

# LATINA WOMEN AT COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY: THE STRUGGLE TO PERSIST

By

Sharon Seneca

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for  
The Degree of Doctor of Education in  
Curriculum and Leadership (Higher Education)

Columbus State University

Columbus, GA

May 2018



Copyright 2018  
Sharon Seneca  
All Rights Reserved

## Dedication

First I give honor to God for without Him, this dissertation would never have been possible. I dedicate this dissertation to my mother Maria Virginia (RIP), my aunt (Taty) and my sisters. My Soul Sister Lael, who blew on the dying embers of my dream over thirty years ago, and continued to fan the flame which has now become a roaring fire. My birth sisters Millie (RIP), Bessie, Margie, Karim, and Nerisse, who have all lived the experiences referenced in this dissertation and to whom I sought to be a good example. And to my nieces and nephews for whom now a trail has been blazed.

## Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my Committee for their continuous encouragement, support, and guidance throughout the dissertation process. Thank you for sharing your time, wisdom and expertise so selflessly and demonstrating the willingness to be available whenever I called.

Thank you Dr. Richardson for chairing my committee. Thank you for pouring into me and guiding me every step of the way. Thank you for encouraging me and believing in me, even during those moments when I doubted myself. Thank you for the countless Saturdays when I called you from the library with one question or another. Thank you for pushing me when I needed a good push. And, thank you for showing me how to plow through, go around, or tunnel under obstacles intended to hinder me. Thank you for your selfless acts of care and concern, even when you were not feeling your best. Thank you for mentoring me, and sharing your wealth of wisdom and knowledge. Thank you for the charge you gave me to, “just pay it forward.” I am deeply grateful. A special thank you to Mrs. Leah Richardson who also encouraged me, and was ever so gracious during the countless times I called. I appreciate you.

Thank you Dr. Hackett for sharing your time, talent and expertise as my methodologist. Thank you for your wisdom and insight as well as your valuable feedback. I truly appreciate it.

Thank you Dr. Jenkins for working on my committee, and for sharing your time, talent, and wisdom with me. Thank you for your excellent feedback, and helping to stretch me in my writing. Your understanding and attention to detail helped me tremendously and caused me to grow. Thank you for your encouragement also. I am very appreciative.

Thank you Dr. Lemoine for all of your insight, input, encouragement and assistance even though you were not formally a member of my committee. Thank you for always being willing to assist me when I called, and thank you for the many times that you “talked me down from the

ledge!” Your encouragement was invaluable to me and helped carry me through to the end. I am forever grateful.

Thank you to the faculty and staff of the Department of Counseling, Foundations and Leadership. I have gained a wealth of knowledge through the rigorous curriculum. Thank you also to the Institutional Review Board, Amber Dees, and Dawn Nguyen for assistance during the IRB approval process.

A special thank you to Profesora Elizabeth Narnajo Hayes, Janet Crane, and Omar Castillo for your invaluable assistance in helping to identify and recruit Latina students that I could invite to participate in the study. And a genuine heartfelt thank you to the eight wonderful Latina students who we know as Anna, Carmen, Julianna, Lucia, Maria, Mia, Rosa, and Viviana who agreed to participate in my study and so openly shared their “lived experiences” at Columbus State University. Without you, the study would not have been possible.

A special thank you to Dr. Lael Melville, who has been my mentor, my sister, my cheerleader, my friend and who has walked this journey with me from inception to completion. There are not enough words to express my sincere love and gratitude for all you have done and continue to do for me, nor to describe the fact that you have been and continue to be, “the wind beneath my wings.”

My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all of my family, friends and extended family who have cheered me on along the way. To my sisters who have each inspired me in their own struggle to persist, I say thank you and I love you. To my Sister-Friend Michelle, I say thank you for your encouragement, love and support. It really meant a lot, and brightened up some of the dark spots. I love you.

I thank my children John Jr., Sean, Christopher, and Sharisse for your love, support, encouragement and belief in me. I hope that you are proud. I pray that you each have been inspired to “never stop reaching for your dream.” I love you more than I have words to say.

