the LSO.

My research focus was not on how participants were evolving throughout our three-series interview. Participants, however, evolved throughout the course of our conversations. One participant moved from low to high engagement over the course of a month. Another participant began to network extensively with advisors and instructors. Despite these really interesting developments among participants, my analysis of the data primarily focused on their previous experience at Midwest Community College and the type of information and resources they have utilized to overcome challenges and persist.

Future research needs to explore how students’ experiences vary depending on participants’ level of interaction with peers, faculty, and administrators. Based on these 16 participants, not all experience the same challenge at the same level of intensity. Researchers need to fully explore the varying degree of impact challenges have on Latina/o students’ experience at community colleges. Padilla’s (2009) EMSS provides a starting foundation, but can be complicated further by the type of questions and data collection methodology we employ. In addition to exploring intra-group differences, researchers must also explore how Latina/o students evolve over time. The evolution of participants went beyond the scope of my research focus, but I strongly believe that following students throughout their tenure at a community college will provide important insight towards persistence. Lastly, researchers need to explore the resiliency of Latina/o students that were successful in obtaining either a degree or transferring to a four-year university. Latina/o students that were able to achieve their aspirations
require further scholarly attention. Lastly, researchers must also document the transition process for Latina/o students once they transfer to a four-year college or university.

**Conclusion**

In this final chapter, I offered a summary of research findings based on the research questions outlined at the start of the study. In addition, I elaborate on how the data collected on these 16 participants added a more nuanced rendition to Padilla’s (2009) Expertise Model of Student Success. These 16 participants communicated similar challenges, resources, and resilience. The difference lies on the level of intensity of these challenges. Moreover, participants expressed different levels of access to information and resources based on their level of engagement. In addition, participants shared several sources of inspiration that have propelled them to overcome a variety of challenges during their tenure at Midwest Community College. In the last section of this chapter, I provided a list of recommendations that were drawn from participants’ responses. A list of recommendations are offered to faculty, administrators, Latina/o parents, and incoming Latina/o students. I concluded this chapter by explaining how this research study has helped provide insight into future areas of research among Latina/o students.
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Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Interview I

Purpose:

I want to hear your life history before attending community college. This includes learning about your background, parents’ childrearing practices, peer relations, ethnic identity, neighborhood characteristics, and pre-college education experience. More importantly, I want to learn about your educational experience before attending this community college. The goal of this interview is to be conversational and fluid while also capturing the richness of your pre-college experience so I can better understand your current and future educational and career aspirations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics and Background Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Place of Birth
Age
Gender
Ethnicity/Race
Where parents were born
Where grandparents were born
Generation of respondent
Father’s occupation while respondent was growing up
Highest grade in school completed by father
Mother’s occupation while respondent was growing up
Highest grade completed by mother
Composition of family at the time respondent finished high school
List of all siblings, ages, gender, current occupation and schooling
Number of siblings with BA or above
Birth order of respondent
Language(s) spoken in the home with (i) mother (ii) father (iii) siblings

Which language respondent spoke primarily when beginning formal education.

How language use changed over time

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**Childrearing Practices and Parental Characteristics**

Which parent had greatest influence on the development of educational goals.

Mother’s attitudes toward the value of education.

Father’s attitudes toward the value of education.

Other influential person’s attitudes toward the value of education.

In what specific ways did parents assist in early schooling

What getting ahead or being successful meant to mother

What getting ahead or being successful meant to father

Occupations suggested by mother

Occupations suggested by father

Importance of work responsibilities in elementary school

Importance of work responsibilities in high school

Cultural activities that either parent engaged in (music, dance, art, literature)

Did either parent read a great deal. What did they read

Mother’s and Father’s involvement in activities outside the home

Did parents ever discourage playing/spending time with other peers’ parents

What ways did parents support reading at home

---

**Peer Relations**
Friendship groupings in elementary and high school (many friends, a few friends, loner)

Did respondent consider self different from peers. In what ways

Characterization of friendship group at school (e.g., rowdy, studious, jocks, popular, average, outsiders)

Ethnicity of friends in high school

Language spoken among friends

Was respondent admired for any special ability

Did parents approved or disapproved of high school friendships

How did parents identified racial/ethnically

Was respondent ever aware of discrimination against any family members. How was this handled

How did each parent feel about anglos

Did parents have Anglo friends

Did respondent ever experience discrimination because of ethnicity

Was being Latina/o related in any way to academic success

Did respondent ever feel he/she had to adopt Anglo values to survey academically. What kinds of values

Has respondent ever wish he/she weren’t Latino

Does respondent characterize family’s value system as typical or atypical of other Latino families. In what ways.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighborhood Characteristics</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial/ethnic composition of neighborhood(s) in which respondent grew up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Socio-economic composition of neighborhood(s) in which respondent grew up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Population density of neighborhood (rural, urban, suburban)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language spoken in the neighborhood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated percentage of peers from the neighborhood who went on to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What academic spaces were present in the neighborhood (e.g., public library, museums, tutoring centers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What recreational spaces were available in the neighborhood (e.g., Boys and Girls Club, Park and Recreational services)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-college Educational Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did respondent attend head start or pre-kindergarten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality of elementary and high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of math completed in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest level of science completed in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did respondent enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) or honor courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, what is total of AP or honor courses taken by respondent in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask respondent to share high school experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did respondent work while in high school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, how many total hours worked per week</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What extracurricular was respondent involved in high school?
Did respondent take part in college-going programs in high school (e.g., AVID)
Did respondent experience any conduct or disciplinary issues in high school
How would respondent describe his/her interaction with high school teachers and administrators?
Does respondent feel that physical appearance has been a factor in school success. In what ways.
Did respondent feel excluded by others in high school because of his/her race
Did respondent feel invisible in high school because of his/her race
Did respondent feel his/her contributions were minimized because of his/her race
Did respondent experience racism in high school
Did respondent feel unwelcome in high school because of his/her race
When did respondent begin to consider college as an option after high school
Did respondent have appropriate guidance and support to learn about the college application process
Did respondent feel supported or encouraged during high school by school officials
Purpose:
For this second interview, I am interested in learning about your current educational experience at this community college. More specifically, I will be asking questions that focus on the following areas: appeal to institution, current educational aspiration, interaction and engagement with campus, campus climate, and extracurricular activities.

**Appeal to Institution**

How did respondent come to learn about this institution?

What attracted the respondent to this institution?

Is there a particular reason respondent is attending this college (e.g., proximity, affordability, only option, family pressure)?

Did you enroll directly from high school?

If yes, was this institution your first or only option after high school?

If no, how long did you wait before enrolling at this institution? Is there a particular reason for your delayed enrollment? Did you attend another college?

**Integration and Involvement with Institution**

Ask respondent walk me through a typical day of being a student here?

Are you currently working?

- If yes: tell me about your job
- Do you work full-time or part-time?
- Total number of hours you work a week
- Is your employment on or off campus?
- If no: are you looking for a job now?
o Are you looking for one on or off campus?

How approachable and willing to help does respondent perceive instructors to be?

- Describe a recent experience that illustrates this well:

How accessible would respondent say that his/her instructors are to him/her?

PROMPT: How easy or difficult is it to gain access to instructors when you need to talk with them about something?

- Describe a recent experience that illustrates this well.

Since arriving here, has respondent had any interactions with his/her instructor outside of class, such as attending instructors’ office hours or talking with instructors after class?

- How often in a typical week would respondent say that him/her interact with one or more of his/her instructors outside of class?

- Tell me about one recent experiences interacting with one of your instructors outside of class.

- In this experience that respondent describes, what sorts of things did he/she discuss with instructor

In what ways would respondent say that the instruction in classes works well for him/her?

- In what ways would respondent say that it does NOT work well?

- What sort of interactions does respondent have with instructors during class

- What sort of interactions does respondent have with fellow students during class

To what extent has respondent been able to make connections with others students in his/her classes?

- Has connecting with other students in classes been helpful to respondent academically or perhaps, in other ways?
• If yes, how so?
• If not, why so?

• What does respondent think would improve his/her opportunities to connect with other students in classes?

Is respondent involved in any study groups with fellow classmates or other students here?

• If Yes: How did respondent become involved in these groups?
• If No: Is that by choice?
  • If it has been difficult: what does respondent think have been the major obstacles that he/she have faced with respect to finding, joining, or forming a study group?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, how important is it to you to make friends hers, or to connect with others here with whom you share similar interests or activities?

• Prompt for an explanation of rating.

Other than study groups, is respondent currently participating in any student groups, clubs, or extracurricular activities?

• If so, in what groups/activities/clubs are you involved?
• How did you become involved
• What interested you about group
• Has participating in group been helpful for you to become connected socially to other students
• Are there any particular groups, clubs, activities in which you would like to be involved but haven’t

How often during the semester do you typically meet with an academic advisor here?

• When was your most recent meeting with an academic advisor
• Can you tell me a bit about this most recent meeting, the kinds of things that you discussed?
• How easy or difficult was it to schedule that meeting?
• To what extent was the meeting helpful to you?
• Were you able to get all of your questions answered at this meeting?
  o If No: with what questions was your advisor unable to help?

Perceived Fit:

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being highest, how well do you feel that you fit here?

• Prompt for explanation or rating
• In what ways do you feel that you fit well here?
• In what ways do you feel that you do not fit well here
• If less than 5, What do you think would help you feel more a part of institution?

Self-Efficacy:

How well-equipped do you feel concerning your ability to succeed here?

• Prompt for explanation
• Is there anything in particular about your experience here that you feel particularly well-equipped to handle?
• Is there anything in particular that you feel particularly unequipped, not well-equipped to handle?

Perceived Fit:

If you had to describe the typical student in one of your classes this semester, how would you describe him or her?
• To what extent, and in what ways, do you perceive yourself to be similar or different from the other students in your classes this semester?

Stigma:

Do you think students at this community college are perceived any differently here from students at another community college?
• If yes: In what ways do you think students are perceived differently?
• If yes: What has led you to believe that students here are perceived differently

Adjustment

If you were to offer advice to a prospective student who was about to enroll here, what would you tell him or her?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Climate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent feel that physical appearance has been a factor in school success. In what ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent feel excluded by others here because of his/her race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent feel invisible here because of his/her race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent feel his/her contributions were minimized because of his/her race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent experience racism here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent feel unwelcome here because of his/her race</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have people made respondent feel intellectually inferior on campus because his/her race?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does respondent experience encouragement in pursing academic or educational goals because of race? If yes, by whom?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Concluding questions
What some challenges that you have encountered while at Midwest Community College?

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being the highest, how satisfied are you with your decision to attend this institution?

• Prompt explanation for rating

Is there anything that you would like to add, or anything that you think should be clarified
Interview III

Purpose:
In light of what you shared in our first two interviews, where do you see yourself in the future?

Questions:

Educational Aspirations
What is the highest level of college degree respondent is seeking to complete?

Does respondent have the resource and knowledge to achieve his/her educational goal?

Has respondent talked to advisor/faculty/mentor about a course of action to achieve educational goal?

Does respondent have the support and encouragement necessary to achieve his/her goal? (e.g., family, faculty, advisors)

Where do you see yourself working professionally in the future?

How do you plan to achieve this?

What are your career/professional aspirations?

Do you have resources and mentorship to achieve these aspirations?

What would be greatest challenge to attaining your future goals?
What advice or recommendations would you give to other Latino students starting their post-secondary education at a community college?

Follow Up:

Have you ever experienced any source of discomfort while on campus?

How about subtle forms of glances or remarks about your academic ability on campus?
Appendix B: Individual Narratives of Participants

Ana

Ana was born in Mexico. At the age of a year and half, Ana’s mother made the decision to migrate and settle in the Texas valley. Ana was raised in the southern part of Texas for a majority of her life by her mother and older siblings, which consist of a brother and two sisters. Ana’s mother was a single parent who worked numerous jobs to provide for her family. Her mother only attained a ninth grade education. Ana knew of her biological father, but he lived in Mexico for most of her life. Her mother would take her to visit him at the Texas’ border, but because she was not a legal resident, she couldn’t cross the border. As Ana grew older, her contact with her father became distant and infrequent. Her mother, brother, and extended family members filled the father figure void in her life. In particular, Ana’s brother would often take care of her while their mother worked. He would ensure she was well fed and arrived to school on time. Ana developed a very close bond with her brother because he played a very influential role in her life. She attended elementary, middle school, and the first three years of high school in Texas. At the age of 17, Ana moved to central Illinois, so she could be closer to her older brother and sisters. When Ana first moved to Illinois, she lived with her cousin and godmother. Her older sister was able to convince their mother that moving to Illinois would be in Ana’s best educational interest. The transition to a new town and a new high school was not difficult for Ana because she was well accustomed to changing schools in Texas. At a young age, Ana attended a total of six different elementary schools. She viewed this instability as an opportunity to meet new people. This frequent change in schools was a direct result of an overpopulated school district that caused students to be reassigned to different schools on yearly basis. Ana attributed her decision to move to Illinois to gang violence, drugs, and school overcrowding in Texas. Ana’s mother stayed in Texas while Ana moved to central Illinois to a small rural town located thirty-five miles south of Midwest Community College.

While growing up, Ana’s mother emphasized the importance of obtaining a formal education, which was something that she wasn’t able to obtain. Ana’s mom was a single parent that had to raise four children. Ana was surrounded and supported by extended family that consisted of grandparents, aunts, and uncles, but it didn’t eliminate her sentiments of feeling different compared to her peers that were being raised in a two-parent household. Ana’s mother worked extremely hard to provide for her family. She worked as a migrant worker as well as a care provider for the elderly. Her example of hard work helped inspire Ana to dedicate herself to learning and setting high educational goals. Ana always loved attending school. All throughout her educational experience, Ana excelled academically. She enrolled in several Advanced Placement courses while attending high school in Texas. She continued her academic success in central Illinois. She graduated from high school with honors. Her academic focus earned her a financial scholarship given to underrepresented students attending Midwest Community College. Ana attributed her success to the hard work of her mother as well as very influential people she met during high school such as her band director, English teacher, and a high school counselor. Most specifically, Ana’s band director in Texas demonstrated the importance and value of education. He required all band members to maintain a really high grade point average. If students fell below the GPA requirements, they would be ineligible to take part in band events. Ana also talked extensively about how her high school band director showed her the importance of being disciplined and focused while working towards a goal. Ana attributes much of her hard work, organization, and discipline to her involvement with band.
Ana’s mother emphasized the importance of education in a variety of ways. First, she often used her life experience of hardships as an important reason why Ana needed to focus on her education. Second, she would assist Ana in her homework assignments despite her limited English fluency. Third, she would frequently attend parent-teacher conferences so she would be up to date on Ana’s academic progress. Fourth, she would encourage all of her kids to read at home and at the library. Ana recalled that her mother would often take them to the public library so they could all read or do homework. Lastly, Ana remembered fondly that her mother attended every single performance and event that Ana participated in while in band. This type of support produced immeasurable reassurance that Ana was on the right path for success. Ana felt completely supported and encouraged by her mother. For this reason, Ana was able to excel in high school despite being thousands of miles away from her mother and being a student in a new high school and town.

Ana’s transition to a new town was seamless. Since she moved a lot in elementary, Ana was well prepared to handle the move to a new town and high school. She is a very social and outgoing person, so she was able to make friends quickly. Ana also appreciated attending a small high school because she was able to connect at a deeper level with her peers, teachers, and administrators, which was practically impossible in Texas. Ana developed a very strong connection with her peers, teachers, and administrators despite only attending her new high school for a year and a semester. Her engagement with teachers and administrators gave her access to important college information and scholarships. Ana, however, did experience a heightened sense of racial discrimination by moving from a predominantly Latina/o to a predominantly White high school and town. She noticed this difference when she began to date a White male. When they would go out on dates, she would notice other White couples and families giving them odd glances. Ana also retold an incident where a local police officer pulled up next to them while she was hanging out with a group of Latinas/os at the town’s park. She had no doubt that the police officer stopped because they were a group of Latinas/os. Despite these targeted incidents, Ana never lost sight of her focus to excel academically or to seek out resources or information from people around her. This success continued while attending Midwest Community College.

As a student at Midwest Community College, Ana excelled academically. She was also very much involved on campus despite commuting to school all two years that she was enrolled at MCC. All four semesters that she attended Midwest Community College, Ana earned a place on the Dean’s list. Ana spoke about the importance of being actively engaged with her peers, professors, and counselors. She was able to form close bonds with her peers and professors through her participation in several student organizations including: Phi Theta Kappa, Latino student organization, a Latina/o mentorship program, and a criminal justice club. During class instruction, she actively absorbed the course content. When called to answer a question, she would do so with ease. She would reach out to the instructor before or after class to discuss any questions or concerns she had over the course material. Ana spoke highly of her instructors’ approachable and willing demeanor. Ana recalled a professor that offered constructive criticism, which helped enhance her writing skills. Ana was the recipient of underrepresented scholarship at Midwest Community College, which paid for tuition as a full-time student. This was a major source of support for Ana. Despite receiving financial assistance, Ana, like many other of the participants in this study, had to work close to thirty hours a week to pay for living expenses such as gas, food, and housing. While a freshman at MCC, Ana was living with her older sister, so she was also working to bring additional income to their household.
In her second year at Midwest Community College, Ana decided to move out of her older sister’s apartment and move in with her boyfriend in a nearby town. Her decision was not supported by many in her family, especially her older sisters. Her sisters worried that she wouldn’t continue her path towards attaining her educational and career goals. But Ana knew that her passion and focus on her educational goals would not be cooled off by her new living arrangement. When living with her boyfriend, Ana continued her academic success. While juggling a nineteen credit hour semester as well as twenty-eight hour workweek, Ana’s grades earned her a spot on the Dean’s list. She also took part in a study abroad trip to Costa Rica, where she served as the ad hoc translator for the group because of her Spanish fluency. In all three scale questions regarding importance of connecting with others, perceived fit, and satisfaction, Ana responded with all five ratings. Her strong connection with Midwest Community College can be attributed to her high level of engagement with professors, counselors, and peers. Ana viewed MCC as a welcoming environment for her to flourish academically, professionally, and personally. We conducted our interview over the summer while she was working for a regional migrant program and as she was preparing for her first semester at Central State University. Our last interview took place during her first semester at Central State University. Her insight into MCC allows us to understand the significance of maintaining a high level of engagement has on promoting academic success of students, especially students that commute from their hometown to campus.

Ana has high educational and professional aspirations. She plans on obtaining her bachelor’s degree in criminal justice from Central State University. In addition, she sees herself pursuing a master’s and doctoral degree in criminal justice. A major reason why she is interested in earning an advanced degree is her love of school. She has also interacted with professors at Central State University that have earned a doctoral degree, which has further motivated her to continue a path towards obtaining a doctoral degree. Ana’s mother has fostered a go-getter mentality in her, so Ana feels like she can achieve anything she sets her mind towards. With respect to her career, Ana plans on working for the Federal Bureau of Investigation at an international level. Her love for traveling and passion for the law has really fueled her career trajectory towards working internationally for the FBI. Ana feels that she has support from her mother, friends, and academic advisor to accomplish her educational and professional goals. She hasn’t had an opportunity to take part in internships to help solidify her area of expertise, but plans on taking part in an internship during her last semester at Central State University. She is currently enrolled in a career exploration course that will expose her to a wide range of professions in the law enforcement field. In addition, Ana has been admitted to a study abroad trip to Scotland for the spring semester.