To my Sisters in the Struggle-Dr. Claudia Lyerly, and Dr. Varonika Hardman, I say, “I thank my God upon every remembrance of you.” (Philippians 1:3) Thank you for being in the trenches with me. Thank you for the countless hours at the library and the constant check-in texts, calls and chats, the prayers and the words of encouragement. Thank you that once you crossed the Finish Line before me, you both reached back and helped walk me through that last lap! I am forever grateful. And I love you both.

## VITA

Sharon Seneca

seneca\_sharon@columbusstate.edu

---

### **EDUCATION & LICENSES**

---

*Doctor of Education - Curriculum and Leadership - Higher Education*  
Columbus State University  
Columbus, GA

*Master of Science in Education – School Guidance Counseling*  
Cambridge College  
Cambridge, MA

*Bachelor of Business Administration*  
Howard University  
Washington, DC

*Certification/License:*  
Georgia Educator Certificate, School Counseling P-12

### **SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS**

---

- Highly motivated professional with excellent leadership, customer service and communication skills
- Experienced in developing diverse human service programs to individuals and families in a variety of settings
- Experienced in case management
- Able to coordinate the delivery of a wide range of services through referrals to appropriate resources
- Innovative in developing alternative solutions
- Skilled in providing crisis intervention, conflict mediation and client advocacy
- Bilingual in English and Spanish
- Computer Skills: Microsoft -Word, Excel, PowerPoint, Internet Explorer, iCollege
- Job-Related Databases: BANNER, NOLIJ, eSIS, Teacher Assist, Career Cruising, GAcollege411.org

### **PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

---

**Admissions Specialist(Counselor)** *Columbus State Univeristy; Columbus, GA*

***January 2013-Present***

- Process applications for admission from prospective Graduate students (data entry).
- High level of understanding regarding policy.
- Record College Board S.A.T. and appropriate achievement scores; college entrance exams; request missing scores; evaluate transcripts, credits, and College Board scores. Follow up on questionable courses and other discrepancies.
- Maintain appropriate records and files.

**Resource Specialist(Counselor)** *Georgia Perimeter College; Clarkston, GA*

***January 2008-September 2012***

- Created course curriculums and provided instruction for College Survival, Career Developmant and Study Skills courses

- Provided academic advisement, career planning, crisis intervention, emergency assistance, conflict resolution, individual and group counseling to at-risk students and drop-out population
- Evaluated transcripts and created academic plans with students and parents to provide a framework of courses needed to fulfill Dekalb County graduation requirements and Georgia Perimeter College two year degree requirements
- Worked collaboratively with faculty, parents and students to create individualized plans and strategies for student success
- Provided students with wrap-around services to address barriers that impact success
- Facilitated small groups to promote academic and social development
- Consulted with a variety of community and social service agencies to explain program requirements
- Assisted with the development and coordination of the Career Expo, School Wide Mentoring, Graduation, and Anti-bullying programs annually
- Actively recruited and oriented students, parents, schools, the community and all key program stakeholders to program requirements, goals and objectives
- Facilitated Gateway to College Information and Assessment and Orientation sessions with prospective students and parents
- Administered and proctored Georgia High School Graduation, End of Course and COMPASS testing
- Assisted in the preparation of the Standard Assessment Report for the Academy's SACS accreditation.

**Resource Specialist Intern** *Georgia Perimeter College; Clarkston, GA*

***November 2006 - May 2007***

- Provided academic planning, scheduling, crisis intervention, and individual counseling for students on assigned caseload
- Facilitated classroom visits and small groups to promote academic and social development
- Evaluated Summary of Credits for Academy students to develop academic plans
- Assisted in student record maintenance
- Assisted with the Systemwide Drop Out Round-up and recruitment fair

**Secretary/Registrar** *Panola Way Elementary; Lithonia, GA*

***July 2006 - January 2008***

- Maintained confidentiality of student and school personnel information
- Maintained attendance and student records in compliance with state regulations
- Enrolled and withdrew students
- Answered telephones, provided information, recorded and dispatched messages to school personnel
- Processed student record requests
- Entered data for new and previous students
- Checked and reviewed a variety of data for accuracy, completeness, and conformance to established standards and procedures
- Performed related tasks as assigned by building administrator(s) in accordance with the school/policies and practices

**School Healthcare Worker** *Nancy Creek Theme School; Atlanta, GA*

***January 2001-July 2006***

- Responsible for administration and maintenance of school clinic.
- Maintained and updated student health and immunization records
- Administered health-screening tests and first aid
- Coordinated and delivered health programs and instructions to students and staff
- Maintained and created the bulletin board displays and information library
- Maintained appropriate documentation and completed monthly, quarterly and year end reports as required

**Site Director** *YMCA Primetime; Ashford-Dunwoody, GA*

***August 2004-July 2005***

- Managed a comprehensive year round after school program for youth, grades K-5
- Interviewed, hired, and supervised program counselors
- Created a curriculum and schedule of activities for the site
- Developed, implemented and facilitated all site programming
- Coordinated fieldtrips and educational experiences for attendees
- Facilitated small groups on character education based on the YMCA core values
- Worked collaboratively with key stakeholders to ensure successful implementation of programs and initiatives to promote student success
- Completed monthly and year-end reports on activities and populations served

## ABSTRACT

The Hispanic population in the United States increased tremendously over the years and Latinos are now the largest ethnic minority in the United States. The growth of the Latino community changed the face of the nation. Latina women are projected to account for a third of the total female population by the year 2060. This growing segment of society represented untapped human capital, much of which has yet to be discovered and utilized. The Latino population at Columbus State University has also increased over the years. While the numbers of Latino students continued to increase, the fact that Latino students accounted for less than 5% of the total undergraduate student population and less than 1% of the total graduate student population was problematic.

Numerous factors combine to contribute to the lived experiences of Latina women in higher education. The Latina experience at Columbus State University had not been fully explored. Therefore, the researcher sought to examine the lived experiences of Latina students at Columbus State University in attempt to identify information that could prove helpful for the recruitment, enrollment, and retention of this growing diverse population.

A qualitative study utilizing a narrative research design was conducted to explore the lived experiences of Latina students at Columbus State University. The study consisted of semi-structured interviews with eight participants comprised of open ended questions regarding experience, representation, inclusion/acceptance, freedom of expression, challenges faced, motivation to persist, campus climate and recommendations.

Analysis of the data produced nine emergent themes which impact the lived experiences of Latina students at Columbus State University including diversity, representation, stereotypes, identity, inclusion/acceptance, challenges faced, motivation to persist, campus climate, and

recommendations.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Title Page .....	i
Copyright Page.....	ii
Dedication .....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
VITA .....	vii
Abstract.....	x
Table of Contents.....	xi
List of Tables .....	xiv
List of Figures .....	xv
 <b>CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION</b>	
Introduction.....	1
Statement of Problem .....	4
Research Questions .....	4
Conceptual Framework.....	4
Significance of Study.....	5
Procedures.....	6
Limitations/Delimitations .....	7
Definitions of Terms .....	7
Summary .....	8
 <b>CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RESEARCH AND RELATED RESEARCH.....</b>	
Introduction.....	10
History of Latino Presence.....	11
Impact of Latino Population Growth .....	13
Higher Education .....	14
Enrollment vs Attainment.....	16
Factors that Affect Latina Participation in Higher Education .....	18
Familial Obligations.....	18
Biculturalism.....	22
Relationship Building/Mentorship.....	23
Lack of Access.....	28
Trends in Participation and Persistence among Latinas in Higher Education .....	30
College Readiness.....	30
Persistence.....	32
Completion.....	37
Latinas at Columbus State University.....	43
Summary .....	45
 <b>CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY</b>	
Introduction.....	53

Research Question .....	54
Population .....	55
Participants.....	55
Sample.....	56
Instrumentation .....	57
Data Collection .....	58
Data Analysis .....	58
Data Collection .....	58
Limitations .....	58
Item Analysis .....	59
Summary .....	61