Ana did offer several recommendations to incoming Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. She suggested that they don’t settle for mediocrity. She encouraged students to follow their dreams regardless of the numerous obstacles that they encounter while pursing their educational dreams. Lastly, Ana implored incoming Latina/o students to seek out information and help in order to ensure their academic success. Ana highlighted the challenging nature of maintaining a healthy balance between work, school, friends, and family. For Ana, this was a daunting task that she continues to negotiate. For this reason, Ana encouraged other students to really establish priorities that would allow them to maintain a healthy balance, which will call for some necessary sacrifices in order to be academically successful.
Brenda

Brenda was born in Guadalupe, Mexico. At the age of six, her parents decided to migrate to the United States in search of a better opportunity for their family. Brenda’s family consists of a father, mother, an older sister, and a younger brother. They were all born in Mexico. Upon arriving to the United States, her family settled in a small rural town in central Illinois. Many of the residents of this town work at the local factory. Almost 30% of the residents of this town identify as Latina/o. The growth of Latinas/os in this town has steadily increased over the past decade. Brenda considers herself to be a first-generation college student because her parents attained a minimal level of formal education. Her mother only received a fourth grade education and her father completed fifth grade. Despite her parents’ limited formal education, she was raised to value and appreciate the numerous educational opportunities available to her.

Regardless of the language barrier, Brenda’s parents sought out resources to ensure that she would be academically successful. They also attended a majority of her teacher-parent conferences as well as her extracurricular events.

Brenda’s older sister attended Midwest Community College but stopped out after getting married. She completed almost half of her requirements for an associate’s degree. Brenda’s sister college experience as well as her parents’ limited education fueled her desire to earn an associate’s degree. Brenda has always excelled in the classroom. In high school, many of Brenda’s classmates considered her to be very smart. As an enthusiastic reader, she could be seen reading frequently. Both her mother and father helped foster this attraction for reading by taking her to the local library. She was also considered by many of her classmates as likeable and very fun to hang out with. According to Brenda, many of her friends admired her ability to make others laugh. Brenda’s parents played a very influential role in shaping her educational aspirations. Given that both of her parents didn’t attain a formal education beyond elementary, they would use themselves as examples of why it was important to pursue a college education. Brenda’s father would constantly remind her of the hardships of working in a factory job. Her parents’ labor-intensive employment also fueled her academic success. However, she was quite aware that college might not have been an option for her because of her undocumented status. At a young age, Brenda was aware that she was an undocumented immigrant living in the United States. She had aspirations of pursuing a degree in the health profession, but assumed she would not be able to go to college because of her undocumented status. When she was researching colleges, she found out that many required applicants to submit their social security number, which she did not have. Her dreams of pursuing a college education became a reality when her high school guidance counselor contacted her and encouraged her to apply to Midwest Community College, which is roughly a 35-mile drive north of her town. The counselor also told her that she was not required to submit information about her residency status. Most importantly, the counselor also found that Brenda was eligible to receive a scholarship based on her high academic performance. After her junior year of high school, Brenda had the third highest GPA of her graduating class. She graduated from high school in the top ten percent of her class.

Brenda’s undocumented status denied her many of the milestones that emerging young adults attain while in high school. She would often make up excuses on why she should not take part in important rites of passage for teenagers such as obtaining a driver’s license, renting an apartment or even taking part in the high school senior trip. These important milestones marking the transition of teenager to young adult were frequent and painful reminders that she was an undocumented immigrant despite living most of her life in the United States. These reminders were painful, but not paralyzing. She excelled academically and took a very active
role in her high school experience. Her high school did not offer advanced placement courses or college preparatory courses, so she wasn’t able to enroll in any academically challenging courses. However, she was involved in several student organizations. She also played volleyball and basketball all four years of high school. Brenda juggled her extracurricular activities while also working an average of 25 hours a week. During her senior year of high school, Brenda worked 35 hours a week. She did not let her undocumented status define her academic potential or her aspirations. Brenda used her family’s support to fuel her dreams. She also spoke highly of being a first-generation Latina seeking to overcome stereotypes attributed Latina/o students. Her undocumented status was a barrier that she sought to overcome through hard work and building a strong support system that offered her the encouragement and resources necessary to be successful. In high school, she was a high achieving student with a very positive relationship with all of her high school teachers and administrators.

Brenda’s high academic achievements would have made her a strong applicant at selective admission universities, but due to her undocumented status, she decided to enroll at Midwest Community College. Brenda was attracted to Midwest Community College for two major reasons. First and foremost, she was eligible to receive a merit-based scholarship that paid for her two years at the community college. She also wanted to attend an institution that was in close proximity to her parents’ hometown because she would be living with them while she attended college. Brenda was also very familiar with the strong health professional programs offered at Midwest Community College. Brenda enrolled directly from high school to Midwest Community College. She attended college as a full-time student while also working over 30 hours a week. During her last year, she was able to secure on-campus employment, which helped reduce her workweek to 19 hours a week. While a first-year student at Midwest Community College, Brenda was very hesitant to interact with instructors during office hours because she believed that, in college, students were responsible for understanding the course material on their own. She quickly learned that instructors were incredibly approachable and willing to help students understand the course content. After her first semester, Brenda frequently contacted instructors to discuss course material. When asked if she was prepared for Midwest Community College she resounded said, “Yes.” She has excelled at Midwest Community College. Her interaction during class varies depending on the course content, classmates, and instructor. In some of her classes, she might be an active participant. In other courses, she is focused on absorbing the course material. One key aspect that has remained constant is her uncanny ability to become friends with her classmates.

Brenda, however, did highlight some of the challenges of being a commuter student. She regularly has to share with her classmates, especially with group work projects, that she is only available during a limited timeframe on campus. Brenda spoke highly of her involvement in a Latina/o student organization. Her involvement in this organization really helped solidify her sense of belonging on campus, especially since she commutes to campus. On two scale questions gauging fit and satisfaction, Brenda gave the highest ranking of five for both. She voiced her utmost pleasure for attending MCC. Brenda also gave a five on a scale question measuring how important it was for her to connect with peers that have similar interests as her. Brenda’s high involvement both in out of the classroom setting at MCC really influenced her sense of belonging as well as satisfaction with attending the college. Additionally, Brenda has received a tremendous amount of support and encouragement from both professors and counselors at Midwest Community College. She was able to name several instructors, counselors, and
administrators that played a major role in helping her adjust to the campus as well as make progress towards her educational goals.

Brenda’s toughest semester was her first semester. One of the counselors enrolled her for 18 credit hours. Her scheduled was incredibly difficult and she felt extremely overwhelmed her first week, especially since she was working over thirty hours a week off-campus. She quickly scheduled a meeting with another counselor that was recommended by staff at the Center for Academic Success (CAS) and was able to adjust her course schedule to a much more manageable one. Brenda recommends incoming students seek out counselors that really get to know the whole student rather than just placing them in courses without careful consideration of students’ work and family responsibilities. She attributes much of her academic success to a strong desire to overcome challenges, time management, and unwavering support of family, instructors, administrators, and counselors. Brenda has always displayed great poise and confidence in her ability to excel academically. Despite her undocumented status, which always evoked fear while commuting 30 minutes to campus because of fear of being pulled over, she has constantly used her circumstance as a source of power and motivation. She encourages other undocumented students to approach their situation with a positive outlook in order to remain encouraged. Brenda reinforced her positive outlook by highlighting the significance of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, which has allowed her to secure employment on campus and apply for a driver’s license so she can commute to campus without the fear of being pulled over and deported. She also talked about the numerous stereotypes attributed to Latinas/os as being academically inferior to other ethnic groups. She underscored the importance of overcoming these negative stereotypes by pursuing an education.

Brenda has high academic and career aspirations. She plans to obtain a bachelor’s of science in nursing. After earning a bachelor’s degree in nursing, she is also interested in seeking a master’s degree in nursing. Her ultimate career goal is to become a nurse practitioner, which is a career path she learned about while completing her Certified Nursing Assistant program during high school. A major obstacle in obtaining her educational goals is not her academic ability or desire, but her undocumented status. She was not able to apply for a bachelor’s nursing program, because the program she was interested required applicants to submit their social security number. Brenda has graduated from Midwest Community College with an associate’s degree in a health profession, but has yet to apply for a nursing program. She plans to work full-time for several years in order to save up for the cost of the bachelor’s program in nursing. After the summer, she plans to start working full-time at the local factory and begin saving money for her future educational goals. Because of her undocumented status, Brenda is ineligible to receive federal financial aid to support her nursing program.

Brenda’s undocumented status continues to set parameters that she must navigate. She is a high achieving student that graduated in the top ten percent of her high school class. This academic success continued at Midwest Community College. She is academically prepared to excel in a nursing program, but her educational dreams are now on hold until she is able to save enough money to pay for a very expensive nursing program. Brenda, however, will continue to demonstrate incredible resolve in the face of all these limited circumstances because she is an extraordinary person with dreams of flying high and a long track record of success.

Chela

Chela brings a unique perspective to the study. She is the only non-traditional college age student in the participant pool. She was born and raised in Houston, Texas. She is the youngest in
a family of eight. Her mother was born in Texas and her father was born in Mexico. She has three older sisters and three older brothers. Both of her parents finished high school. At the age of 13, Chela’s father died suddenly of a heart attack while at work. This created a major disruption in her household. Her mother soon found a boyfriend that mistreated Chela, so she decided to move out to her older sister’s apartment. Chela frequently described her mom as being both emotionally and mentally uninvolved in her life. Her older sister was also very much distant in her life. Chela was forced to become independent at a young age. She endured a very tough and unpleasant upbringing. The only person that offered any source of inspiration was her father. Chela would frequently see him reading the bible. He would also offer her words of encouragement to continue her education. Her father led by example—he was an extremely hard worker. Chela’s father served as the greatest influence in her educational goals.

At the age of 18, she moved to central Illinois with a boyfriend. They lived together for several years and had a son. During Chela’s pregnancy, her boyfriend became increasingly abusive towards her. She was forced to become the sole breadwinner of the household. Her income was the only one supporting her boyfriend and their newborn child. On several occasions, Chela’s boyfriend used her income without her consent to purchase non-essentials. Her living situation became unbearable, so she ended up taking her son and breaking up with her boyfriend. Most recently, Chela married a person that offers her unconditional support and encouragement. She has been able to continue her education while her husband provides the family with financial support. Chela’s relationship with her mother has improved dramatically since she moved to Illinois. Chela did experience a very unpleasant custody dispute with the father of her son, which caused her to withdraw from a semester at Midwest Community College. Besides the nasty custody battle, Chela has been able to pursue a college education albeit rather slowly.

Chela described the quality of her elementary and secondary education as poor. She only enrolled in an AP English course. All throughout elementary and high school, Chela never excelled academically. The highest level of math she completed in high school was trigonometry. The highest level of science was chemistry. She described her effort simply as coasting through school. She rarely exerted any effort to work on or complete course assignments. In many instances, she was more concerned about her living arrangement than focusing on her academics. With respect to friendships, throughout elementary, she mostly kept to herself. In high school, Chela had a small group of friends whom she considered outsiders to the general student population because of their appeal to the counter-culture and rock music. She was never involved in any disciplinary or conduct issue. She, however, did consider herself to be different compared to her classmates. To Chela, many of her classmates had a normal and traditional family make-up. Her sense of feeling different became heightened when she started living with her older sister. Her older sister only offered her the bare minimum, which was a place for her to sleep. Chela took part in extracurricular activities throughout high school such as J-ROTC’s drill team and cheerleading. Her involvement, however, was quite limited. She didn’t work while in high school and she devoted more attention to her peer group.

In high school, Chela never considered college as a possible option after high school. She was more concerned about escaping her living arrangement that had forced her to mature at a very young age. Her minimal effort in early education school continues to haunt her. She has struggled to overcome her low level of academic preparation in order to meet the demands of her courses. Most importantly, Chela continues to slide back into feelings of being intellectually inferior. Despite excelling academically at Midwest Community College, Chela continues to
doubt her academic competency. In our second interview, Chela commented that she was upset that she received only the second highest midterm exam in her physics course. Her fear of not being smart enough has forced Chela to invest considerable amount of time and energy to complete course assignments and prepare for course exams. Chela never considered college as a possible option after high school mainly because she did not receive the adequate support or guidance to envision college as a possibility. She was a below average student. Her recent interest in attending college was a direct result of working in a hostile fast food restaurant environment. In this hostile environment, she worked over forty hours a week and under constant sexual and racial harassment by the general manager. Her manager would frequently make sexist remarks towards Chela. She finally reported the sexual harassment to upper-level management and her manager was fired. Her traumatic experience working at the restaurant became the impetus for her to pursue a college education so she could obtain a career path that valued her and promoted her success. The birth of her son also became a major source of motivation for her to be the role model and advocate that she didn’t have growing up.

Chela is in her third year at Midwest Community College. She was attracted to MCC because of its affordability. She was initially concerned that her three-year break between high school and college enrollment would be a major challenge. Chela did struggle especially in her math course, but she invested a lot of time and energy to overcome her low level of academic preparation. Despite not being academically prepared, she has excelled academically. For example, she has been on the Dean’s list every semester since enrolling at MCC. Due to finances, Chela is only able to enroll as a part-time student. During our interviews, Chela was enrolled in one course—physics. Despite being enrolled as a part-time student, she studies as if she were a full-time student. She devotes considerable amount of time preparing for her course. During our second interview, Chela commented about how she was three chapters ahead of the course schedule. With respect to campus engagement, Chela frequently attends the Center for Academic Success and utilizes instructors’ office hours. She finds instructors to be very approachable and accessible. She also discussed the numerous ways she is able to get a hold of instructors such as emailing, phone call, and text messaging. Chela is very resourceful in getting her questions answered. She has a shy demeanor during classroom instruction, so she does not raise her hand or actively engage in conversation with her fellow classmates. Chela primarily observes and takes copious notes during class. However, she does pose questions before or after class instruction. Her shy personality has prevented her from connecting with other students. She is a member of the honor’s program, but is not actively engaged with other members. Moreover, Chela’s primary concern is ensuring her academic success. She frequently attends the Center of Academic Success and meets with an academic advisor at least once a semester to receive an update on her progress. When asked if she feels part of the campus, she quickly replied that her connection to campus is a direct result of her academic focus not a social one.

Chela was very much aware of the campus resources available to students, but was unaware of the academic resources off-campus. She did not know that students could study at Central University’s libraries. Participants in this study obtained information about off-campus resources as a result of their peer-to-peer interaction, which is something that Chela has sacrificed so she could focus on her academics. Chela is very much satisfied with her decision to attend Midwest Community College. Lastly, Chela views the campus climate at Midwest Community College as welcoming towards Latina/o students. She, however, did highlight incidents during her science course that made her feel uncomfortable, especially because she was the only Latina/o student in the course. Chela also commented on insensitive remarks by her
English instructor that were intended to complement her, but had the opposite effect. Her English instructor praised her writing skills, especially because she assumed English was Chela’s second language. Chela, however, was raised speaking and writing English. This attempt to praise was based on an erroneous assumption made about Chela’s English instructor. These incidents have been few and far between, but they still left a long-lasting impression on Chela that has pushed her to continue her education and serve as an inspiration for her son.

Chela is interested in pursing a degree in forensic biology. Since we weren’t unable to schedule our last interview, I am unable to report on what is the highest educational degree she is seeking to obtain. I am also unable to share her career aspirations. We attempted to schedule the last interview for over two months, but our attempts were unsuccessful. She agreed on letting me use the data collected in the previous two interviews.

Emily

Emily is 21 years old. She was born in the north side of Chicago, Illinois. Both of her parents were born in Mexico. Her mother was born in Guerrero, Mexico and her father was born in the state of Michoacán, Mexico. Emily identifies as being a Mexican-American. She is the youngest member of the household that includes an older brother (23 years old), mother, and father. In her household, Spanish is the language spoken. Emily has lived most of her life in Chicago, except for two and half years that were spent living in Mexico. Her mother and brother moved to Mexico after Emily finished fourth grade. They lived in Mexico until Emily completed the sixth grade. Her father stayed behind in Chicago to sell their house, but was unsuccessful, so they moved back to Chicago. Her parents are divorced. Both parents attained a minimal level of formal schooling. Emily’s father only completed the second grade in Mexico. Her mother completed secundaria (secondary), which is the equivalent of finishing middle school in the United States. Despite their low level of formal education, both parents worked really hard to give their children a better life. Growing up, Emily’s father worked at a factory, which produced labels for Coca-Cola bottles. Her mother worked at another factory, which manufactured wall mounts for large TVs. While working at the factory, Emily’s mom pursued a career in cosmetology. Upon completing her degree, she began working at a beauty salon. Her older brother finished high school and then attended a community college in Chicago, but dropped out after a semester. He then enrolled at a technical school, but stopped out after a year and a half. Emily’s older brother has yet to secure a degree or certificate beyond his high school diploma.

Emily received parental encouragement to continue her formal education at an early age, especially from her father. Her father would tell her that the biggest gift that he could give her and her older brother is an education, something he did not have while growing up in Mexico. In high school, Emily was academically strong and highly involved. She enrolled in International Baccalaureate courses all throughout her high school years. She performed exceptionally well in all of her courses. She graduated in the top 10 percent of her senior class. While juggling an academically demanding schedule, Emily was incredibly involved in extracurricular activities. She was part of a Latino club, J-ROTC, Rube Goldberg club, Drum and Bugle Band, Coast to Coast Club, and the Women’s World Conference. During the weekend, she babysat between three to four hours. While a freshman in high school, Emily went on a campus visit to Private University. She fell in love with the campus instantly and decided that that would be the only institution of higher education to which she would apply. A high school counselor convinced her to apply to several other schools. Although she heeded the advice of her counselor to broaden her college application process, Emily was confident that she would be admitted to her first-choice.
She scored well on her ACT exam, which helped solidify her already exceptional academic credentials. All of her hard work and dedication came into fruition when she received an official letter informing her that she had been admitted to Private University.

Her excitement and eagerness to be part of the campus quickly faded away starting with the overwhelming and impersonal summer registration experience she had. Due to work commitments, Emily’s parents were unable to join her during the new student summer registration, so she had to take part in the registration process alone. She found the registration process to be difficult to understand and isolating. She felt embarrassed to ask for assistance because she saw other students were easily navigating the course registration process. She was also unsure of the major she wanted to pursue. She entered Private University with a pre-dentistry concentration in the College of Science, but did not feel passionate about it. She ended up changing her major four times during the course of an academic year and trimester. While she was trying to sort out her major, she felt a high amount of pressure from academic advisors to pick a major and make progress towards completion. She felt uneasy about the demand to select a major, especially during her first year. Emily also cited the stark class distinction between herself and her classmates as being a driving component in her dissatisfaction with being a student at Private University. She considered many of her classmates and their parents to be in the upper echelons of society. For example, she was surprised to learn that many of her classmates’ parents were paying all their educational expenses out of pocket without any federal assistance and some of her friends were out-of-state students. This social class difference caused her to feel disconnected and isolated. She attempted to be involved on campus, but did not feel like she could find a common ground with others. In high school, Emily was a social butterfly, but at Private University, she struggled to make friends and felt out of her element. She shared with me, “I wasn’t comfortable there. I didn’t feel like I was part of the university. I just felt like I was going to a class and coming out and going home. It was really hard for me to make friends, too.” After a year and a trimester, Emily reversed transferred from Private University to Midwest Community College (MCC). She learned about MCC through a mutual friend. She was looking for an opportunity to move away from home and continue her education. Midwest Community College is situated almost three hours south of north side Chicago, so it offered her the opportunity to move away from Chicago as well as being an affordable option for her.