#### CHAPTER FOUR: REPORT OF DATA AND DATA ANALYSIS

Introduction.....	63
Research Question .....	63
Research Design.....	63
Respondents .....	65
Data Analysis .....	69
Inclusion and Acceptance as Reported by Respondents.....	71
Perceptions of Representation as Reported by Respondents .....	73
Perceptions of Freedom of Expression as Reported by Respondents.....	74
Challenges Faced by Respondents.....	75
Motivation to Persist as Reported by Respondents.....	79
Perception of Campus Climate as Reported by Respondents.....	82
Proposed Recommendations by Respondents .....	85
Research Question 1	
Findings.....	87
Theme One – Diversity .....	87
Theme Two – Representation .....	87
Theme Three – Stereotypes .....	88
Theme Four – Identity .....	90
Theme Five – Inclusion/Acceptance.....	91
Theme Six – Motivation to Persist.....	92
Theme Seven – Campus Climate.....	93
Theme Eight – Challenges Faced .....	93
Theme Nine – Respondent Recommendations .....	94
Summary .....	95

#### CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of Chapters 1-4 .....	96
Analysis of Research Findings.....	96
Discussion of Research Findings .....	101
Conclusions.....	107
Implications.....	111
Limitations .....	111
Implications for Practice .....	112

Recommendations.....	114
Dissemination .....	115
Research Framework .....	117
Concluding Thoughts.....	118
 REFERENCES .....	 118
 APPENDICES	
Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Protocol.....	128
Appendix B: IRB Approval Email.....	129
Appendix C: Participant Invitation Email.....	130

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1 – Immigrant Degree Attainment by Geographic Location .....	39
Table 2.2 – Awards Conferred by Title IV 4-Year Institutions 2014-2015.....	40
Table 2.3 – Awards Conferred by Title IV 2-Year Institutions 2014-2015.....	40
Table 2.4 – Ethnic Composition of Student Population at Columbus State University	44
Table 2.5 – Conceptual Analysis Chart .....	46
Table 3.1 – Lived Experiences Addressed by Interview Protocol.....	57
Table 3.2 – Qualitative Item Analysis .....	59
Table 3.3 - Research Confirmation Table.....	60
Table 4.1 – Demographic Composition of Respondent Pool .....	69
Table 4.2 – Interview Protocol- The Experiences of Latina Women at Columbus State University.....	70
Table 4.3 – Challenges Faced by Respondents.....	78
Table 4.4 – Motivation to Persist as Reported by Respondents .....	81
Table 4.5 – Perception of Campus Climate as Reported by Respondents.....	84

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework ..... 5  
Figure 2 Research Framework .....

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The Hispanic population in the United States continued to grow exponentially, and Latinos were now the largest ethnic minority in America (U.S. Census, 2011; Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015). The tremendous growth of the Latino population changed the face of our nation and resulted in some cities and states becoming classified as “minority-majority” states because people of color outnumbered the dominant White majority” (Urbina & Wright, 2015). Additionally, there were several states where Latinos comprised over 50% of the population, and as a result, were now classified as “Latino majority” states (Urbina & Wright). The continued growth of the Latino population projected Latinas to account for one third of the total population by the year 2060 (Gandara, 2015; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Urbina & Wright, 2015). This growing segment of society was rich with untapped potential and human capital, which was yet to be fully cultivated and utilized to the fullest magnitude.

The importance of higher education as an agent of change as well as a conduit for social status and mobility was well established (Clark, 2003; Espinoza, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Urbina & Wright, 2015). A cornerstone of the “American Dream,” higher education was often hailed as “the great equalizer,” and it was this quest for a better life that served as the impetus for the quest for higher education (Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; Cammarota, 2004; Clark, 2003; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012; Storlie et al., 2016; Urbina & Wright, 2015; Yazedjian, Toews, & Navarro, 2009). The