Emily views MCC as being a welcoming and supportive environment. She has been actively involved in a Latino student organization. In addition, she has been able to secure a position to serve as a tutor for an after-school program at a local elementary school. She has also attended several criminal justice club meetings. She meets with academic advisors a minimum of twice a semester. Unlike Private University, academic advisors at Midwest Community College have encouraged Emily to pursue her interest rather than pressuring her to decide on a major. She also views faculty as being accessible during and after class. She frequently utilizes office hours especially for difficult courses in the sciences. Emily did highlight areas that the college could improve especially with respect to providing students with large and inviting places in which they can feel comfortable studying as individuals or large groups. She also mentioned that campus accessibility is a major challenge for students seeking opportunities to study after-hours. Emily has been resourceful in addressing this challenge by utilizing Central University’s undergraduate library (UGL). She learned about the UGL through friends attending Central University. The UGL is open 24 hours, so students can access the library at any time of the day. The UGL is also very spacious and welcoming. As a student at Midwest Community College, Emily was surprised to learn about the large presence of Chicago natives, especially among
Latinas/os and African Americans that enroll at Midwest Community College. Initially, she assumed that she would be one of the few people from Chicago. Midwest Community College’s close proximity to Illinois’ flagship institution of higher education attracts a large constituency from Chicago. Unlike Private University, Emily has forged some really strong friendships at Midwest Community College. At one point in the interview, Emily described her friendships as being more like family bonds. When asked about her academic preparation, Emily responded that she felt pretty prepared to handle the academic courses at Midwest Community College. She, however, gets upset when Central University students look down upon Midwest Community College students. She has had to tell her Central University friends to stop stereotyping classes, students, and faculty at Midwest Community College.

In her response to Midwest Community College critics, she said, “They would say it [criticism] and it and at first it would be like whatever, it just got annoying. But I would be like I know I can get into university. And there are other students who maybe didn’t get into university and are okay maybe starting community college. Maybe they just went to community college for financial issues. And I think university students making comments like that makes community college students feel bad. I knew what university was like, I got into university, I got into plenty, I just chose to come here. I didn’t really feel bad in that aspect, but I know some people maybe felt bad.” Emily brings an important dimension to the Latina/o experience at community college. She is a reverse transfer who did not feel welcomed at a prestigious private university, rather she was able to find an inspiring and welcoming place at a two-year institution located almost 3 hours south of Chicago. She has been academically challenged and reinvigorated in her efforts to become a speech pathologist. Despite the deficit-based notions espoused by Central University students towards Midwest Community College students, Emily challenges them by bringing in her experience both at Private University and Midwest Community College. Although Emily has been able to challenge the stereotypes attributed to Midwest Community College students, she has struggled to cope with the delay in her on-time graduation. Many of her friends, especially at Central University, are on track to graduating on-time, but Emily’s graduation will be delayed. She has been able to find support and strength through her roommate and advisors that focus attention on the process rather than on the speed at which it takes students.

Emily’s goddaughter, who has to see a speech pathologist, has inspired her to pursue a profession in speech pathology. Emily plans to transfer back to a community college in Chicago and then transfer to a university in Chicago, so she can earn a bachelor’s in speech pathology. She also plans to pursue a master’s degree after working in a government agency, which provides important assistance to low-income families, especially Latina/o families. She has passion to help others in the community. She sees herself ending up Chicago near her family after graduating from a four-year university. When asked to offer advice to other Latina/o students starting their college experience at Midwest Community College, she simply stated, “get involved.” Being involved allows for students to establish friendships while also having fun. Most importantly, being involved allows for students to feel part of the campus.

Esperanza

Esperanza is twenty-two years old. She was born in Dallas, Texas. Esperanza was raised in a border town near the southern part of Texas. Both of her parents were born in Mexico and migrated to Dallas during their adulthood. Esperanza’s parents completed a high school education. Esperanza’s family consists of her parents, an older sister (26 years old), a younger sister (11 years old), and a younger brother (15 years old). Her older sister completed high school
and attended a local college until she had to stop out. Recently, Esperanza’s older sister has returned to college to complete her undergraduate degree. Esperanza’s parents prefer to communicate with their children in Spanish, so all members of the family speak Spanish. Esperanza learned English while attending school. Moreover, she considered herself to be a first-generation college student because nobody in her immediate family has obtained a college degree.

Esperanza talked extensively of the enormous impact both her mother and father had on shaping her educational aspirations. Both of her parents encouraged all of their children to take advantage of the educational opportunities available to them in the United States. Her parents wanted them all to obtain a college education. Esperanza recalled how her father instilled a strong work ethic in her. Her parents were also very involved in their early schooling. The language barrier did prevent her parents from providing them with direct tutoring, but they implemented rules and expectations that all homework needed to be complete every single day. This type of homework expectation underscored the value her parents placed on education. Since Esperanza’s parents were unable to assist her on homework assignments, she would get help from peers and teachers at school. Her parents would also encourage their children to achieve a college education so they could pursue a profession that they are passionate about. Her parents also expected their children to help out in the house. For a majority of her life, Esperanza’s father worked in the local import and export industry. Her mother worked at a candle factory and now works in the hotel industry. Both of her parents worked extremely hard to provide opportunities for their children that they did not have. Esperanza recalled that religion played a central role in their family. She remembered attending religious ceremonies such as Las Posadas and La Virgen de Guadalupe vigils. Besides these religious events, her parents were too busy to participate in community activities or organizations.

Esperanza was raised in a fast-growing town composed of predominantly Latina/o neighborhood in the south of Texas. She completed all of her K-12 education in the same town. At a very young age, Esperanza was identified as a gifted student, so she was enrolled in accelerated courses all throughout elementary and middle school. During middle school, she enrolled in academically rigorous courses, which placed her at a higher academic level than her peers. She completed algebra while in middle school. In high school, she enrolled in advanced placement courses as well as dual credit classes at a local community college. Esperanza excelled academically. She reflected fondly on how her parents, despite their limited fluency in the English language, helped cultivate an academically supportive environment that emphasized the value of education. Esperanza would also often visit the local library. Due to her parents’ high value on education, Esperanza would devote considerable time and energy on her homework assignments. According to Esperanza, she was really into school and cared significantly about her grades. In addition to academics, Esperanza was a student athlete during middle school and high school. In middle school, she played soccer, volleyball, basketball, and track. In high school, she also played volleyball, soccer, and track year-round. Her coaches considered her to be an extremely gifted athlete. She broke the school record in the long jump. For Esperanza, college was always the next step, but she did not have the resources or information necessary to plan for college. During her senior year, she applied to a local state college.

Esperanza commuted from her parents’ house to a local state college. She found living with her parents was difficult. Despite her parents’ high aspirations for their children, Esperanza’s parents did not have the knowledge to quite grasp the major commitment required of
her daughter to meet the academic rigor of college courses. Esperanza shared how her parents struggled to understand why she would have to study late at the campus library to prepare for an exam or complete a homework assignment. She attempted to explain the time commitment necessary to prepare for exams, but her parents still could not wrap their minds around the investment necessary to be a successful college student.

Esperanza shared how her boyfriend at the time, now husband, also served as a major source of support and inspiration. She met her husband while attending a local state college in south Texas. He completed an engineering program at Texas’ flagship institution of higher education and was attending the local college to fulfill course requirements for a Ph.D. program he was seeking admissions in Illinois. Esperanza’s husband was raised in a family of highly educated Latinas/os. Both of his parents earned doctoral degrees and they expected that their son would also attend college and earn an advanced degree. He has motivated Esperanza to complete her educational dreams as well. Upon her husband securing admission to the doctoral program at Central University, they both decided to relocate to central Illinois. When they moved to Illinois they were engaged and married in the spring of 2014. Since Esperanza’s husband comes from a tradition of high achieving professionals, she often feels the pressure to also devote the same of time and energy to her studies. However, she doesn’t feel comfortable managing the type of academic schedule that her husband follows.

While living in the Midwest, she enrolled at Midwest Community College because it was too late to transfer to Central University. During her first semester at Midwest Community College, she enrolled in an academically rigorous schedule, but did not do well academically. Since then, she has enrolled in courses at her own pace. She is currently only enrolled in one course—English. She also took spring 2014 off to plan her wedding. During her off semester, Esperanza began to volunteer at an after-school program for Latina/o students. In addition to attending MCC part-time, Esperanza also works at a local coffee shop an average of twenty-five hours a week. With respect to campus involvement, she recently attended Latina/o Student Organization meetings. Her involvement with campus and instructors is at a moderate level. Moreover, she has made a strategic effort to remain on campus to complete her course assignments and readings.

Esperanza views instructors at Midwest Community College to be both approachable and helpful. She cited several incidents in which she has interacted with instructors especially with the faculty advisor of Latina/o Student Organization. She has appreciated how accommodating and welcoming instructors are towards students. Recently, Esperanza began to utilize instructors’ office hours. She attends instructors’ office hours twice a week to seek out guidance on course material. Unlike her previous semester, Esperanza has devoted more effort and time to her academics. She has eliminated a number of distractions that previously hindered her academic potential. Esperanza also does not take the initiative to join study groups because of her previous experience of finding them to be distracting. She also underscored the difficulty of identifying a time and place that fits in with students’ work commitments. Rather than invest time and effort in socializing, Esperanza has increased her involvement with the community. Currently, she is involved in two different tutoring programs. She is passionate about helping others become academically successful. Esperanza is also interested in taking part in student government but is concerned about the required time commitment, so hasn’t actively pursued this interest. As of now, she is focused on her volunteer and academic responsibilities. She usually connects with a counselor at Midwest Community College twice per academic year. Esperanza finds her advising...
meetings to be helpful, but would benefit immensely from a more personalized advising session rather than a generic one.

With respect to fit, Esperanza fits strongly at Midwest Community College. She views the campus as diverse and very welcoming to a wide range of students. Esperanza did feel academically prepared to meet the academic rigors of MCC especially since she excelled in high school and at her previous college. She has shifted her curricular focus from political science to psychology. Her move to the Midwest was a major adjustment period for Esperanza, but she has been able to acclimate to the new environment with the support of her husband. Since her husband is a graduate student at Central University, Esperanza utilizes academic spaces at CU to be closer to him. They often study at her husband’s graduate office or the campus union. A major challenge that Esperanza had to overcome was creating friendships that were academically supportive rather than focused heavily on the socializing aspect of college.

Esperanza has implemented a couple of different strategies during her second semester at Midwest Community College. She has been intentional about staying on campus to complete homework assignments. She has also built a community of support at MCC that has allowed her to feel connected to campus. She has not experienced any racist or discriminatory exchanges with faculty, peers, or administrators. Her involvement with the Latina/o Student Organization has allowed her to feel a part of the campus. She, however, has experienced several racially charged incidents off campus, especially while working at a local coffee shop and restaurant. While working a coffee shop, an older White male patron asked Esperanza if her dark skin complexion was a result of grinding coffee. She was taken aback by the blatantly racist remark, but decided to just let it go. Esperanza also shared how an employer at a local chain restaurant assumed she was an undocumented immigrant. The employer processing her new hire forms commented that her “fake” social security card looked exactly like the real ones despite being born in Texas. Rather than engage in the ignorance of others, she decided to laugh off the insulting remark. Esperanza has had to endure a number of racially charged incidents. She talked extensively of having to acclimate to the cultural shock of moving from being the ethnic majority in south Texas to the ethnic minority in the Midwest. Her time in the Midwest has affirmed her sense of identity as a Latina and Texan. She has never wished to be anything but Latina despite having to navigate racist incidents in her new community. Esperanza’s husband has been an invaluable source of support especially in difficult moments. She attributes much of her resiliency and focus to succeed academically on the unwavering support that she receives from her husband as well as her family back in Texas.

Esperanza has high educational and career aspirations. She plans to transfer to a university and earn a bachelor’s degree in psychology. She is also interested in obtaining a master’s degree in psychology, but wants to focus on earning a bachelor’s degree. Her husband has been a major source of motivation, but also brings a high level of intensity and pressure, which can be offsetting to her. For that reason, she has yet to share with him her goals of obtaining a master’s degree. She has no doubt that her husband would provide her with unwavering support, but he will also create an enormous amount of pressure. When asked if she had the resources to obtain her educational goals, Esperanza responded that she did not have the immediate information to pursue a master’s degree, but felt she could obtain it if needed. Her interest in pursuing a master’s degree is a recent one. She has not had the opportunity to research the type of program she would like to consider.

With respect to a profession, Esperanza is interested becoming a marriage therapist. She has considered job shadowing a therapist, but is unsure of the type of restrictions she would
encounter with trying to observe the day-to-day operations of the profession. Overall, Esperanza strongly believed she had the necessary support and resources to attain her educational and professional aspirations. She, however, communicated a couple of foreseeable challenges while pursuing an advanced degree. First, Esperanza shared a concern of having to juggle her academic commitment and family responsibilities, especially if she decides to have children in the future. She is also worried that her husband’s residency and career path would require that they relocate several times across the nation before settling. Despite these possible challenges, Esperanza is convinced that she will be able to overcome these obstacles with the support and guidance of her husband. At the end of conversation, Esperanza offered several recommendations to incoming Latina/o students. She encouraged Latina/o students to remain focused on their academic endeavors. She also emphasized the importance of taking advantage of the numerous academic and social resources available at Midwest Community College. Lastly, Esperanza also prompted Latina/o students to move beyond their comfort zone and interact with non-Latina/o students at MCC. This type of interaction will allow them to grow as a person and student.

**Gabriel**

Gabriel was born in Atlanta, Georgia. He identifies as a first-generation Latina/o. Both of his parents were born in Mexico. When Gabriel was only a year old, his parents decided to move back to home country, so they could be closer to their family. While living in Mexico, Gabriel’s two younger brothers were born. His father moved back to the United States so there would be enough income to sustain the family. Gabriel’s father was living in Chicago, Illinois while the rest of family was living in Mexico. This family arrangement was only short-term because soon after, the rest of family joined their father in Illinois. They relocated to Champaign, Illinois. Gabriel has been raised in campus town for most of his life. He attended the local elementary, middle school, and high school. Most recently, Gabriel is a second year student at Midwest Community College.

Gabriel’s parents work in labor-intensive jobs. His father works at a local restaurant, where he was been able to move up the ranks from dishwasher to cook. His mother worked at a hotel maid and also cooked special Mexican cuisine such as tamales. Both of his parents attained a minimal level of formal education. They only completed a middle school education. Being denied the opportunity to pursue a college education really has shaped how his parents viewed the significance and value of an education. Gabriel’s mother has been a key figure in shaping his educational aspirations. His mother fostered a living environment that emphasized learning. She would often ask Gabriel and his brothers to retell their day at school as well as the subject matter they learned in a detail manner. She has always been an avid reader in Spanish, so she would take Gabriel and his younger brothers to the local bookstore at least three times per week so they could read. She would give Gabriel Spanish books so he could learn how to read and write in Spanish. His parents’ encouraged their sons to well versed in their native language that included being able to read, write, and speak in Spanish. His parents often used their limited formal education and labor-intensive employment as reasons why their children should pursue a college education. Their constant reminders about the value of education propelled Gabriel to become the first in his family to attain a high school diploma. They were ecstatic when Gabriel enrolled for his first semester at Midwest Community College. For his parents, it was finally a dream come true. Gabriel shared the awesome responsibility of being the first in the family to attend college. All of his family members looked up to him and saw him as an important role model.
Despite the added pressure of being a trailblazer, he has been able to handle the responsibility with ease.

In our first interview, Gabriel devoted a section to discussing the hardships that his two younger brothers endured because of their undocumented status. His two younger brothers were born in Mexico, so they arrived to the United States as undocumented immigrants. Gabriel keenly recalled the countless restrictions imposed on his younger brothers. For example, Gabriel shared that his younger brother, a junior in high school, is enrolled in a German class, but he will be unable to take part in the class trip to Germany because of his immigration status. His other brother recently graduated from high school and is currently enrolled in his first year at Midwest Community College. Gabriel discussed the numerous challenges his middle brother faced while submitting his college application and scheduling his assessment placement because he didn’t have a social security number. Gabriel would also drive his younger brother to high school because he did not have a license to drive. His other brother was forced to drive without license, so Gabriel highlighted the precautionary measures he would have to take so as not to be pulled over by law enforcement. Gabriel’s parents are also undocumented immigrants. He retold the accounts of his mother being involved in two separate automobile accidents, which were both caused by other motorists. In the first accident, Gabriel’s mother had to pay for the car repairs of her own vehicle and that of other motorists despite the accident not being caused by her. His parents feared getting the police involved so they arranged a private settlement. In similar fashion, the other motorist caused the second accident, but this time law enforcement was dispatched. Gabriel’s mother wasn’t held responsible to pay for the damage, but she was given a hefty fine for driving without a driver’s license. These two experiences have really shocked Gabriel’s mother to the point of her not being to operate a vehicle as often as she once did. Gabriel was born in the United States, so he has not endured many of the restrictions that his family has encountered, but he is quite cognizant of the barriers his family has experienced on a daily basis. More importantly, he has been able to funnel his family’s struggle to fuel his passion towards a college education.

Gabriel began his education at a local elementary school. Since Gabriel’s native language is Spanish, he had a very traumatic couple of years as he tried to learn English. His mother told Gabriel that he would attempt to speak in English, but only gibberish would come out of his mouth. She also shared with Gabriel that he would sit in the back of the classroom and disengage from the classroom. As he reached the fifth grade, Gabriel began to master the English language and he became more involved in the classroom setting. In high school, he was encouraged by his math teacher to enroll in Advanced Placement courses. His math teacher also gave him a tutoring role in the classroom because he knew the content material well. This math teacher gave him the validation that he had tremendous potential to be both academically and professionally successful. Gabriel never considered himself to be different from his peers. He, however, did notice that he had a strong desire to learn and complete his assignments compared to his peers. He viewed this difference as an opportunity to encourage and help his peers with their homework assignments.

In high school, Gabriel became involved with sports. He played soccer for all four years and tennis for a year. His involvement with sports really allowed him to feel connected with his peers and campus. Gabriel also enrolled in three Advanced Placement courses, which consisted of geometry, English, and Anatomy. He did well academically. His friends often admired him for his math prowess and they would often refer to him as the human calculator. He never experienced any racism or discrimination during high school. He felt that all of his teachers
viewed him on an equal level compared to his peers. Gabriel felt excluded during the initial days of his enrollment in Advanced Placement courses because he was one of two Latina/o students in the course. Most of his classmates in AP courses were White students that had been taking classes together for several years. His enrollment in academically challenging courses removed him from his Latina/o peers and closer to students that were excelling academically. Over time, Gabriel was able to adjust and became more comfortable with his new classmates. While enrolled in AP and honor courses, Gabriel did not feel that his contributions were minimized. He felt that his teachers and administrators were available to give him the support and the resources necessary to be successful.

According to Gabriel, college education was always a dream for him and his family. He did not think it would become a reality until his sophomore year when teachers began to inform him of the required forms and documents needed to apply for college. Gabriel shared that college information and resources were available for students, but he felt extremely intimidated by the whole application process. Gabriel did not start applying to colleges until his senior year. He took part in an after-school college preparation program to obtain important information about the college application. In the end, Gabriel was able to overcome the strong feeling of intimidation and uncertainty by applying to college. His driving force past these unsettling sentiments was his parents’ high standards to obtain a college education.

Gabriel only applied to Midwest Community College during his senior year in high school. He heard positive reviews from teachers and counselors about MCC. He was also attracted to MCC because of its close proximity to his parents’ home and affordability. Gabriel did not feel ready to leave his parents’ home, so he decided to enroll at MCC because it was the same town his parents lived. He also shouldered some family responsibilities such as driving his younger brother to high school and being the family translator. Gabriel also referenced that the financial burden of paying for a four-year institution was beyond his family’s income. Gabriel made a decision to enroll at Midwest Community College so he could complete his general education courses and then transfer to a university and earn his bachelor’s degree. Currently, Gabriel is in his second year at Midwest Community College. He is pursuing a degree in early education. He has aspirations of being an elementary teacher. During his first year, Gabriel struggled to balance both his academic and work commitments. Gabriel also worked over thirty hours of week while being enrolled as a full-time student. He made the assumption that the academic rigor of MCC would be similar to that of his high school. He quickly learned that the courses at MCC were demanding and he needed to manage his time effectively in order to complete his course assignments. After his first year, Gabriel reduced the number of hours he worked from thirty to twenty hours a week. This reduction in work hours allowed him to devote more time and energy to his academics.

Gabriel found Midwest Community College’ campus climate to be very welcoming to Latina/o students. He hasn’t experienced any incidents of racism or racial insensitivity. Gabriel highlighted the growth of the Latina/o student presence as a major reason why the campus is viewed as welcoming to Latina/o students. He also talked about the Latina/o Student Organization and the active role it has served to provide Latina/o students with an opportunity to connect and engage in the community outreach. Gabriel has been involved with the Latina/o Student Organization, but not on a consistent level. When asked about his instructors and counselors, Gabriel viewed them as very approachable and accessible. He was able to list the numerous ways that students are able to interact with their instructors such as email, office hours, phone call, and text message. In the previous year, Gabriel connected with instructors once per
week to discuss questions he had about the course content. Gabriel discussed how a class assignment required him to engage with an instructor outside of class and it helped him establish a close connection with the professor. Gabriel underscored the passion that his instructors have towards teaching the course material and ensuring student success.

A major challenge for Gabriel has been his introverted personality. He really has not been able to establish a strong connection with peers or maximize the numerous opportunities available at Midwest Community College. Gabriel also attributed his work schedule as a reason why he has not been able to take a more active role in the Latina/o Student Organization or branch out to other student organizations such as the Future Teacher Student Organization. For this reason, Gabriel rated his sense of fit a four out of five. Based on his responses, Gabriel demonstrated a medium level of engagement at Midwest Community College. He has improved his attendance at the Latina/o Student Organization and has connected with other peers that are pursuing a career in early education. Despite his medium level of engagement, Gabriel has been able to negotiate resources and his peer networks to locate important resources off- and on-campus. He found out about the undergraduate library through a classmate in psychology. He has also been able to locate opportunities to be part of the campus and local community through his volunteer work. During his time at Midwest Community College, Gabriel approaches all of his classes with an eagerness to learn and high level of preparedness. To prepare for his future in teaching, Gabriel has volunteered teaching Sunday school at a local church for the past five years.

In our interview, Gabriel offered several recommendations to incoming Latina/o students at Midwest Community College. He encouraged incoming students to be involved. He also recommended that they remain positive and motivated throughout their time at Midwest Community College. He communicated a profound awareness of the numerous challenges surrounding Latina/o students, but he implored prospective students to utilize the numerous resources available in promoting academic success. According to Gabriel, there are plenty of faculty and administrators willing to lend a helping hand to Latina/o students. During the course of our interview, Gabriel increased his engagement level by participating in the Latina/o Student Organization.

Gabriel is pursuing a degree in elementary education. He plans to transfer to Central State University, so he can obtain a bachelor’s degree in early education. During our conversation, we also talked about the numerous possibilities available to those that seek to obtain an advanced degree. Gabriel was unsure of the educational trajectory available to college students, so we devoted a segment of our last interview to discussing the different levels of educational degrees as well as possible career and employment opportunities for college students. In particular, we talked about the numerous career paths for people pursuing a doctoral degree in education. This became a very intriguing aspect of the conversation because for the first time, Gabriel was able to visualize the enormous platform he would be able to attain if he continued his educational trajectory past a bachelor’s degree. In our conversation, Gabriel found that other Latinas/os have had the opportunity to obtain an advanced degree and are now professors teaching undergraduate students. Gabriel’s eyes lit up at the possibilities. With a clearer understanding of the educational trajectory of college students, Gabriel articulated a desire to teach at an elementary, but he also saw himself pursuing a doctoral degree, so he could be a professor at a college or university.

According to Gabriel, he strongly believes that he can accomplish any career or educational goal he sets his mind to because of a strong desire to succeed. If given the resources and information to obtain a career path as an educator, Gabriel will be able to achieve amazing
feats. He also believes that the unwavering support of his family and loved ones is a constant source of encouragement especially when he comes across unexpected challenges. In our conversation, Gabriel was beginning to formulate his future career and educational path. He has not had the opportunity to extensively discuss his aspirations with advisors or mentors, but does feel that if he shares his goals with faculty and advisors at Midwest Community College, that he would be given the information necessary to make progress towards attaining his career and educational goals.

Jorge

Jorge is twenty-two years old. He has spent most of his life in a campus town. His parents were born in Guatemala and decided to migrate from their native country to Los Angeles, California. While living in California, Jorge was born. Both of his parents only attained an elementary education in Guatemala. Jorge recalled that, at a young age, his father worked mostly in factory jobs while his mother stayed at home taking care of him and his siblings. His family is quite large. It consists of his mother, father, older sister, older brother, himself, two younger sisters, and a younger brother. Jorge’s older sister remained in Guatemala until he turned ten years old. She reunited the family when they were living in Illinois. Jorge’s parents decided to leave California for central Illinois. Their decision to move was swayed by their family ties to Illinois as well as employment opportunities.

Jorge’s transition to the Midwest was a bit of a shock. He had to get accustomed to life in colder weather as well as adjust to the non-city lifestyle. With respect to his education, Jorge had to repeat the third grade in Illinois. His parents’ always emphasized the importance of attaining a college education. They would often use themselves as examples of why Jorge and his siblings needed to attain a high level of formal education. Jorge’s father works both a full-time and part-time job at local restaurants. Jorge’s mother also works at a local restaurant with his father. Jorge’s parents constantly remind him of the numerous opportunities available to him that were not present for them in their country of origin. He also recalled the various ways that his parents were involved in his early education. For example, Jorge’s parents would always promote reading in their household by purchasing books for all of their sons. They would also sign up Jorge and his siblings for after-school programs that offered a positive outlet for their children. According to Jorge, his father would frequently share with him that he wanted to provide his family with an opportunity to have a better life, a life he couldn’t have while growing up in Guatemala. For this reason, Jorge shared that his parents would constantly ask him for an update on his academics. He commented, “They would always be on my back about school.” Jorge also discussed the influential role of former teachers and his current girlfriend, who is enrolled at Central University.

All throughout his early education, Jorge had a very outgoing personality, which made it very easy for him to establish friendships with his neighbors and classmates. His outgoing personality, coupled with his athleticism, made him a social magnet in high school. While in high school, Jorge played soccer, tennis, and track and field. He also took part in a college-going program that offered college information, provided tutoring, and took students to college visits. Jorge, however, devoted minimal attention to his academics. He also had a history of arriving late to class for variety reasons. During high school, he prioritized his friendships and sports over his academics. Many of his teachers and administrators would often try to encourage and support Jorge because he showed tremendous potential. Jorge, however, continued to invest minimal effort on his academics. It was just enough to get by. His minimum effort dramatically impacted
his odds of being admitted to a university. During his senior year in high school, Jorge applied to the flagship institution of Illinois and two mid-level selective colleges, but all three denied him admittance. His only option for a college education was Midwest Community College. He applied and enrolled directly after high school. When asked about the campus climate at his high school, Jorge viewed it in very positive terms. It was a place that welcomed students from different backgrounds. He also received the support and encouragement of teachers and administrators. Jorge mentioned that he took part in a Latina/o student organization while in high school that helped promote Latina/o culture and heritage around the school.

Jorge talked very positively about the campus climate at both high school and Midwest Community College, but he did highlight incidents of being racially profiled and targeted in the surrounding community. Jorge shared an incident that occurred while carpooling with another Latina/o co-worker as they were doing outreach for their summer employment. Jorge and his co-worker were pulled up at a nearby gas station to fill up the vehicle’s gas tank. As they began to park at the gas station, they came across a police vehicle exiting the establishment. After filling up the gas tank, they resumed their trip, but they noticed that the same patrol car was now following them and soon after they were pulled over and asked for their driver’s licenses and car registration. Jorge and his co-worker were not cited for any type of driving infraction rather the police officer wanted to make sure they hand the proper documentation to be driving. Being pulled over without any cause really shock Jorge. Jorge began to question and think about a life as a non-Latina/o. Jorge used this incident of being racially profiled to start a healthy discussion among members of the Latina/o Student Organization at Midwest Community College.

Our interviews took place during the summer between his third and fourth year at Midwest Community College. Jorge was already registered as a full-time student for the upcoming fall semester. During our interview, Jorge talked about the academic struggles that continued from high school to college. Jorge devoted considerable time to his friendships as well as becoming a very visible leader on campus. During his second year at Midwest Community College, Jorge became actively involved in the Latina/o Student Organization. He took part in the organization’s events and volunteer efforts. His active role garnered him the support and respect of his fellow classmates so much that he was voted the president of the Latina/o Student Organization. Jorge’s involvement enabled him to make strong connections with students, administrators, and professors on campus. He, however, continued to struggle academically. According to Jorge, he still did not have the necessary study strategies and underutilized the available academic resources to be a successful student. Jorge mentioned that his first year at Midwest Community College was a complete shock because he erroneously assumed that professors at MCC would be as lenient as his high school teachers with their grading and assignment due dates. Jorge’s high school approach to his academics resulted in his low academic performance. Despite Jorge’s academic struggles during his first two years at MCC, he was able to cultivate a purpose as well as the necessary studying habits to continue along his path of obtaining an associates degree in kinesiology and applying to the nursing program at MCC.

Jorge attributes his recent academic support to two major factors. First, his girlfriend, who is currently a student at the Central University, role modeled important studying and learning habits that she used to understand course material. For example, she showed him a learning strategy of printing out hard copies of the PowerPoint lectures and writing down key notes on the handouts. She also informed Jorge of Central University’s libraries, which he frequently utilizes especially the Natural Science Library. Jorge also listed a number of other University spaces that were options for him to study that included: the Undergraduate Library,
Grainger, and the Union. Second, Jorge began to utilize important resources that he infrequently used during his two years at MCC. One important resource was attending instructors’ office hours. He began to attend instructors’ office during the start of his third year. He found instructors to be both approachable and accessible to him. Jorge would discuss questions he had over the course content as well as ways to improve his grades on upcoming assignments. Jorge also began to increase his level of engagement with his academic advisors. During his first two years, Jorge would only attend advisor meetings to enroll for courses in the upcoming semester. He realized that the role of an advisor expanded well beyond just course selection. Their role was to support and plan his future. In his most recent meeting with an advisor, Jorge talked about courses he needed to complete his associate’s degree as well as important pre-requisites he needed to fulfill to apply to the nursing program at MCC.

Because of Jorge’s high level of involvement with Midwest Community College, he was able to continue on his path towards completing his degree despite encountering academic missteps his first two years. His level of involvement allowed him to reorient the role of advisors and instructors at Midwest Community College. He was able to see them more as champions for his educational and career goals. Additionally, Jorge was able to make strong connections with his fellow peers. This level of engagement really shaped how he viewed the campus as well as his sense of fit and satisfaction with attending MCC. According to Jorge, Midwest Community College is a very welcoming environment that supports all students. He gave the highest rating to all three questions around the importance of connecting with others, perceived fit with the campus, and satisfaction attending MCC.

Jorge recommended that incoming Latina/o students at MCC immediately make connections with peers and instructors. He encouraged prospective students to be involved with student organizations. Lastly, he urged students to take advantage of the academic resources available to students both at Midwest Community College as well as at Central University. The University is a place that Jorge frequently utilizes to study. Regardless of the stereotypes attributed to community college students, Jorge sees MCC as a welcoming place for students with varying academic abilities that gives them all a chance to fulfill their educational and career goals. More importantly, it is an institution that is academically comparable to Central University, but it offers students small class environments that promote a high level of interaction between students and instructor.

Jorge’s career goal is to become a nurse practitioner. A nurse practitioner is able to consult patients without the presence of a doctor. This person can also sign off on prescriptions. According to Jorge, this is the highest level a nurse can attain without having to complete a medical degree program. Jorge’s highest educational degree goal is to obtain a bachelor’s degree in nursing. Before pursuing a bachelor’s degree, Jorge plans on applying to the selective nursing program at Midwest Community College for an associate in nursing. He is currently enrolled in his fourth year at MCC. It has taken him quite some time to figure out his passion and interest, but he has finally found a curricular and career path that he enjoys. Jorge also discussed the difficulty he encountered in making school a priority and his lack of discipline. His study habits were also not up to a level that allowed him to be academically successful. Jorge attributes his current academic success the study habits he learned from his girlfriend.

Jorge has elected to place extracurricular involvement on the backburner so he can devote attention to improving his overall grades as well as applying to the Midwest Community College’s nursing program. He plans to apply during the spring semester while also completing the final pre-requisites for the nursing program. After obtaining his associates degree in nursing,
Jorge intends on working in the health profession field before enrolling in a bachelor’s program for nursing. He spoke highly of the unwavering support he has received from his family, friends, and instructors towards obtaining his academic and professional goals. In addition, Jorge has consulted with advisors about the necessary steps he needs to take to apply to the nursing program. He has yet to shadow anybody in his career interest, but plans on seeking out volunteer opportunities at the local hospitals in the near future. If admitted to the nursing program, he will receive numerous opportunities to intern at the local clinics and hospitals. Jorge is very confident that he will be able to earn an associate’s degree in nursing from Midwest Community College.

Luz

Luz was born in the north central part of Mexico. She arrived to the United States at the age of five. Luz’s immediate family consists of her and her mother. She never knew her biological father. Luz described herself as very different than her peers because of growing up in a single-parent household. She cited having extended family as a source of support, but not enough to overcome the daily struggles of being raised in a single-parent household. Luz and her mother first moved to Texas. They only lived in Texas for a little over a year. After Texas, Luz and her mother moved to North Carolina with extended family. Luz was raised in North Carolina for a majority of her childhood. She attended elementary and middle school in North Carolina. While living in North Carolina, Luz’s mother worked in a factory. Before attending high school, Luz’s mother was offered the opportunity to manage a family business, owned by Luz’s uncle, in a small town in central Illinois. Luz’s mother decided to take the offer so they moved to Illinois. In Illinois, Luz had to adjust to a new town and school. She found it very difficult to leave North Carolina because of the strong bonds she created with her peers as well as the sheer size difference in her new town. Luz shared that her middle school in North Carolina was twice the size of her new high school in Illinois. She was also surprised to learn that many of the Latina/o residents were related to each other. Luz was able to adjust to the new environment and create new friendships. She also appreciated the number of opportunities she was able to obtain in Illinois.

Luz’s mother only attained a middle school education in Mexico. She worked tirelessly to provide Luz with the essentials of shelter and food. She would constantly remind Luz about the importance of obtaining a formal education. Because of her mother’s limited amount of formal education, she was unable to help Luz with her homework assignments, especially if they were in English. However, Luz’s mother frequently attended parent-teacher conferences as well as took the time to drive Luz to sporting practices and games. Luz’s mother constantly underscored the value of obtaining a college education despite not having the information or resources to share with Luz. She also encouraged Luz to pursue a degree in several career paths, medicine and business. Luz’s mother reserved demeanor created a unique display of support and encouragement. She rarely told Luz that she was proud of her academic and professional achievements. She is overjoyed with Luz’s current path towards a college education, but has a difficult time expressing her feelings with Luz. Regardless of how Luz’s mother expressed her feelings towards her daughter, Luz has always been inspired and encouraged by her mother as well as the limiting circumstances of their lives. Luz has also been influenced by the number of teen pregnancies and high school dropouts she witnessed while living in North Carolina. Luz had a strong conviction that a college education would be her way out of the cycle of teen pregnancy and poverty amongst her peers. Her neighbor in central Illinois also influenced Luz’s educational aspirations. Her neighbor was a year older than her, but they attended high school around the
same time. She didn’t talk to him, but observed and admired his commitment to academics. During his high school graduation, Luz’s neighbor gave a moving speech about the importance of students conquering their dreams. His message of achieving dreams has resonated with Luz and continues to propel her towards accomplishing her own dreams.

Luz’s mother discouraged her from interacting with her peers outside school activities. This type of strict upbringing has continued while Luz attends Midwest Community College. Her mother frequently disapproves of Luz staying out late or sleepovers with core group of friends. She continues to be very protective of Luz. Luz cited her mother’s strict and protective upbringing as cultural differences, but also expressed the difficulty of having to adjust and cope with differences. With respect to ethnic identity, Luz expressed a strong sense of identity with being Latina. She talked about the importance of pursuing a college education to overcome stereotypes attributed to Latinas/os. There have been moments that Luz has felt it would be convenient to identify solely as American rather trying to negotiate her multiple identities. Luz cited incidents of discrimination towards her family. For example, Luz recalled the driver’s license inspection points in North Carolina as unfairly targeting the Latina/o population, particularly those that were undocumented and were driving without a license.

Luz viewed her high school in central Illinois as both welcoming and supportive. She was part of the track and field team as well as several student organizations. She attended school regularly and had a core group of friends. Luz was also involved in the community. She utilized Latina/o community centers and also took part in the church choir group. Luz also worked an average of ten hours a week at a local grocery store. Luz did not have a strong connection with either teachers or staff at high school. She didn’t enroll in either Advanced Placement or dual credit courses. Luz also did not participate in college preparatory programs. Her bond with mentors took place outside the school setting and in the community center for Latina/o families. Luz shared that counselors in her high school provided information about college, but did not take the additional step to advocate or support students in the college application process. Unlike her high school counselors, Luz was able to receive hands-on guidance and support from the director of the Latina/o community center.

Luz enrolled immediately into a community college in southern Illinois to pursue a cosmetology degree. She completed the program within a year and a semester. Upon earning her degree in cosmetology, Luz worked thirty to thirty-five hour workweeks while also attending Midwest Community College. Her employment experience at the beauty salon encouraged her to reconsider her profession and pursue other options. Luz is no longer working at the beauty salon. She is pursuing a degree in business administration and plans on transferring to a four-year college for the upcoming academic year. Based on Luz’s responses to a series of campus engagement questions, Luz demonstrated a low level of engagement. She attributed her low level of engagement with peers and student organizations to her status as a commuter student. During the course of our interview, Luz began increasing her level of engagement at an unbelievable rate. She ran and was elected senator for student government. She also began to attend meetings at the Latina/o Student Organization. With respect to instructors at Midwest Community College, Luz found her instructors to be both approachable and willing to help students. She recalled several examples of her seeking out additional guidance on course material and instructors being willing to help out. She also talked about the flexibility of instructors to meet with students. Luz also underscored the important supportive role that her counselor has played in her life. In the current semester, Luz visited her advisor a total of five times. Her most recent visit was to ask for a letter of recommendation for a scholarship. In the classroom setting, Luz primarily observes
and takes notes. If she is unable to understand the course content, she reaches out to the instructor over email or office hours. She has been able to connect with her classmates, but due to her commute, she has found it difficult to either be part of a study group or interact with her classmates outside the classroom context. For Luz, the most challenging part of being a student at Midwest Community College has been her commute because she often carpool with another person.