enrollment rate of Latina women in higher education tended to compare equally with women of other nationalities; however, they differed greatly in terms of completion and graduation (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Gandara, 2015; Gilroy, 2011; Lopez & Barrera, 2014; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). There were numerous factors which impacted the lived experiences of Latina women in their pursuit of higher education. Included in these factors were familial obligations, cultural considerations, relationship and mentoring issues, lack of access, and institutional and systemic barriers to success (Cammarota, 2004; Cooper, 2014; Gilroy, 2011; Storlie et al., 2016; Sy & Brittian 2008). Additionally, there were other considerations which impacted participation and persistence among Latina students in higher education. Included among these considerations were issues pertaining to college readiness, inadequate counseling by high school counselors and personnel, tracking of Latinos to vocational curriculums, financial aid issues, and unfamiliarity with the college admissions process (Cammarota, 2004; Cooper, 2014; Espinoza, 2010; Gilroy, 2011; Storlie et al., 2016; Sy & Brittian 2008; Urbina & Wright, 2015). These factors combined uniquely in a manner which differentiated the Latina experience in higher education from the experiences of women of other ethnicities.

The landscape of higher education was in a constant state of evolution due to societal changes and responses to disruptive innovations. Globalization, technological advances, economic uncertainty, accountability and innovation contributed to the disruption of higher education (Christensen, Horn, Caldra, & Soares, 2011; Richardson, Jenkins, & Lemoine, 2017). Rising tuition costs and decreased state funding for education, along with changing dynamics in the economic and political realms combined

to make college unaffordable for many (Christensen et al., 2011; Richardson et al., 2017). One answer to the “disruption of higher education” was the increase of online learning (Bell & Frederman, 2013; Bok, 2013; Skiba, 2012). While online learning enthusiasts praised the cost saving benefits and increased access made possible by online courses, it needed to be emphasized that technological access among minority and other marginalized groups prevented these groups from enjoying the benefits of online courses to the same extent of their White peers (Bok, 2013).

In an effort to curtail the cost of higher education, many Latinas began their postsecondary pursuits by enrolling in community colleges (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2005). This strategy however was beset with other problems, and the majority of Latinas who entered college at the community college level did not successfully transfer to four year institutions and complete a bachelor degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Dougherty, 2002; Fry, 2004; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2005; Yazedjian, Toews, & Navarro, 2009). The low transfer rate of Latinas from two-year to four-year institutions was one example of the many factors which combined to create unique lived experiences for Latinas in higher education.

The inherent inequalities within our educational system resulted in educational gaps and carried economic, social and political repercussions for Latinas and other marginalized segments of society (Urbina & Wright, 2015). Since Latinas were projected to comprise approximately one third of the entire female population by the year 2060, an examination of the Latina experience in higher education was necessary to identify the factors which affected participation, persistence, and completion for this growing segment of the American population. While numerous studies were done chronicling the

postsecondary experiences of women in general, and White and Black women in particular, the experiences of Latina women in higher education remained underexplored.

For the purposes of this dissertation, the terms Latino and Hispanic were used interchangeably, and included any individual who self-identified as Latino/Hispanic regardless of subgroup. The term Latina referred to Latina women specifically, while the terms Latinos and Hispanics were used gender neutrally to refer to the population as a whole.

## Statement of the Problem

The Hispanic population in the United States increased tremendously over the years and Latinos were now the largest ethnic minority in the United States (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015; U.S. Census, 2011). Latinas were projected to comprise approximately one third of the total female population of the United States by the year 2060 (Gandara, 2015; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Numerous factors combined to contribute to the lived experiences of Latina women in higher education. The Latina experience in higher education had not been sufficiently studied, and the experience of Latinas at Columbus State University not been fully explored. Therefore, the researcher sought to examine the experiences of Latina at Columbus State University.

## Research Question

The researcher proposes to answer the following question: What are the lived experiences of Latinas at Columbus State University?

## Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework below (see Figure 1) depicts factors which impacted the lived experiences of Latina students at Columbus State University.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