As a commuter student, Luz has time restrictions. She is unable to attend events or interact with her classmates that are not within time period she is on campus. Luz shared that she knew about different off-campus resources at the nearby Central University, but revealed that she didn’t utilize them because she did not live in the campus town. Her limited engagement with peers and student organizations significantly impacted her sense of fit. When asked to rate her fit, Luz gave a rating of 3 out of 5. She attributed her low score to her status as a commuter student. Luz also discussed how she did not feel academically prepared to meet the challenges of her classes during her first semester. Fortunately, she has been able to overcome this obstacle through the use of student support services as well as her interaction with instructors. Luz also reported feeling supported and encouraged by her instructors and advisors, which dramatically different than her high school experience. Luz also commented about the welcoming environment created at Midwest Community College.

In our last interview, Luz revealed her status as undocumented student and the numerous obstacles she has had and will continue to overcome. Her undocumented status revelation came at the tail end of our interview. She shared with me that her legal status is something that she is very protective of and reserved about revealing to others because of its sensitive nature. At a young age, Luz learned about her legal status. During middle school, Luz wanted to play organized soccer, so she was required to submit medical documentation. This required medical document asked her to report her immigration status, which she found out, was as an undocumented immigrant. Luz elaborated on the economic constraints imposed on undocumented students. She also referenced how federally funded student support programs are off limits to her and other undocumented students. She was not able to apply for the TRIO program at Midwest Community College because they require applicants to submit their social security information. Being the first in her family to attend college, she is unable to receive the necessary support or guidance from mother. She has had to rely on herself to seek out the information and resources about college.

Luz has high academic and career aspirations. She wants to pursue a master’s degree in business administration, but fears the financial burden of pursuing an advanced degree, especially because she is ineligible to receive federal aid. For this reason, she is simply focused on obtaining her bachelor’s degree in business administration. She would love to transfer to Central University, but again, is afraid that the financial cost would be too high. For this reason, Luz is considering transferring to a more affordable alternative--Central State University. Because of her legal status, Luz missed out on several important milestones marking her emergence into adulthood such as obtaining a driver’s license while in high school. Luz also revealed how her undocumented status is a constant reminder of the constraints imposed on her career and educational goals. Luz, however, refuses to concede to these restrictions. Luz continues to push beyond these limits to achieve her educational and career goals. In her young life, Luz has already earned a degree in cosmetology and is on the verge of transferring to a four-year university. When asked to offer other undocumented students words of advice, she said, “…if they really want to succeed um they have the motivation and to go on and I mean like fight
for your dreams. Fight for what you want and don't give up. Like it's going to be a rough fight you can say, but it's possible. Don't give up. Definitely don't give up.” Luz is well positioned to offer this advice because she has lived it. Luz continues to fight and refuses to give up despite the constant reminder that she is undocumented.

**Martin**

Martin was born in Los Angeles, California. Due to employment opportunities, Martin’s parents relocated to the Midwest. They initially moved to Chicago and then to Indiana. Martin’s family lived in Indiana for almost 10 years before moving to a rural town in central Illinois. His family consists of four younger brothers and both parents. His parents were born in Mexico. He is the oldest of five siblings. His parents adopted one of his brothers at the age of fifteen. Martin identifies strongly with his Mexican identity. He was raised in a Spanish-speaking household and his mother trained and practiced Mexican folk dancing, which is known in Spanish as folklórico. Moreover, Martin responded on several occasions that he felt proud to be a Latina/o striving to break stereotypes that often depict Latinas/os as uneducated.

With respect to his parents’ educational background, Martin’s parents had the opportunity to attend college. Martin’s mother played a significant role in shaping his educational goals. She would help him out on his homework assignments as well as serve as his tutor on course material. Martin’s mother constantly emphasized the value of pursuing a formal education. She would often use her over 20 years of employment at the pork plant as a reason why all of her children needed to obtain a college education. Martin’s mother would share with him that she didn’t want him or any of his siblings to work at a factory. Martin’s father also promoted the importance of education, but he often pressured Martin and his brothers to focus more on employment rather than school. More specifically, Martin’s father opened up a Latina/o grocery store and expected all of his children to work at the store after school. This type of expectation conflicted with Martin’s extracurricular activities as well as his college years. His father’s actions and expectations emphasized the value of work over school. He expected his son to work at least 40 hours a week during high school. For this reason, Martin had to let go of all his extracurricular activities. Martin began high school playing track and field, football, and wrestling. With each passing year, he had to stop playing sports. By his senior year of high school, Martin was no longer involved in campus sports.

Martin extensively discussed the heartbreak and constant struggles he had to endure because of the expectation to work at the family owned store. He has attempted, on a number of occasions, to explain the importance of attaining a college education with his father, but all of his attempts have been unsuccessful. His father doesn’t quite understand the long-term benefits of obtaining a college degree as well as the cultivating of peer-to-peer networks, which Martin finds essential in securing important resources and information. Martin’s mother supports his academic endeavors but is unable to serve as an advocate for him. His mother usually gives in to his father’s unrealistic work expectations. Martin also shared that his father rarely inquired about his classes and showed little interest in his homework assignments. Martin has found it extremely difficult to talk to his father about the importance of a college education or securing an internship in his career of interest. According to Martin, his father values work over education. His father’s refusal to understand the value of an education beyond high school has been profoundly painful for Martin. In our final interview, Martin began to visibly shake when
describing how his father doesn’t provide him with the support or encouragement he needs to maximize his potential as a college student.

Martin also discussed the important role that teachers have played in shaping his educational goals, in particular, his modern media and web design teachers in high school. These two instructors ignited Martin’s interest in pursuing a degree in journalism and communication. Martin also attributed his college readiness to his English and calculus teachers. In high school, Martin felt tremendous support and guidance by teachers and administrators. Moreover, he excelled academically. He was considered by many of his classmates as academically gifted. He was enrolled in all honors courses and a handful of Advanced Placement courses. For his AP calculus exam, Martin earned a four out of five. Martin also took part in a couple of dual credit courses. In all of his courses, he was the only Latino male student. He took great pride in being a Latina/o striving to excel academically and pursue a college education.

Martin has always loved reading. At a young age, he became an avid reader. He slowed down his personal reading during high school because of school and family commitments. Martin never saw his parents read a book, but his mother was always willing to purchase him books to read. He began to excel in school at a very young age. He started to earn all A’s after his third year in elementary. For Martin, school came naturally. Martin is the first in his family to attend college. He started thinking about college during middle school, but did not see it as a financial possibility until his junior year in high school when his family’s finances stabilized. Before his junior year in high school, Martin was considering joining the military to fund his college education. Martin also talked extensively of growing up in a family where he was the only one to attend college. His mother supported his college aspirations, but could not provide him with the necessary support or resources to apply to college. Martin had to secure college resources and information from his high school teachers and counselors. He also discussed the awesome responsibility of being the one in his family to pave a path towards college for his siblings and extended family members. Being the first in his family to attend college has really pushed him to overcome a number of challenges throughout his college experience.

Martin also served as a mentor for other Latina/o students during high school. He became a role model and advocate for Latina/o students that were not doing well in classroom. This leadership position was a challenge for Martin because he interacted with students that struggled in school. He also shared a high level of frustration with U.S.-born Latina/o students that were not taking advantage of the educational opportunities available to them. He talked extensively about the challenges that undocumented immigrants encounter and how U.S.-born Latina/o students took their unrestricted access to resources and opportunities for granted. Martin’s adopted brother is an undocumented immigrant, so he is quite familiar with the numerous restrictions imposed on this segment of the population.

During high school, Martin juggled an academically challenging schedule while also working more than 40 hours a week at his family owned store. Due to his high involvement in the family business, Martin was only able to connect with his peers through sports. He had a core group of friends that he made through his participation in football and wrestling. Since Martin interacted mostly with athletes and students in his honors and AP courses, he rarely interacted with other Latina/o students. Many of his Latina/o peers resented him and called him “guero” (White) because of his focus on academics and sports. In his reflection, Martin revealed that he is proud of being Latina/o. He wanted to show that Latinas/os could also be athletic and do well
academically. He wanted to break the stereotype that Latina/o students do not do well in school or attend college.

Martin excelled academically all throughout high school. He applied to several colleges and ended up enrolling at Central University. For the past two years, Martin has been attending Central University. He is pursuing a degree in journalism through the College of Media. He is also interested in majoring in communication given its broad-based application to media. During his first year, Martin struggled to meet the academic rigor of his courses as well as juggle his family commitments. He shared that his high school did not prepare him for the academic intensity of Central University. Despite his initial struggles, Martin was able to improve his grades during the second half of his first year as well as his second year at Central University. Based on his family’s income level, Martin did not receive any federal assistance in the form of grants or scholarships. His financial aid package consisted of only student and parent loans. His parents had to pay the total tuition of his college education. His parents’ significant financial investments in his college education made him feel extremely guilty. This profound sense of guilt propelled him to obtain an exemption to living on-campus requirement for all first year students. He was trying to save his parents’ money even if it meant commuting to Central University. Martin’s decision to save his family money would have major repercussions for him such as heightened family responsibility and being unable to fully immerse himself in the college experience.

After his second year at Central University, Martin reverse transferred to Midwest Community College. His decision to attend the local community college was based on affordability and saving money. He wanted to complete several of his general education requirements before having to enroll in his major courses at Central University. During his first semester at Midwest Community College, Martin noticed several differences between MCC and CU. First, Martin perceived professors at Midwest Community College to be more approachable and welcoming to students. He gave an example of how his instructors at MCC were more willing to help students be successful in the classroom. Martin also shared how professors at MCC genuinely care for students. For example, Martin disclosed that several of his professors provided their cell phone numbers to students. Moreover, these professors encouraged students to either call or text them with school related questions or concerns. None of Martin’s previous instructors at Central University offered their cell phone number to students. Martin also referenced the difference in the level of academic intensity between MCC and CU. He felt that professors would often spoon-feed exam responses to students. He also cited that the time he needs to invest in preparing for course assignments and exams decreased compared to his time at Central University.

Martin usually kept to himself while attending Midwest Community College. He failed to see the purpose of establishing close-knit friendships among his classmates at MCC since he planned to transfer back to Central University the following academic year. His main priority continues to be his academics. He does not interact with his MCC peers because his tenure at this institution is just one small part in his future plans. On the scale question of how important it is to connect with others, Martin responded with a 2 out of 5. He attributed his low score to his multiple commitments as well as the lack of involvement in student organizations. Moreover, Martin expressed a strong interest in being involved with student organizations, but is unable to partake in any extracurricular activities because of his family commitments. He has elected to not even research what student organizations are available because it would only inflict harm knowing about them and not being able to join them.
Overall, Martin views the campus climate at Midwest Community College as welcoming and supportive towards Latina/o students. He mentioned how welcoming instructors and advisors are towards students. Martin has yet to experience any direct or indirect form of racism or discrimination while on campus. He did, however, discuss a racially charged debate that took place in his political science course. One of his classmates began a discussion around undocumented immigrants and the need to deport them to their country of origin. Martin shared in a detailed fashion how his peer went on a rant, without any supporting evidence, on the harm undocumented immigrants are causing the United States. Rather than respond to his peer’s rant, Martin listened intently and formulated his own position on the topic. Martin elected not to share his position on the issue of undocumented immigrants because he wanted to avoid being tokenized as the Latina/o student supporting undocumented immigrants.

Based on his own experience, Martin powerfully understands the consequences of deporting undocumented immigrants, especially ones that are doing their best to provide for their loved ones without breaking any laws. A simple traffic violation can catapult an undocumented immigrant into deportation proceedings. Martin has witnessed the deportation of several community members and customers because of a broken taillight. Martin’s adopted brother is also undocumented immigrant so he shared how having a member of his own family having to endure a number of restrictions is heartbreaking. Martin also offered a history lesson during our interview when he shared that there has always been a strong presence of Latinas/os in the U.S. especially when the Mexico extended beyond the southwest. According to Martin, “This is more our country than yours.” Martin did not engage in his peer’s non-factual argument on the harm of undocumented immigrants rather he formulated a strong personal stance on the important role of undocumented immigrants in shaping the future of the United States. Martin also shared how the instructor did an excellent job facilitating the racially insensitive rant of a classmate.

Towards the end of our second interview, Martin disclosed that he would have preferred to start off his college education at Midwest Community College because his transition to Central University was a rocky one, especially his first year. If given a second chance, Martin would have started at MCC and then transferred to Central University. Based on all the student support programs at MCC, Martin would have had a smooth transition to college. More importantly, he would have been able to save a lot on his tuition expenses. On a scale question of satisfaction, Martin gave a 5 out of 5 because of MCC’s affordability and welcoming environment.

Similar to the other 15 participants, Martin expressed high educational and professional aspirations. If given all the resources and support, Martin would like to attain a master’s degree in journalism after he earns his bachelor’s degree from Central University. He also shared an interest in attending law school and becoming a lawyer. Martin has disclosed his high aspirations with both advisors at Central University and Midwest Community College. He believes strongly that he can achieve his professional and academic goals if given the financial support. Currently, his parents’ income level is one that makes him ineligible to receive any federal aid in the form of need-based aid. Martin’s parents have had to finance all of his college education beginning at Central University and most recently at Midwest Community College. Martin’s financial aid package at Central University consisted of only student and parent loans. His parents have had to finance his whole college education. Because of his parents’ investment in his college education, Martin feels obligated to help out with the family store. His father expects him to work at the store 30 to 40 hours a week while juggling full-time enrollment at college. Martin’s mother has been incredibly supportive and understands the value of a college education, but his father views
the family store as being the primary responsibility for Martin and his siblings. Martin also shared the incredible pressure he feels to do well academically despite having to manage a 40-hour workweek because his parents are financing his college education.

Martin revealed in extensive detail the major disconnect between him and his father. This became a central topic throughout our three interviews, especially the last one. He disclosed the major rift between what his father expects of him and what Martin expects of himself, especially with respect to pursuing a college education and career. For Martin’s father, the family store is the central focus of the family and this means that all family members need to contribute by working at the store. On the other hand, Martin firmly believes that his college education is his path towards a better future, not the store. He shared that he did not want to inherit the family business. He yearns to create his own career path in journalism. Martin has always viewed college beyond just academics. He described the tremendous value of establishing connections and networks with peers. More importantly, he discussed the significance of taking part in internships that will prepare him towards his future in journalism. Despite knowing the value of networks and internships, Martin has not had the opportunity to either cultivate a network of support or take part in career-focused internships. Martin often referred to his last two years at Central University and one semester at Midwest Community College as a waste. He became visibly upset with each account of missed opportunities with respect to developing his interest in journalism or establishing a network of peers. During the past three years of college, Martin has devoted all his attention and focus to the family store. He has not had an opportunity to be part of student organizations. His major regret was waiving the freshman requirement to live on-campus. He decided to live at home because he felt guilty that his parents would have to pay an additional ten thousand dollars for him to live at a residence hall located 25 minutes away from his parents’ household. His decision to live at home, however, has caused him to miss out on the full experience of being a college student.

Martin has attempted to communicate the importance of a college experience—one that extends beyond the classroom. His attempts have fallen on deaf ears. Martin’s father continues to expect that he be available to assist with the family business regardless of the rigor of his coursework. According to Martin, his father believes that helping out with the family store is preparing him for the future. However, Martin has become increasingly resentful about his commitment to the family business. Martin sees no direct connection between being a cashier at the store and his path towards sports broadcasting. In addition, Martin has become fearful of all the missed opportunities to interact with his peers and in his career interest. Martin, along with two other participants, communicated a low level of engagement at Midwest Community College. Martin’s only commitment is his academics. He arrives to campus and attends class. He completes his homework and then heads back home to help with the family business. Martin is unable to take an active role as a student or pursue any of his interests because of his father’s expectation that he help out with the family store.

According to Martin, his future is both dark and gloomy. He is afraid to tell his parents about the detrimental role his involvement with the family store has taken on his academic and career interests especially since his parents finance his college education. We devoted a large portion of our conversation to how he needed to be honest and forthcoming to both of his parents about his level of unhappiness with his college experience. Martin believes that his mother is much more open and willing to support him in his college education, but his father presents a major source of resistance because he does not fully understand the importance of the college experience. Martin has a different vision for his future and it is not one where he inherits the
family business. Martin wants to create his own path, which centers on his passion for sports and writing. Since he is the first one to attend college in his family, Martin has felt the sense of obligation to become an advocate for his younger siblings. He constantly reminds all four of them to move out when they attend college. He also defends his younger brothers when their father begins to discourage them from playing extracurricular activities. Martin is still very upset that he had to give up all of his sports interests during high school.

Martin offered incoming Latina/o students at MidWest Community College several recommendations. First and foremost, Martin advises all Latina/o students to focus on themselves. He wants them to make college about them not their family or friends. Martin also encourages Latina/o students to view college beyond academics. He wants Latina/o students to establish connections with their peers and to take advantage of the number of opportunities to strengthen their career interest. Martin strongly believes that his parents want him to be successful. Most importantly, Martin appreciates the financial support he has received from his parents, but in order for him to fully take advantage of his college experience, he needs his parents to support him emotionally as well. He needs his parents to realize that college extends beyond the classroom setting.

Maya

Maya was born in Mexico City, Mexico. She is currently twenty years old. At the age of six, Maya’s parents decided to migrate to the Midwest region of the United States. Their decision to leave their home country as well as their extended family was premised on the hope of attaining financial stability. They also wanted to provide their daughter with all the educational and career opportunities that were denied to them. In particular, Maya’s father constantly promoted the value of education. He attended college to study political science, but was unable to complete his degree. After dropping out of college, Maya’s father worked for a well-recognized television company called Televisa. Maya’s mother completed high school and worked as a secretary. Despite having White-collar jobs, Maya’s parents were still unable to bring enough income to be financially stable. They decided to pack up their belongings and leave their loved ones in search of better opportunities in the United States. When they arrived to the United States, they settled in a small town in central Illinois and started working at a local factory. Maya’s parents had to endure a huge transition from White-collar to blue-collar employment. When Maya was young, her parents could not afford a babysitter to take care of her before school. As a result, Maya would accompany her parents to their job in the morning and she would observe them working tirelessly from the employee break room as she waited to catch the bus to take her to school. Her parents’ numerous sacrifices placed tremendous pressure on her not to fall short of attaining a college education. Her parents’ sacrifices fueled her motivation and drive to succeed at all levels of her schooling.

Maya also recalled how her parents played an important role in her early schooling. Despite the language barrier, Maya’s parents helped her prepare for a school-wide spelling competition. Her father also served as a math tutor even though her teacher disapproved of the different techniques he used to solve problems. Maya’s parents have been major advocates of education. According to Maya, her father has always had high educational and career aspirations for her. Her father suggested several career professions she should pursue such as being a medical doctor, lawyer, or senator. Maya’s mother has also been supportive, but would be proud of her even if she obtained an associates degree. Both of her parents want Maya to have a different future than they had. They wanted their daughter to obtain a college degree and a
career, which was something that eluded both of them. To help motivate her, Maya’s parents would remind her of the hardships they had to endure while in Mexico and in Illinois. Her parents’ struggles served as a constant source of motivation for her to obtain her dreams.

During her early schooling, Maya was always one of the brightest students in her class. Her teachers would frequently praise her academic potential and offer their unconditional support to her. Maya excelled academically in this vibrant and supportive classroom environment. There were a couple of incidents of racism she encountered at a young age, but her elementary and middle school years were academically stimulating and overwhelmingly supportive. At the end of eighth grade, Maya’s family moved to a more White and rural town in Illinois. In her new high school, incidents of racism and hostility among her White peers dramatically escalated. Maya’s peers bullied her on a daily basis. One of her high school classmates called her a “spic” as she walked down the hall. Her peers would also physically push her in the hallways. None of the school officials intervened or stopped the bullying from occurring. During lunchtime, Maya would run and hide in the school restroom. She even contemplated committing suicide. She decided not to disclose these incidents of racism and bullying to her parents because she did not want them to worry. Maya’s self-esteem plummeted and she began to associate with a segment of the student population involved in high-risk behavior. She found that this was the only group in high school that welcomed her. This group was also the only one that did not judge or bully her. She saw them as her refugee from the racism and discrimination.

Maya’s academics suffered, especially during the first two years of high school. The bullying did not cease and she would often miss school. She also began to hate her Latina/o background and became resentful of her linguistic diversity. She also battled depression given the high volume of bullying she had to endure while in school. During the third year of high school, Maya began to submit requests to transfer to surrounding high schools. A nearby high school denied her transfer request. Her last option was to transfer to a high school located 50 miles east of her parents’ home. Maya contacted the principal and disclosed her situation. Initially, the high school principal was very reluctant to approve her request, but ended up accepting her. During her senior year, Maya traveled 100 miles every day to attend a high school because of the bullying and racism she encountered in her local high school. Despite the long commute, Maya performed exceptionally well in her classes. She earned a 4.0 GPA her first semester. She also did well during her last semester in high school. She never once experienced any type of bullying or racism. Her new high school was much more diverse than her previous school and it gave her a second chance to focus on her academics. In addition to traveling 100 miles, Maya also worked 40 hours a week at a local restaurant during her senior year. She was able to juggle all these commitments because her new high school did not challenge her academically. She was enrolled in dual credit courses as well as honors courses.

Maya’s pre-college experience was quite turbulent. She endured a racist and hostile learning environment that caused her to hate her linguistic and cultural diversity. During many of these incidents, Maya kept silent and did not share the harsh conditions in which she had to learn. According to Maya, these hardships and struggles shaped her into a highly resilient and motivated college student. Her dreams of obtaining a college education remained intact despite hanging out with peers that were involved with drugs and alcohol. There were many instances when she doubted her self-worth, but the love and support of her parents were powerful sources of motivation. Maya wants to fulfill many of her parents’ dreams and the only way to achieve them is by pursuing a college education.
At a very young age, Maya knew that college would always be the next step after high school. Due to financial constrains, her college options were quite limited. A four-year institution was out of the question. Since she lived outside the Midwest Community College district, she could have attended her local community college, but wanted to move away and be closer to a larger campus town. Maya decided to move out and enroll in Midwest Community College because of its affordability, location, and welcoming staff. She was also interested in transferring to Central University, which is a four-year university located in the same town of Midwest Community College. The challenge, however, was that her tuition would be higher since she was an out-of-district student. To avoid paying out-of-district tuition fees, Maya located the necessary requirements to change her living residency within the MCC district. She was successful in her attempt to navigate the residency requirements to become an in-district student. This would not be the only example of how Maya has been creative in navigating resources and opportunities to promote her college education.

Maya also discussed how she was able to learn about academic spaces provided by Central University. She used her network of peers to locate information on the availability of the undergraduate library at Central University. Prior to using Central University’s library, Maya would spend her evenings studying at local diners, but felt extremely uncomfortable. She learned about the undergraduate library through her peers at MCC that had transferred to Central University. Based on her work schedule, the only time that Maya was able to study was late at night, but the library at Midwest Community College would close at 8pm, which did not fit with her work schedule. Maya used the undergraduate library at Central University because of its 24-hour availability, Internet, and the academic stimulation environment. Maya spoke in detail how she was drawn to the intellectual exchange among college students and how it encouraged her to study for her exams and complete her course assignments. Maya benefited immensely for accessing the academic spaces available through Central University.

In addition to her academic commitments, Maya would typically work more than 40 hours a week. She was employed at two separate part-time jobs. Most of her work hours would occur during the weekend. Maya often worried about not having enough income to pay for her college education, so that’s what would push her to work an extraordinary number of hours. Maya frequently juggled full-time enrollment with a 40-hour workweek. She was also very involved both on- and off-campus. She has held multiple leadership roles at Midwest Community College. She previously held the presidency for student government. Most recently, she is serving as the president for the honor’s program at MCC. Maya has received tremendous support from faculty and staff. For example, the Latina/o faculty advisor for the Latina/o Student Organization encouraged Maya to run for president of student government because of her strong leadership and unparalleled drive to be successful.

During her second year at Midwest Community College, Maya served as president for student government. Her tenure in student government was incredibly fulfilling and empowering. She was one of the few Latina students that have successfully held the presidency. She also spoke in detail about the leadership conference she had attended. Her presidency, however, was bittersweet. Her relationship with the student government advisor deteriorated during the course of the academic year. Maya felt underestimated and most importantly did not feel supported by the advisor. She voiced her concerns on several occasions, but felt that her concerns were not considered or valued. On several occasion, Maya contemplated resigning from student government, but did not want to disappoint peers, faculty, and staff that have consistently supported her. She wanted to rise above the occasion and push through regardless of the difficult
situation she was in. Maya ended up completing her tenure in student government. Most recently, she has been selected by the advisor of the honor’s program to serve as its president. Maya continues to feel underestimated by those around her, but she continues to push forward with hard work and determination. Her presidency in student government and the honor’s program has really encouraged her to have strong connections with peers and faculty members at Midwest Community College. Maya attributes her leadership roles as being a major reason why she feels profoundly connected to the campus.

Since her first year at Midwest Community College, Maya has had to balance multiple commitments and responsibilities. She has also had to struggle with a health issue during her second year. Despite the numerous commitments and challenges that emerged, Maya has been extremely successful. She is well positioned to transfer to a four-year university. She has also been a strong leader at MCC. Maya talked extensively about the willingness of faculty and staff to connect with students at Midwest Community College. Maya shared several incidents in which she received information about different opportunities on campus. She also discussed the ease with which she has been able to contact faculty and advisors. Maya frequently emails instructors about questions or concerns over the course content. She also talked about utilizing instructors’ office hours to pose questions over course assignments and upcoming exams. Maya also disclosed using the MCC’s tutoring services to receive additional help on course concepts. Given her multiple commitments, Maya has been unable to take part in study groups, but she did communicate the value behind them such as allowing students to feel academically connected and sharing important resources.

With respect to the three scale questions, Maya responded with all fives out of fives. She placed a high value on connecting with other students sharing similar interests as her. She also responded with a five out of five on the question of fit. She attributed her strong sense of fit to the numerous leadership roles on-campus, which has allowed her to connect with both peers and staff. Lastly, Maya is extremely satisfied with her decision to attend Midwest Community College. Midwest Community College has been a very affordable option for her. Most importantly, she has been able to interact with a very diverse student population. Maya has never felt uncomfortable or unwelcome while on campus. There have been incidents in where she has been underestimated, but no incidents of racism or discrimination. Her experience off-campus has been drastically different. While working as a waitress at a local restaurant, her customers would often give her unwelcoming glances. On a number of occasions, Maya felt out of place and excluded in the surrounding community. Her previous experience with overt forms of racism and discrimination in her rural hometown enabled her to create a strong resistance to these subtle forms of hostility, but she still has to skillfully navigate a hostile environment.

Maya has high educational and career aspirations. Upon earning her associates degree in the sciences, Maya plans on transferring to a four-year university. She is interested in applying to Central University and has already met with an academic advisor in her area of interest. After obtaining her bachelor’s in sciences, Maya plans to enroll in medical school so she can obtain her childhood dream of becoming a medical doctor. Ultimately, Maya would love to be part of Doctors without Borders, an international program that places medical doctors in regions throughout the world in desperate need of medical aid. Similar to other participants, Maya has extraordinarily high educational and career aspirations. She also mentioned that she feels extremely supported by staff at Midwest Community College. She has identified a core group of counselors, administrators, and faculty that provide her with the necessary resources and support to continue her path towards transferring to a four-year university. Maya also revealed how her
father constantly showers her with unwavering support. Her mother is also supportive, but often voices her concerns about the financial cost of pursuing an advanced degree.

During our last interview, Maya disclosed her immigration status as an undocumented immigrant. She revealed that her status caused major financial stress, especially since she was ineligible to receive federal assistance. Maya recalled the painful process of applying for federal assistance through FAFSA and realizing that she would not qualify for any federal aid. This realization was devastating, especially since it took a substantial amount of time to gather the information necessary to apply for federal aid. Since Maya applied for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), she assumed that federal aid would be extended to her. However, she soon found out that DACA recipients still remained ineligible for aid. In this moment of disappointment, Maya realized that she would have to work two or three times harder than her peers with residency in the United States. Maya also revealed that she typically keeps her undocumented status to herself, but felt comfortable sharing it with me because of helping others in a similar situation. Despite her undocumented status and the numerous restrictions she has had to overcome, Maya wants others not to feel sorry for her situation rather she wants it to serve as a shining example of what is possible in the face of limiting circumstances.

Maya spoke in detail of the difficulties her family encountered living as undocumented immigrants in small rural town composed primarily of Whites. She mostly discussed examples that underscored the constant fear as well as the avoidance of seeking out law enforcement during incidents of theft, harassment, and discrimination. Maya recalled several incidents that would have prompted any resident to contact the local law enforcement, but her parents refused to do so. For example, her parents’ vehicle was broken into and had their stereo stolen. A next-door neighbor also stole her father’s identification and used it to purchase car insurance. In both of these situations, Maya’s parents refused to contact law enforcement. They decided to remain silent and endure the loss of their personal belongings. A much more disturbing incident occurred when Maya’s high school boyfriend became emotionally, mentally, and physically abusive towards her. After breaking up with him, he would send her threatening letters detailing how he was planning on killing her, her family, and himself if they did not get back together. He would also repeatedly stalk her. Maya told her parents about the abuse she was enduring, but her parents refused to contact law enforcement. Maya finally shared her horrific situation with a family friend, which ended up contacting local law enforcement. When Maya’s parents realized that local law enforcement was involved, they were furious at their family friend. Maya’s parents accompanied her to the local police station to submit a formal report on the abusive ex-boyfriend. Maya had enough evidence to successfully obtain a restraining order, but her parents’ convinced her not to follow through with it. As time passed, Maya’s ex-boyfriend diminished his contact with her and simply moved on. For Maya, however, the emotional scarring remained. She had to experience unimaginable abuse because her parents did not want to involve local authorities. Maya realized in that moment that her parents were willing to endure incredible pain and suffering by remaining silent on incidents of harassment and discrimination towards them. As a young teenager, Maya took an oath that she would not remain silent like her parents, especially if she was experiencing harassment or discrimination. Maya’s earlier experiences of being silent inspired her to actively seek leadership positions that would allow her to be a role model and a leader for others.

Maya also disclosed the discouraging messages her parents received from other Latina/o co-workers that emphasized the hardships of attaining a college degree, especially if their children are undocumented immigrants. These negative messages, however, did not diminish the
importance and value her parents’ placed on a college education, especially Maya’s father. Her father would frequently underscore the vital role of having a college education, especially in preparing people towards a career. Maya’s father played a major role shaping her views on the importance of a college education as well as the sacrifices she would have to make in order to achieve a college education. While at Midwest Community College, Maya has had to work two jobs while attending college as a full-time student. She has also been involved in several leadership roles during her time at MCC. She is currently serving as the president for the honor’s program. Maya has had to work twice as hard as her peers to navigate her college experience, especially since she is ineligible to receive federal assistance given her residency status.

Despite the obstacles, Maya has been able to soar professionally and academically. She has received tremendous support from faculty, staff, and her parents. Faculty and staff believe in her potential. Most importantly, she has been able to obtain important information on resources that have allowed her to become a leader on campus as well as securing financial assistance. Maya has been extremely successful in navigating Midwest Community College. Moreover, she has been very resourceful in obtaining alternative funding sources beyond her off-campus employment. Maya provided several recommendations for both undocumented students and Latina/o students. With respect to undocumented students, Maya encourages them to take changes and seek out opportunities. She also emphasizes the importance of challenging negative messages that tell undocumented students of everything they cannot do. Maya wants undocumented immigrants to focus on the variety of opportunities available to them as well as hope. In many instances, Maya was reminded of everything she could not do because of her residency status so she has decided to focus on what she can control. She also urges undocumented students not to be afraid or remain silent especially during incidents of discrimination. She wants them to have the courage to speak up and fight for their dreams. Lastly, Maya also implores undocumented students to share their story of struggle and triumph because that’s how others in a similar situation are able to learn about what is possible despite their residency status. For incoming Latina/o students, Maya offers two simple recommendations. First, Latina/o students must be involved on campus especially in visible leadership positions like student government. Second, Latina/o students must establish and cultivate a network of support at Midwest Community College. Maya has been one of the few Latina/o students to hold key leadership positions outside the Latina/o Student Organization.

Omar

Unlike the other fifteen participants in this study, Omar’s narrative is distinct. He was born in the state of Guerrero, Mexico and spent most of his life there. At the age of fourteen, Omar and his family migrated to the United States as documented residents. His father had been working and living in the United States since the age of twelve, so he was able to establish legal residency. He later extended his U.S. residency to his whole family. Omar has two younger brothers that are ages nine and twelve. He also has an older brother who is twenty years old. Omar has a stepsister, but does not know much about her. At the time of the study, Omar was nineteen years old. His older brother dropped out of high school during his first year.

While living in Mexico, Omar rarely saw or interacted with his father. His mother and paternal grandfather were the father figures in his life. Omar spoke fondly of his grandfather and the influential role he had in shaping the value of education and pursuing a career. Omar’s grandfather obtained a college education and he also offered financial support for Omar’s father to pursue a college education, but he dropped out after the first year. According to the
grandfather, Omar’s father was more involved with the social aspects of being a college student than the academic ones. Omar’s mother finished high school in Mexico and attended college briefly before dropping out. Being a college drop out really shaped the value of education for Omar’s mother. At a very young age, Omar’s mother encouraged him to pursue a college education and work towards a profession in the medical or engineering field. To help promote the value of education, Omar’s mother would frequently review his homework assignments and attend parent-teacher conferences. According to Omar, his mother would often remind him that a college education is a powerful and necessary tool for the future. Omar’s father would also emphasize the importance of education, but he was overly preoccupied with being the breadwinner, so he didn’t take an active role in shaping Omar’s educational trajectory. Omar’s father encouraged him to join the army.

Omar’s high school education was a very traumatic one. He arrived to the United States at the age of fourteen. His parents enrolled him as a freshman in high school. He only spoke Spanish when he entered high school, he was placed in English as a Second Language classes. In his ESL classes, he was around other non-English speakers from different ethnicities. Omar also mentioned that his attire was completely different than his peers, which often made him feel very uncomfortable. With respect to his English language fluency, he still continues to struggle with technical and grammatical aspects of it. Most importantly, he does not feel comfortable speaking in English with others. For this reason, Omar and I agreed to conduct all of our interviews in Spanish. Omar’s insecurity with the English language resulted in him having few friends throughout high school as well as at Midwest Community College. Omar’s academics also suffered in high school. Overall, he was an average student. His report cards during high school consisted of mostly B’s and C’s. He only completed one Advanced Placement class, which was Spanish.

During his first year of high school, he was around some bad influences that resulted in him ditching and missing class. This type of disengagement during high school only lasted his first year. Omar became involved with high school athletics, specifically soccer and football. His love for sports prompted him to change his approach towards academics and attendance because his level of engagement determined his eligibility to play sports. In order to play soccer and football, he had to attend class and do well academically. He also began to create friendships around other teammates that valued education. Omar cites his friendship with a Peruvian soccer teammate as a key reason why he improved his grades. When asked about the campus climate of high school, Omar viewed his high school as a welcoming place, but talked in detail about the racial insensitivity among his football teammates. Since he was one of the few Latino football players, his White teammates would make very derogatory comments and remarks towards him. They would call him Speedy Gonzalez while he was running to make a play on the field. This racist comment was a direct reference to a cartoon-based mouse with stereotypical Latina/o features such as running extremely fast and having a thick Spanish-accent. Omar’s lack of confidence with English made it difficult for him to address the issue with his football coach. He would often miss practice to avoid being made fun of. He finally shared the issues with the Spanish-speaking secretary at the high school. The secretary then brought up the issue with coach. His football teammates stopped making racially insensitive remarks after the coach addressed the issue.

Omar’s passion and athleticism earned him an athletic scholarship to be a kicker for a university near Chicago. Ultimately, he declined the scholarship and elected to attend Midwest Community College so he could be close to his family and loved ones. The Spanish-speaking
secretary at his high school became a major source of support for Omar. She provided him information about the surrounding colleges and assisted him in the college application process. Omar’s attraction to Midwest Community College was two-fold. The relative closeness of the campus to his parents’ home was very appealing to him. Omar also liked the idea that many of his high school friends were also planning on enrolling in MCC after high school. Omar immediately enrolled in MCC after high school. He actually took a summer course before the fall semester. In his first semester at MCC, Omar did very well. As a full-time student, he earned all A’s during the fall semester. However, the following semester he struggled academically. There were several reasons why Omar struggled. One major reason was time management. He would often wait until the day before the due date of his assignments to work on them. His lack of time management would cause him to feel extremely overwhelmed, especially when had to complete several assignments at once. Omar also mentioned that his friends and work responsibilities distracted him. He worked an average of twenty hours per week at a local restaurant to help pay for monthly expenses. His income also helped his family pay for household expenses. Omar lamented his lack of focus on academics and his overemphasis on socializing.

To help address his time management skills, as well as to increase his focus on academics, Omar elected to reduce his enrollment from full-time to part-time. After consulting with his counselor, Omar decided to enroll in an English and a criminal justice course. He was still mulling over adding a math course, but was looking forward to the opportunity to devote his full attention to two courses rather than four. When asked about how frequently he meets with academic advisors, Omar responded that, on average, he meets with advisors twice a semester to discuss his progress as well as enrollment in the upcoming semester. Omar continues to struggle with his English fluency. This challenge has really prevented him from maximizing his full potential as a student. He would often tell me that his quiet demeanor and shy personality prevented him from reaching out to professors and making connections with his peers. He rarely utilized office hours. If he did have questions or concerns about the course content, he would wait until nobody was around to talk to the professor. If students were around, he would not reach out to the professor. This presented a major challenge for Omar because he would continue to have doubts and questions about the course material. This would cause him not to understand the course content. When asked about how important it was to connect with others with similar interests, Omar gave the second lowest ranking of all participants, which was a three out of five. He did see the value but his insecurity with his English fluency served as a major obstacle for him. Despite his lack of confidence, Omar was able to connect with students through his involvement in student organizations such as Latina/o Student Organization and Criminal Justice. He was also able to connect with Central University students while playing at the university turf fields. Through his interaction with a university student, Omar found about different university resources that he could use to study late at night. One specific resource that Omar used was the Undergraduate Library because of its twenty-four hour availability. He discussed the difficulty of studying in his parents’ household because of his younger siblings as well as family responsibilities that distract him from focusing on his academics. Omar would frequently use the university library to study for exams and complete assignments.