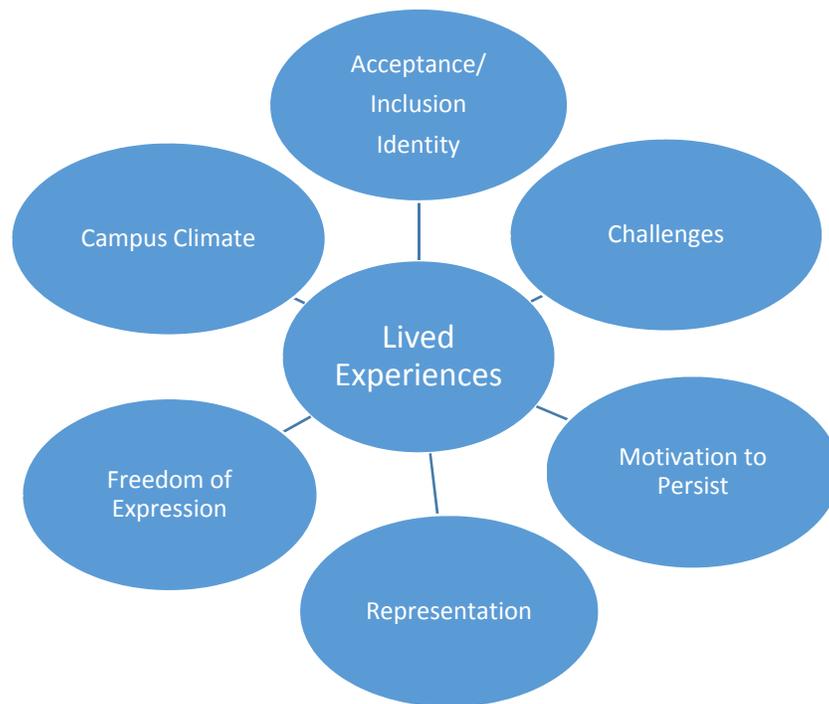


Figure 1 represented the relationship between the various factors, which combined to affect the lived experiences of Latina students at Columbus State University. The factors, which were explored, reflected factors identified in the review of the literature which affected the experience of Latina women in higher education. These factors included Latina student's perceptions of acceptance/inclusion, identity, challenges faced, motivation to persist, representation, freedom of expression, and campus climate (Cammarota, 2004; Cooper, 2014; Gilroy, 2011; Storlie et al., 2016; Sy & Brittian 2008).

## Importance of the Study

The increase in the Latino population was well documented and the projection of Latina growth in the United States necessitated attention. Latina women represented an untapped wealth of human social capital and rich natural resources, and this research helped this underrepresented population. The experiences of Latina women in higher education was underexplored, and this research added to the existing literature and helped to close some gaps. On the institutional side, this research helped to identify what were the lived experiences of Latina women at Columbus State University and what needed to be done to improve those experiences. Additionally, the research could aid the University in helping to determine the things which make Columbus State University more attractive to Latina students and as a result, increase enrollment. In terms of society, as Latina students became better equipped to successfully navigate the landscape of higher education, they became better equipped to thrive economically and socially, which had significant societal impact. This research aided in that process. This study was unique to Columbus State University, as it had never been done before, and it had potential to impact the university positively in terms of helping to increase recruitment, retention, and completion of Latina students. As for the researcher, this study was important because as a Latina woman, the researcher had to overcome and persist many obstacles to become part of the “less than 1” who received a doctorate.

## Procedures

Utilizing a qualitative approach, the researcher intended to have participants participate in one-on-one semi-structured interviews with select participants. This data

was analyzed via coding technique. This technique was being utilized to obtain “rich” qualitative data. The interviews were recorded with the participant’s permission, and transcribed verbatim. The transcribed data was analyzed to identify emergent themes. The population for the study consisted of Latina students at Columbus State University.

### Limitations/Delimitations

This study was limited by the sample size of the population. Latino students currently comprised only 5% of the total undergraduate population, and less than 1% of the total graduate population at Columbus State University, thereby limiting the sample size. From that limited population, the researcher sought to extrapolate Latina students, thereby further narrowing the population. Another possible limitation was researcher bias. Although the intent of the researcher was to remain neutral, the possibility of researcher bias remained, and there was always the possibility that the expectation or interpretation of the data became skewed by the researcher’s experience.

### Definition of Terms

- Latina-refers to all Latina women regardless of subgroup (US Census, 2010).
- Latino/Hispanic-refers to the Latino population as a whole. Gender neutral.
- Lived experiences-refers to “Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people” (Chandler & Munday, 2011, p. 112).
- Disruption innovation- refers to the process whereby an innovation is introduced, and replaces an original expensive product at a much less expensive cost, thereby

increasing access to many who otherwise could not afford it (Christensen, Horn, Caldera, & Soares, 2011).