Similar to other participants, Omar viewed the campus climate at Midwest Community College to be very welcoming. He especially enjoyed the diversity among students. He talked proudly of the high enrollment of Latina/o students and how he viewed the campus as an inviting place for diverse students to exchange their culture and language to other students. Omar spent a majority of his time off-campus, so he took advantage of the opportunities to be part of student
organizations in order to connect with other students. He especially enjoyed his participation in the Latina/o Student Organization because he was able to interact with other Latina/o students. Initially, he was very reluctant to participate in the organization but once he started, he enjoyed the numerous social and volunteer benefits of being a member. Omar also mentioned that he hasn’t encountered any incidents of racism or discrimination while being a student. He, however, discussed that around the community, stereotypes remain that pigeonhole the Latina/o population as uneducated, especially among undocumented students. He seeks to break this stereotype by furthering his education. One major challenge that Omar has experienced is that he has not felt the same type of support or encouragement that he had while in high school among instructors and counselors. Omar attributes this lack of support to the nature of college. He explained that professors were there to disseminate knowledge rather than being students’ friends. He also talked about how his shy demeanor served as a major roadblock for him to connect with professors and advisors. His perspective of the instructor role coupled his timid demeanor really inhibited him from engaging with important gatekeepers at Midwest Community College.

Omar has high educational and career aspirations for the future. He plans to transfer to Central State University to earn a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice. After earning his bachelor’s degree, he intends to apply to the law school program at Central University. Upon completing his degrees and earning his license to practice law, he sees himself working at a foreign consulate in Spain, England, or Brazil. He has seen the high level of discrimination that Latina/o people experience simply because of residency status. He plans on advocating for Latinas/os at an international level. He has shared his educational and career aspirations with his close friends, who support his endeavors. Omar also feels the unwavering support of his family. Despite entering his second year at Midwest Community College, Omar has yet to share his career and educational aspirations with his academic advisor. He plans on disclosing his goals soon. When asked about the challenges in achieving his goals, Omar simply stated that he fears that he would quit because of the long road ahead. He continued by saying that he fears losing the motivation and drive to pursue his dreams. Omar’s main source of inspiration is being a role model for his younger siblings. His younger brothers look up to him and see him as an example that a college education is possible.

Pablo

Pablo was born in Mexico City, Mexico. He arrived to the United States at the age of five. He was raised in a single-parent home for all of his life. He never met his biological father and knows very little about him. Pablo’s mother has always been the breadwinner of the household, composed of him and his older sister. She has also served as both the mother and father figure of the household. She is the oldest of a large family, so at a young age she had to work to support the family. She only completed the third grade in Mexico. In Mexico, Pablo’s mom would sell coffee and bake cakes to support the family. Pablo’s older sister was also born in the Mexico and completed high school there. She didn’t attend college. She joined Pablo and their mother on their migration to the United States. When they first moved to the United States, they arrived in Chicago, Illinois, but then moved south to central Illinois. All of Pablo’s immediate family arrived to the United States as undocumented immigrants. His residency status has played a major impact on his outlook on education and career profession, an outlook he continues to redefine with each opportunity and limitation he encounters.

The primary language spoke in their household is Spanish. Pablo completed all of his education in the local campus town. When asked to reflect about his pre-college experience, Pablo retold of the language barrier he encountered while in elementary. His native language was
Spanish, so when he entered elementary it was a difficult transition period because he had to read and write in English. After his first year, Pablo was moved to an ESL classroom where he was given the support necessary to acquire the English language. Pablo cited his grandmother as one of the most influential persons to shape his educational goals. His grandmother would often remind him of the numerous hardships his family endured while living in Mexico. She would also encourage Pablo to take advantage of the educational opportunities given to students. She would also role model the importance of education by reading the bible and encouraging Pablo to also read. Pablo’s mother was preoccupied with work to support the family, which did not give her time or energy to read. However, she would underscore the value of obtaining a college education by using her personal and work-related hardships as reasons why Pablo had to complete high school and attend college. Pablo’s mother worked the nightshift at a local factory. Due to immigration sweeps at the factory, she stopped working at the factory. Currently, Pablo’s mom sells baked goods from their home. Pablo did not cite any influential people outside his family. His family has been the major source of inspiration and support. His mother has suggested that he become an automotive mechanic because his undocumented status won’t prevent him from obtaining work in that field.

Growing up, Pablo wasn’t given many family responsibilities. Since his older sister lived with him and his mother, she shouldered a lot of the family responsibilities. Pablo was one of the few participants that did not work while in high school. According to him, Pablo’s mother wanted him to focus on his academics. Although she couldn’t help Pablo with any homework assignments in English, she helped him with his math homework. She made an effort to help Pablo despite her busy work schedule and limited understanding of the English language. She would also remind him that he needed to finish any incomplete homework.

Throughout his educational experience, Pablo surrounded himself around Latina/o peers. He was enrolled in ESL courses throughout elementary and those friendships continued through middle school and high school. He also lived in a predominantly Latina/o neighborhood. He never considered himself to be different than his peers. He is proud to be Mexican-born and is very aware of the restrictions imposed on undocumented immigrants because of his lived experience. He was able to retell a racist encounter his family experienced while shopping at a local store. A White male cut in front of his family while at the checkout line and shouted, “You don’t belong here. Get out of my way!” The store staff escorted the person out of the store. There were other incidents that Pablo shared of his family being targeted such as the random inspection sweeps conducted by Immigration Customs Enforcement at his mother’s work. Pablo did not share any racially hostile or discriminatory incidents while in high school or at Midwest Community College.

During his pre-college education, Pablo reported that a majority of his teachers were very supportive and encouraging towards him and other students. They would often give students websites to locate college applications and information about college. Pablo found out about his undocumented status during a course assignment while a sophomore in high school. His teacher asked the class to complete a college application. In this college application, it required applicants to write down their social security number. Pablo told his teacher that he didn’t know his social security number. The teacher shared with Pablo to ask his parents for it. According to the teacher, it was common for students not to know their social security number. When Pablo asked his mother, she told him for the first time that he was an undocumented immigrant, so he did not have a social security number. His mother also commented that he might not have the opportunity to attend college. This was a crushing revelation for Pablo. He decided not try any
more in high school. He went through the motions. He was incredibly discouraged by the news that he was an undocumented immigrant. He lost focus and motivation to excel in the classroom. He went from a rising star to academically mediocre student. He received C’s and D’s in the last three years of high school. The only courses he excelled in were math and anatomy—he earned A’s. Pablo shared that he could have earned at least 3.8 GPA in high school. His English teacher would always encourage him to try harder, but he was profoundly discouraged by the news of being an undocumented immigrant.

During the last semester of his senior year of high school, the federal government passed the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, so he applied. Upon his DACA application being accepted, Pablo enrolled at Midwest Community College. During his college assessment, he placed out of math and English. In high school, he took the ACT and received an average score of 24. Pablo enrolled immediately after high school to Midwest Community College. He was attracted to Midwest Community College because of its affordability and close proximity to his family’s house. He was able to secure funding that allowed him to enroll as a full-time student. If he did not have this financial support, he would only be taking one or two courses per semester. In addition to being a full-time student, Pablo typically works 12 hours a week at a local restaurant in town. According to Pablo, he views faculty members approachable and caring towards students. He cited instructors’ passion to help students as a major reason why they are accessible to students. Pablo remarked that he has yet to attend instructors’ office hours in his first two years at MCC because he normally reaches out to professor before or after class to discuss his questions or concerns on the course material and assignments. Since Pablo is pursuing a degree in automotive technology management, he is primarily enrolled in automotive courses. During his automotive courses, he finds the hands-on learning and the collaborative environment to be both enriching and supportive. He shared that connecting with other students has been important because students could exchange knowledge and resources associated with automotive repair.

With respect to campus involvement, Pablo demonstrates a medium level of engagement. He is involved in Alpha Phi Omega. Alpha Phi Omega is a national service co-ed fraternity. Their focus is on helping the community as well as their college through community service. For example, Pablo has participated in penny for pumpkins and books to prison campaign. Pablo was drawn to the group because of its potential to build up his resume through leadership and community service. Pablo does not regularly attend meetings with advisors. He typically reviews the Midwest Community College catalogue to make decisions on what courses he needs to complete for his degree in the automotive program. Recently, Pablo met with an advisor to change his degree focus to automotive program. With respect to perceived fit, Pablo reported a strong fit with campus—5 out of 5 on fit scale question. He attributed his fit to MCC to his ability to establish a comfortable level of exchange between instructors and peers. He also shared that his instructors are readily available to answer his questions and concerns. On the scale question of satisfaction, Pablo is satisfied with his decision to attend MCC. He shared with me that MCC has been a very affordable option for him. Most importantly, he was pleased that he was able to pursue an education after high school in an area that he really enjoys. Pablo is views the campus climate at Midwest Community College as both welcoming and supportive.

Pablo’s immigration status has really shaped his educational and career aspirations. In the short term, Pablo would like to complete his current associate’s degree in automotive technology. After two years of experience in the field, he would like to enroll in a second associate’s program focused on collision repair. Ultimately, Pablo is interested in designing cars
in order to increase work efficiency for automotive technicians. Pablo is also interested in attaining a bachelor’s and master’s degree after working in the automotive industry. He is very concerned about the financial responsibility of pursuing an advanced degree, especially since he is a DACA student.

Pablo communicated that he did not have either the resources or knowledge to achieve his educational goals. For example, he shared with me that he did not know if educational institutions offered an advanced degree in automotive technician field. Pablo has high aspirations, but needs someone to help him along the path towards realizing his educational goals. Making progress towards his educational goals is complicated by the nature of his residency status. Pablo is an undocumented immigrant, which affects the type of financial support he is able to attain.

Pablo also disclosed with me the difficulty of securing employment as a mechanic, given the requirement of employers. Local employers require that all automotive technician applicants have their own tools. This is a major start-up financial investment for Pablo, which has really hindered his opportunities to apply for automotive technician positions since he currently does not have the required tools. Pablo also shared that he does not have a car to commute or even practice the skills he has acquired in his program. Due to these obstacles, Pablo has not really talked to counselors about his future goals. The tool requirement has really hindered Pablo from pursuing his field of interest.

In the spirit of uncertainty, Pablo has not considered sharing his educational aspirations of attaining a bachelor’s or master’s degree with advisor or faculty members. However, he shared that MCC faculty are always willing to help students secure employment. His instructors are constantly promoting employment opportunities.

Reyes

Reyes is a third generation Mexican-American. His parents were born and raised in the northern part of Indiana. Reyes was also raised in Indiana, but due to his unique medical condition of spina bifida, he had to be delivered in Chicago, Illinois. Since his birth, Reyes had to cope and endure a number of surgical procedures as a result of his medical condition. During our first interview, he disclosed that he had to undergo a total of forty-nine surgeries. Seventeen of those forty-nine procedures were conducted on his head. His most recent surgery was due to a severe toe infection that resulted in getting his toe amputated. This toe amputation led to a blood infection that almost reached his heart. Due to his weakened health, Reyes took the fall semester off from attending Midwest Community College. Reyes also revealed in detail how his medical complications have been an extreme impediment on his academics. In high school, he had to repeat his senior year of high school because he had to endure a series of surgeries that prevented him from attending school and completing homework. His health complications have also propelled Reyes into a depressive state of mind, which caused him to consider plotting his suicide. Despite the numerous complications as a result of his medical condition, Reyes spoke highly of the support and love he has received from parents. His parents have been his inspiration and advocates. Reyes’ mother has obtained several educational degrees and is currently completing a Ph.D. program in medical nutrition. His father recently retired as a well-regarded sheet metal worker in Indiana. Reyes’ father also enlisted in the military during the Vietnam War. Reyes is the youngest in the family. He has two older brothers that are significantly older than him. Both completed high school and attended college. One of his older brothers lives near Midwest Community College and frequently checks in with Reyes.
Despite his medical condition, Reyes’ parents constantly encouraged him to live an active life. For example, Reyes joined the Boys Scouts of America while in elementary and earned the highest honor in the organization—Eagle Scout. His parents would often remind Reyes that he needed to be a positive role model for the community and show others that, despite his medical condition, he could live an active life. Reyes was involved heavily with the community. He took part in several community service events. His passion, however, has been wheelchair basketball. He recalled fondly how his parents took him to a wheelchair basketball practice. Initially, he was terrified because he viewed the use of the wheelchair as a powerful reminder of his condition, so he refused to use one. But he instantly fell in love with the sport. Reyes played for a club wheelchair team in the surrounding community. He demonstrated great athleticism and resolve. Reyes competed at regional and national competitions. As an athlete, he received a lot of attention and praise from his peers and teachers, especially in high school. Reyes trained religiously in hopes of playing wheelchair basketball at the collegiate level. Due to his academics, Reyes had to pursue the community college route before transferring to a university. Reyes reported that his medical complications were the leading cause of his academic struggles, especially when he had to miss long stretches of school days. In high school, his peers viewed Reyes as a student athlete. He did mention a couple of instances when students would direct hurtful comments about his disability especially in his early schooling, but that being an athlete really served as an avenue for him to receive respect and admiration from his peers. According to Reyes, he sees himself as a normal human being. He might have a medical condition, but he has feelings, abilities, and dreams like other people. Reyes found that his friends admired his active lifestyle as well as his accomplishments in wheelchair basketball and Boys Scouts of America.

For Reyes, his mother has been his biggest inspiration. She has earned a number of college degrees and is currently working on completing her Ph.D. She also created a home environment in which a college education was always the next step after high school for Reyes. A college education was never a question or a doubt. Reyes always knew that he would attend college. Due to his low grades, he had to start at a community college, but he has aspirations of transferring and earning a degree in business administration. Reyes’ mother also supported him in a number of ways. She served as the president of Parent Teacher Organization at Reyes’ elementary school. She also read to him daily. Reyes reported that he had a mini-library in his room. His mother and father always encouraged Reyes to read, learn, and achieve in school. They would often cite Reyes’ medical condition as a major reason why he had to obtain a college education so he could show his worth to others. Reyes’ parents also instilled a strong sense of ethnic and cultural identity. Reyes grew up learning and speaking English, but his parents took him to several cultural events that reflected his Mexican background.

Reyes was proud to be Latina/o. He cited several incidents when his parents encountered discriminatory and sexist incidents while at their work. For example, Reyes’ father would be frequently asked to show proof his residency at different work sites despite being a second generation Mexican-American. His mother would be confused as the dishwasher rather than the head chef at catering events. Reyes also cited insensitive incidents around his disability. In elementary, his peers would not interact with him because they believed his medical condition to be contagious. For Reyes, his medical condition became a strong sense of identity that others placed on him. Reyes had a very difficult childhood navigating the negative responses of his classmates towards his medical condition. His involvement with wheelchair basketball served as a confidence booster and proof that he could be part of the sports culture regardless of his level of ableism. He also talked about the important role of dispelling the myth that Latinas/os should
only be employed at low-paying jobs, especially among Latinas/os with disabilities. Reyes also spoke highly of the important role his parents have played in the community. They are both seen as important figures and are very much connected with the local schools and businesses.

In high school, Reyes excelled as athlete, but also encountered a number of health complications. He struggled to juggle his health, wheelchair sport, and academics. Reyes did not work while in high school. His primary responsibility was academics and his extra curricular activities. He did not enroll in any Advanced Placement courses. The highest level of math he completed was geometry. As for science, he completed chemistry. He did not have any conduct or disciplinary issues in high school. Reyes attributed his academic struggles to both health complications and the death of his beloved grandfather. His health complications were the biggest underlying cause of his academic woes. Reyes also discussed how his medical condition often caused him to feel excluded from his peers. Despite his medical condition, Reyes never doubted that he would enroll in college.

Reyes was attracted to Midwest Community College because of its close proximity to Central University. Central University has a men’s wheelchair basketball team. Reyes planned on transferring to Central University, so he could join the wheelchair team. Reyes is a new arrival to campus town. He had to leave his parents in Indiana so he could attend Midwest Community College. He struggled to find a balance between academics and socializing. Reyes’ newfound independence resulted in a rocky academic semester. He relied heavily on the structure provided at home with his parents, so he had a sharp learning curve to overcome his first academic year. Reyes did not do well his first semester. He also struggled his second semester with his time management. During his second semester, he became very ill and had to undergo an emergency surgery to remove his pinky toe. Due to his medical complication, Reyes elected to take the subsequent semester off to regain his health and focus. In his third semester, he only enrolled in two courses. We conducted our interview during his fourth semester at Midwest Community College. Reyes changed his study habits and placed academics as his primary responsibility. He has also started to utilize instructors’ office hours and regularly attended meetings with his counselor. He spoke of a sense of urgency to do well academically in order to obtain his career and academic goals. In his first year, Reyes was very involved with student organizations because he wanted to interact and meet new people since he was new to the campus town. He decided to primarily focus on his academics and not participate in any student organizations for the past two semesters. He also has not worked while attending Midwest Community College. He is solely focused on improving his academics. He has distanced himself from the socializing scene and committed himself to his academics. Reyes reported his use of academic and recreational spaces at Central University. He frequently uses the library, outdoor and indoor basketball facilities. He finds the Central University library as a quiet environment for him to study and complete his homework assignments. He learned about these spaces during his campus visit to Central University.

With respect to fit, Reyes voiced a strong fit at Midwest Community College because of the numerous services provided by the Office of Disability as well as the accessibility. His only hurdle in cementing his fit at MCC has been his academics. All of his life, Reyes has had to juggle multiple of identities. He has received stares and comments about his disability. He strives to overcome these negative messages placed on him because of his disability. Reyes has tremendous potential as well as the relentless drive to be successful. His major roadblock has been and will continue to be his medical complications. His parents have always been unwavering advocates for him. For Reyes, his identity and sense of being is beyond just being
Latina/o. He wants to show others that he is a regular person striving to achieve a better life for him and his family.

In our last interview, Reyes revealed exceptionally high educational and career aspirations. He plans on obtaining a Ph.D. degree in business administration. He is inspired by his mother’s path of earning a Ph.D. degree. Reyes dreams of opening up a business in Chicago. He feels that he has the resources and support from his parents to obtain his goals. He, however, has yet to share his educational and career goals with his advisors. His focus so far has been on obtaining an associates degree and transferring to a four-year university. Reyes also disclosed that he no longer plans on only applying to Central University. He declared a plan to broaden his application process to other colleges and universities in Illinois. He wants to make sure that he has several options even if it means not playing wheelchair basketball. When asked to share some of the anticipated challenges of achieving his goal, he immediately responded with health complications and sustaining his focus. Reyes’ health continues to be a major roadblock in his life. This is something he will have to continue to overcome. Reyes did offer several recommendations to incoming Latina/o students. He encouraged prospective students to stay focused on their academics and urged them to make thoughtful decisions about their course selection and planning.

Susana identifies as a second-generation Mexican-American. She was born in a small rural town in Illinois. Her parents were born in Guanajuato, Mexico. Her mother, however, was primarily raised in Illinois. Her father arrived to the United States at the age of 16. Susana has two younger sisters, ages 15 and 2. Her mother and father both worked in factory jobs for large parts of their lives. With respect to her parents’ educational attainment level, Susana’s father only completed a sixth grade education and her mother dropped out of high school but earned her GED degree as well as a Medical Assistance Certificate from Midwest Community College. Susana cited her mother as the most influential person that shaped her educational aspirations. Her mother’s experience of being a high school dropout and having to work at the local restaurant underscored the importance of a college education. Susana’s mother frequently highlighted the value of a college education and she also understood the educational system. Susana’s father encouraged her to pursue a college education, but was unable to provide any type of guidance because of his unfamiliarity with the educational system. Both of her parents, however, value the importance of a college education in obtaining financial and employment stability. Unlike a majority of participants in the study, Susana is a native English speaker. She was raised speaking, reading, and writing in English. She picked up Spanish while attending school. For her parents, a successful person is someone that attains a college degree. Her parents never pressured Susana to pursue a particular career path. They just wanted her to obtain a college education.