- Familismo-refers to “prioritizing the needs of the family above those of the individual” (Martinez, 2013, p. 23).
- Marianismo-refers to the expectation of Latinas to be selfless and to prioritize the role of family caretaker above individual or professional roles (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Sy & Brittan, 2008).
- Selective School-refers to an institution that admits students based upon meeting specific academic criteria (Fry, 2004).
- Non-selective School-refers to an institution that admits all students without meeting any specified criteria, synonymous with an Open-Door school (Fry, 2004).
- Funds of knowledge approach-seeks to examine the educational experience of Latina(o) students from the vantage point of the wealth of knowledge within the family structure, gained through personal experience, and how that knowledge, or lack thereof, impacts students’ educational experiences (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012).
- Role salience- “refers to the different aspects of one’s life in which one spends significant amounts of time.” (Storlie, Mostade & Duenyas, 2016, p. 308)

## Summary

The Latino population in the United States continued to grow at a tremendous rate and Latinos were now the largest ethnic minority in America. The growth of the Latino

community changed the face of the nation. Latina women were projected to account for a third of the total female population by the year 2060. This growing segment of society represented untapped human capital, much of which had yet to be discovered and utilized. The Latino student population at Columbus State University was increasing as well, thus requiring greater attention to this underrepresented population.

The importance of higher education as an agent of change and a vehicle for social status and mobility was well documented. Often considered the “great equalizer”, higher education became a cornerstone of the “American Dream”. There were inherent inequalities within our educational system, which created opportunity gaps for Latinas and other marginalized groups in our society. As an institution of higher learning, Columbus State University became the chosen vehicle through which Latinas who were currently enrolled, sought to enhance and improve their lives.

Numerous factors combined to contribute to the lived experiences of Latina women in higher education. The Latina experience in higher education had not been sufficiently studied. The experience of Latinas at Columbus State University had yet to be fully explored. Therefore, the researcher sought to examine what were the lived experiences of Latina students at Columbus State University.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

The importance of higher education as a conduit for social status and upward mobility was well established (Clark, 2003; Espinoza, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Often touted as “the great equalizer,” postsecondary education was viewed by many as the “road map” which led to the “American Dream” (Clark, 2003; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). It was the lure of this “American Dream” and the promise of a brighter future, which motivated millions to embark upon this challenging journey.

The landscape of higher education was constantly evolving in response to the changing dynamics of society. Globalization, technological advances, economic uncertainty, accountability and innovation all contributed to the disruption of higher education (Christensen, Horn, Caldra, & Soares, 2011; Richardson, Jenkins, & Lemoine, 2017). The increased popularity of online learning and the introduction of Massive Open Online Courseware (MOOCs) changed the face of higher education, as well as how information was disseminated (Bok, 2013; Skiba, 2012).

The Latino population in the United States grew steadily over the years, and Latinos were the largest ethnic minority group in America (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015; U.S. Census, 2011). Due to this steady growth, Latinas were projected to account for at least one third of the female population by the year 2060 (Gandara, 2015; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Urbina & Wright, 2015). According to the U.

S. Census Bureau, the Latino population grew to over 50 million, and constituted 16.7 percent of the nation's total population in 2011 (U.S. Census, 2011). During the ten-year span from 2000-2010, the Hispanic population increased by 43%, which accounted for over half of the total population of the United States in 2010 (Ennis, Rios-Vargas, & Albert, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015). According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), in 2014 over 55 million people self-identified as Hispanic or Latino, and approximately 51% were Latinas (Zong & Batalova, 2016; U.S. Census, 2010). Of the 55 million Hispanics counted, 65% were born in the United States, and 35% were immigrants.