Growing up, Susana was a bookworm. She would read science-fiction books on a daily basis. Her parents did not read much, but they supported her enthusiasm for reading. Despite being the oldest in the family, she was not given many family responsibilities growing up. Her primary focus was her academics. Susana never experienced or witnessed any form of discrimination or racially charged incident towards her family or her. Susana was raised in a small rural town with majority Latina/o and White population, but she did not experience any form of racism or discrimination in the surrounding town or high school. Susana elaborated that on several occasions, people assumed she was White because of her light skin complexion and
her height. She cited incidents at work and at Midwest Community College when people confused her for being non-Latina.

At the age of 12, she was attracted to the medical field. She would watch TV shows that were based on the work and lives of emergency room doctors. These TV medical shows ignited her interest in the medical profession. As a student, Susana excelled academically. She described herself to be focused and self-driven. Her teachers would often tell her parents that she was a standout student with tremendous potential. She graduated in the top ten percent of her senior class. Susana’s classmates admired her academic prowess and would often ask her for help on class assignments. Susana also had a very strong connection with her high school teachers and administrators. She received significant support and guidance on the college application process as well as scholarship opportunities. Susana was also involved in extracurricular activities throughout high school. She was a member of the math team, National Honor’s Society, Spanish Club, and academic competition team. She was selected by her teacher to represent the school at a regional and state academic competition in math and biology. Her exam results advanced her to state competition. Susana was also part of the cheerleading team in high school. She attributed her involvement with cheerleading as her opportunity to interact with classmates and broaden her peer group. Her parents were very strict and did not allow her to interact beyond school-sanctioned events. Her involvement with cheerleading offered her a socializing outlet. Susana was raised in a small rural town in central Illinois, so her high school only offered an English honor’s course and dual credit. During her senior year, Susana earned a total of 18 dual credit hours. With respect to peer groups, Susana had a handful of mostly Latina/o friends during elementary and middle school. In high school, her peer-group expanded and became more diverse. She interacted with all segments of the student population from athletes to band members. She also interacted with White and Latina/o students. During her junior and senior, Susana worked 20 hours a week as a server at a local restaurant. Overall, Susana perceived her high school campus climate to be welcoming and supportive. She was always considered a bright and determined student. Her academic achievements made her a strong candidate for merit-based scholarships. She received the merit-based scholarship for graduating in the top ten percent of her graduating class. She also received a private scholarship. For Susana, attending college was always the next step after high school. She never had doubts or reservations about her life after high school. During her senior year, Susana applied to several state universities and in the end, elected to attend Midwest Community College because of the financial incentive of having her first two years at MCC paid for.

Susana’s hometown lies on the border between two community colleges. To help promote enrollment of students, Midwest Community College extends in-district tuition rate for students that are on the district border. Susana had the opportunity to attend her in-district community college, but decided to enroll at MCC because of its campus town and in-district rate. Susana also received a merit-based scholarship, which paid for her two academic years at Midwest Community College. As a student at MCC, Susana demonstrated a medium level of engagement. She appreciated the level of accessibility and approachability of her instructors, but sparingly utilized office hours because she rarely had any questions or concerns over the course material. Susana began to increase her involvement with the Latina/o Student Organization as well as the honor-based society. She cited the value of interacting with students, but also underscored her commitment to academics as her primary responsibility. As a student, Susana continued her track record of success. In all of her semesters at Midwest Community College, she earned a place on the Dean’s list. She has already been admitted to the selective nursing
program at Midwest Community College as well as Central State University. She plans to enroll at Central State University in the spring 2015 semester.

Susana disclosed that learning complex science concepts came easy to her. She would mostly read the course material and could understand the terms and concepts without any complication. For this reason, she did not attend office hours or contact instructors. Susana’s biggest challenge has been time management. Along with her full-time academic load, Susana works 20 hours a week and also visits her family once a week. Her parents live approximately 50 minutes north. Susana shared that she would often wait until the last minute to complete assignments or study for exams. Despite her time management issues, Susana has excelled academically. Susana also viewed the campus climate at Midwest Community College to be welcoming and diverse. She did not report experiencing any incidents of discrimination or racism towards her or her peers. She, however, did share that her peers and co-workers often assume she is White.

Susana reported high academic and professional aspirations. She plans on completing her bachelor’s of science in nursing at Central State University. Upon completing her bachelor’s degree, she intends to work at a hospital for a couple of years. After obtaining professional experience, Susana will be applying for a Ph.D. in nurse anesthesia program in southern Illinois. She learned about the Ph.D. program in nurse anesthesia while a senior in high school. She was asked to invite a guest speaker to class to talk about her career field interest, so she invited a nurse anesthetist to her class. The nurse anesthetist ended up inviting Susana to a job shadow opportunity. During this job shadow, Susana was able to observe a medical procedure in the operating room as well as the role of the nurse anesthetist. She became hooked in the medical field and pursuing an advanced degree in nurse anesthesia. After her job shadow experience, Susana began to research requirements to earn a Ph.D. in nurse anesthesia. She also contacted a college that offered the advanced degree she was interested in pursuing. During her program research, she came across instructors that provided her with important information about the program requirements. Susana’s account of her extensive research into her career of interest is a strong example of her focus and determination to obtain her goals. Susana’s parents might not know what the process of obtaining an advanced degree might entail, but they have offered her their unwavering support. Susana also cited her current instructors as very supportive of her educational and career goals. Susana has a very clear focus on her future aspirations and is determined to reach her goals. According to her, she won’t let shyness or lack of information prevent her from obtaining critical information. Susana also plans to study abroad while at Central State University.

Susana offered prospective Latina/o students some advice. She recommended incoming students to connect with their advisor. Her advisor has been very helpful and informative. She also shared that students have to locate one advisor that they find a strong connection with and present them with information they need to be successful. She ended up seeing several advisors until she found one that she connected with and now frequently consults. The most important recommendation is to find an advisor that you connect with and continue to see that advisor to plan out your courses and work towards your educational goals.

Victor

Victor is finishing up his second year at Midwest Community College, but fourth year in higher education. He attended a previous college for two-years as a student-athlete. Victor is twenty-two years old. He was born in the Southside Chicago. For most of his life, he was
enrolled in schools in a suburb of Chicago except for his first year of high school. During his first year of high school, Victor’s parents decided to move the family to Mexico and open a restaurant. He attended school in Mexico, but had a horrific experience. He was bullied daily by his classmates and since his primary language of instruction was English, he struggled to understand the course content. After one year of living in Mexico, his family moved back to Chicago. Victor is the oldest sibling of the household. He has a younger sister that is 18 years old. Recently, she was accepted to the college of business at Central University. She plans to enroll in the upcoming fall semester. Victor is the first in his family to attend college. His father graduated from high school in Chicago and had the opportunity to play soccer at the college level, but decided to move to Mexico. His father regrets not attending college and often encourages Victor to continue his educational goals. Victor cited his mom as one of the biggest influences in his educational aspirations. His mother only attained a minimal level of formal education, so she constantly reminds him of the importance of receiving a college education. Victor also attributed his educational aspirations to a very successful family member that has served as his mentor throughout his life. Victor identifies strongly as a Chicano. He was able to eloquently articulate the significance of identifying as Chicano rather than Mexican-American. Throughout our conversations, Victor spoke about challenging negative stereotypes attributed to Latina/o students especially with respect to not attaining an advanced degree. He seeks to disrupt this negative perception of Latinas/os not attaining an advanced degree by actively aiming to enroll and complete a doctoral program.

In high school, Victor never considered himself to be a high achieving student. He was placed on academic probation and was unable to take part in sports. He also did not take his education very seriously and often arrived to school tardy or late. This type of disengagement with his education prompted his parents’ disapproval. Victor’s father viewed his son as a family embarrassment and labeled him the black sheep of the family. Being referred to as the embarrassment of the family caused Victor tremendous pain and resentment. Victor became extremely emotional when he talked about his father’s disapproval of his educational failures. Victor attributed much of his academic disengagement a direct result of him being lazy. Victor, however, was asked at very young age to shoulder family responsibilities. His family was involved in the restaurant industry. His dad and grandfather both owned a restaurant, so he often had to work at both establishments. During his senior year of high school, Victor worked between thirty-five to forty-five hours a week. Victor was also participated in tennis and soccer while in high school. Victor negotiated several responsibilities throughout high school and often academics took a backseat to his other familial responsibilities and personal interest. In retrospect, Victor regrets not making academics a primary focus. During his senior year, he was very interested in attending college after high school, but every institution denied him admissions because of his’ below average academics. Victor mentioned that during the college application process, he didn’t receive the adequate guidance or support to really understand the application process. The only reason he as able to attend college was because his high school tennis coach advocated on his behalf. Victor received a student-athlete scholarship to attend a community college close to his parents. According to Victor, becoming a student-athlete allowed him to start a new chapter in his life. In this new chapter, Victor was given an opportunity to redeem himself and become the first in his family to pursue an education after high school.

For two years, Victor attended a community college in Chicago. He was able to play tennis and also pursue his academic and career interest in becoming a high school history teacher. Although his academics dramatically improved, Victor did not receive the adequate
support or guidance to make significant progress towards achieving his academic goals. Once his student-athlete scholarship ended, Victor transferred to Midwest Community College (MCC). He learned about MCC through his best friend that was attending a nearby university. His best friend informed Victor that MCC was an academically inclined and welcoming institution. Victor was also attracted to MCC because it offered him an opportunity to move away from the city environment. Victor’s parents supported his decision to move-out and attend Midwest Community College.

Victor is entering his second year at Midwest Community College. Victor reported that his first year was quite an adjustment from his previous community college institution. He discussed the challenge of feeling that he was not academically prepared to handle his final exams. He was able to adjust academically because of the numerous resources available to students at Midwest Community College. In particular, Victor discussed how his professors had been incredibly approachable and accessible to him, especially when he needed to discuss course material that he did not quite understand. Victor also mentioned feeling an immense amount of support by both counselors and administrators on campus. He also talked extensively about his high volume of involvement with both student government and a Latina/o based student organization. He served as the secretary as well as the president for the Latina/o student organization. Initially, Victor wanted to focus solely on his academics, but he soon found about the numerous opportunities to be part of the campus community. Upon entering college, Victor had a profound sense of giving back to the community, so his involvement with student organizations provided him a platform to be an active contributor both on-campus and in the local community.

In addition to his extracurricular involvement, Victor has worked an extremely high number of hours. During his first year at Midwest Community College, Victor worked an average of over 40 hours a week. He held two work-study positions on-campus and worked at a local restaurant. His time constraints prevented him from taking part in any study group, so he often studied on his own. Victor highlighted that a key academic resource he would use were off-campus. He would frequently study at a nearby university’s library. This library remained open 24 hours, so students would be able to use it late into the night. Victor found this off-campus resource to be convenient, but also inspirational because of the academic aura it gave to him.

Victor viewed the campus climate at Midwest Community College as both diverse and welcoming to all students, especially Latina/o students. He has been asked to serve as a spokesperson for the institution at various promotional campus campaigns. His image has been used to promote enrollment at MCC in both video and poster format. He feels that his active involvement on campus has been an opportunity to promote awareness of Latina/o students around the community and has shown that the campus welcomes a diverse student population. Victor, however, was very critical of the surrounding community. He talked about his level of discomfort as well as the conservative environment he has to both live and work at. He mentioned comments that he received while campaigning to reinstate a scholarship for underrepresented college students at the state capital. Victor also referenced subtle glances that he received from local residents in the community that made him feel very uncomfortable. This level of discomfort has never been present on-campus at MCC. Victor also discussed in detail the negative stereotypes attached to Midwest Community College students by those enrolled at Central University.
Victor offered several recommendations for Latina/o students interested in enrolling at Midwest Community College. He encouraged incoming students to set educational and career goals from the outset and work towards achieving them. Victor also talked adamantly about not being discouraged by others. He also promoted the importance of being role models and giving back to the local community. Lastly, Victor recommended incoming students to be actively involved at Midwest Community College. Because of his involvement, Victor has been able to establish and maintain strong connections with administrators and professors that have served as advocates and mentors to him. For this reason, Victor gave the campus highest rating of satisfaction with his decision to attend Midwest Community College.

Victor is the first in his family to pursue a college education. His journey of attaining a college education has been filled with highs and lows. His greatest achievement has been receiving the student organization of the year at Midwest Community College during his presidency of Latina/o Student Organization. He has been a major spokesperson for the campus’ effort to increase enrollment of Latina/o students. He has also been able to breakaway from his low academic achievements during high school. His journey, however, hasn’t been a smooth ride. He is currently in his fourth year at a community, which includes two years at a previous institution. During our last interview, he changed his major to business, which delayed his graduation to the spring semester. He has also had to juggle a full-time workload to help finance his college education. Victor’s educational experience has been full of setbacks, but his resolve to continue his educational dream remains intact. He plans to transfer to the college of business at Central University. He has dreams of pursuing a career in sports broadcasting. He also hopes to attain a master and a Ph.D. degree. When asked why he was interested in a Ph.D., he simply replied that he wanted to set the educational bar high for his family. He wanted to show others that Latinas/os could also be professionals with high levels of education. Victor has the desire and will to pursue his dreams.

William

At the time of the study, William was 19 years old. He was born in Pachuca-Hidalgo, Mexico. At the age of 5, his mother and father decided to pack up their belongings and migrate to the United States. With respect to his parent’s educational level, William’s mom only completed a sixth grade education while his father stopped attending school after his second year in high school. William’s nuclear family consists of an older sister, who was also born in Pachuca Hidalgo, Mexico, and a younger brother born in the United States. Upon their move to the United States, William’s parents decided to settle in the campus town area. As a result, William was raised for most of his young life in the local area. While growing up, William’s parents worked in blue-collar jobs. His father labored in both agricultural and restaurants. Most recently, William’s father worked at a local factory. For most of his young life, William’s mother has cleaned houses and recently started working at a local hotel. The primary language spoken at home is Spanish. When he entered school for the first time, he only knew Spanish and was forced to learn English. This language transition was difficult for him. It took him about 4 years to learn English and it wasn’t until he was in the 7th grade that he was able to lose his Spanish accent when speaking English.

While William was growing up, his mother played a very influential role in shaping his educational goals. His father has always been supportive, but he was preoccupied with other familial and financial responsibilities that directly influences William’s educational or career goals. His’ mother had the most immediate contact with his academics especially serving as a
constant source of motivation for him to complete all of his course assignments. His parents would also frequently remind William about the vast number of educational opportunities available to him that were often denied to both his mother and father back at their home country. William’s mother was very active in his early educational experience. She regularly attended William’s parent-teacher conferences as well as took part in his classroom field trips. Both of his parents would encourage William to strive for greatness. William shared, “…she just wants me to have a nice job, to have a degree, she wants me to have a college, I mean a university something [degree]. She doesn’t just want me to be working in restaurants. She wants me to do something big…They both just want me to. They want me to be something.” William’s aspirations to pursue a college education has been shaped by his parent’s own struggles to be resourceful despite the numerous challenges existing in their life from the minimal formal education to their precarious undocumented status. William’s parents frequently use their own life stories to enforce the importance of education, especially when it comes to attaining a college degree as well as sharing their educational dreams for their children. This type of support and encouragement really fueled William’s current journey to attaining a college education. William also mentioned the educational shortcoming of his older sister. His older sister attended Midwest Community College (MCC). Upon graduating from high school, William’s sister attended MCC but dropped out after having a child. The difficulty of attaining a college degree has really ignited his current path to be successful at MCC.

For most of his life, William lived in the United States as an undocumented immigrant. He was recently able to apply to the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program which allowed him to come out of the shadows and be eligible to pursue a college education as well as work lawfully. Being a DACA recipient, however, does not provide any type of lawful residency. It only provides undocumented immigrants temporary relief from deportation. William comments, “When that whole thing [DACA] happened, I got happy because I knew that was, I was going to be okay for awhile.” William also shared that while growing up and attending the local school district, being Latina/o was never associated with academic success. He shares, “There was [sic] people that thought you weren’t going to make it because you were Latina/o…I guess the community has a lot to do with it too, because they give you a lot of extra. It’s good, because they give you money, scholarships, give you money like ‘Ah, he won’t make it anyway.’ Like that. But then people really don’t think you’re going to be something in life just because you’re Latina/o.” This type of negative perception imposed on Latina/o youth did not discourage William, rather these messages served as a source of motivation for him to prove naysayers wrong.

In high school, William was an average student. He completed all of his assignments, but was never considered academically talented or gifted student. He received support from his family, teachers, and counselors, but he did not apply himself academically. In our interview, he called his effort in high school as bare minimum. He did enroll in Advanced Placement Spanish course. He did well in the course and earned a 4 in the AP Spanish exam. The highest level of math he completed was algebra II. For science, he finished chemistry. William was also involved in sports. He was part of the school’s soccer and tennis team. With respect to disciplinary issues, William was involved in a physical altercation during lunchtime. He was not the person that started the incident, but did take part in it. He was subsequently suspended and his parents were very much involved in enforcing additional consequences to emphasize that this type of behavior was unacceptable. From the outset, William’s parents have been very supportive in promoting the importance and value of pursuing a college education for him. Despite William’s moderate
academic performance, he was very much engaged with his fellow classmates, teachers and counselors. William would coax his high school teachers into receiving preferential treatment, especially in obtaining deadline extensions for course assignments. This type of interaction with his counselor allowed him to receive a local scholarship. Most importantly, his interaction with fellow classmates enabled him to learn about the different opportunities available for undocumented students. For example, he was able to apply for DACA because his fellow classmates informed him of the program. In high school, William did enough to get by academically. This type of performance limited his options for college and also brought him several challenges that would challenge his academic success at Midwest Community College.

William is entering his second year at Midwest Community College. William viewed Midwest Community College as his only affordable option. He also did not apply to any other colleges. The low cost of attending MCC was a major appeal as well as being a recipient of a local scholarship. William enrolled directly after high school. Over the course of the past year, William has been extremely involved in extracurricular activities. He has been especially involved in a Latina/o Student Organization. Due to his high level of involvement, William views MCC as a very welcoming campus for Latina/o students. For example, he gave ratings of fives in all three scales of questions consisting of fit to campus, satisfaction with attending MCC, and importance of connecting with other students with similar interests. During his first year, William experienced academic shock. William has not been able to maximize his full potential as a student. He attributed his academic struggles to time management and study habits. For example, he failed his chemistry course because he did not have a studying routine in place. William highlighted how he plans to overcome his academic challenges by creating a routine that focuses heavily on his academics rather than socializing. He also plans to utilize campus resources such as attending instructors’ office hours and the Center for Academic Success.

William has very high aspirations. He plans to earn an associates degree in kinesiology from Midwest Community College. Upon completing his associates, he hopes to transfer to Central State University’s physical trainer program. Once he completes his education at CSU, William is interested in obtaining a master’s degree in physical therapy. His career goal is to become a physical trainer at an international level. He envisions himself working for the European soccer league. He hopes that attaining a college education will allow him to merge his passion and academic interest towards a career path that he will love. He also feels that he has received the support and guidance necessary to attain his academic and career goals. His only concern is the financial burden of transferring to Central State University.