#### History of Latina Presence

Contrary to the popular belief that Latinos were newcomers on the American front, "Latino culture was part of "America" longer than the United States has existed" (Urbina & Wright, 2015, p. 5). According to Urbina and Wright, (2015), Latinos populated the Southwestern region of what was the United States including Texas, Florida, and New Mexico since 1565, decades before the founding of Plymouth Rock in 1620 (p. 5). Two major cities: St. Augustine, Florida and Santa Fe, New Mexico were founded by Spain in 1565 and 1610 respectively, thereby establishing the Spanish influence in the region (Urbina & Wright, 2015). The end of the Mexican American War (1848) in which Mexico became a U.S. territory, and the U.S. took over half of the land belonging to Mexico, marked the beginning of Latinos as part of the American landscape (Urbina & Wright, 2015). Even the history of the American dollar could be traced back to the Spanish dollar, referred to as "pieces of eight", which was the "legal tender" of the

U.S. prior to 1857 when Congress approved the Coinage Act of 1857 (Urbina & Wright, 2015).

The Latino population was vast and diverse, and was comprised of individuals from numerous subgroups, including Puerto Rican, Cuban, Mexican, Panamanian, Guatemalan, Dominican, Honduran, Costa Rican, Colombian, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, Argentinean, Bolivian, Chilean, Ecuadorian, Paraguayan, Peruvian, Uruguayan, and Venezuelan. According to the 2010 Census, the increase varied by subgroup, with Mexicans accounting for the largest increase (54%), followed by Cubans (44%) Puerto Ricans (36%) and then Other Hispanics (22.5%) (Ennis et al., 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Of the total number of Hispanics counted in the 2010 Census, 63% self-identified as Mexican, 9% as Puerto Rican, and 4% Cuban (Ennis et al., 2011). Even though Mexicans made up the largest segment of the Latino population, they had the lowest “educational attainment” rate of any ethnic group in America (Yasso & Solorzano, 2006). Using data from the U. S. Census (2000), Yasso and Solorzano (2006) predicted that out of 100 [Mexican] students beginning elementary school together, 54 dropped out of high school, and only 26 of the remaining 46 who graduated, continued on to college. Of the 26 college bound students, 17 enrolled in community colleges, and only one of the 17 transferred to a four-year institution. Of the nine remaining college students plus one transfer student, eight graduated with a bachelor’s degree and one pursued graduate studies. Yasso and Solorzano (2006) predicted, “less than one will receive a doctorate” (p. 8). In addition to the subgroups already mentioned, members of the Hispanic population might also be members of any race. During the 2010 Census, Hispanic or Latino became differentiated as an ethnicity as opposed to a race. Data derived from the

Census reflected 53% of Hispanics self-identified their race as White, 2.5% self-identified as Black or African American, 1.4% as American Indian and Alaska Native, 0.4% as Asian, 0.1% as Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and 36.7% as Some Other Race (US Census 2010).

### Impact of Latino Population Growth

The impact of rapid growth of the Latino population resulted in cities and states whose racial compositions classified them as “minority-majority,” meaning that people of color outnumbered the dominant white majority (Urbina & Wright, 2015). Included in this minority-majority group were California, Washington, D.C., Hawaii, New Mexico, and Texas (Urbina & Wright, 2015). While Latinos lived in virtually every state of the Union, the majority of Latinos lived in nine major states including Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Illinois, New Mexico, New Jersey, New York, and Texas (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015). During the 10-year period between 2000 and 2010, twelve states experienced such growth in the Latino population that Latinos accounted for the majority of the state’s population. These states included South Carolina, Alabama, Tennessee, Kentucky, Arkansas, North Carolina, Maryland, Mississippi, South Dakota, Delaware, Georgia, and Virginia (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015). In 2012, California, Florida, and Texas were “Latino-majority” states, meaning their racial composition was over 50% Latino (Urbina & Wright, 2015).

In terms of geographic region, most Latinos lived in the West and South however, the regions which experienced the fastest growth were the South and Midwest (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011; Urbina & Wright, 2015). The growth of the Latino population as well as the changing demographics within the Latino community created a

scenario that could no longer be ignored. The fact that Latinas constituted such a significant segment of our society required an understanding of the magnitude of untapped potential and influence inherent within this population.

### Higher Education

The importance of higher education as an agent of change could not be overly emphasized (Clark, 2003; Espinoza, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Many view higher education as the impetus that brought about change in their lives. However, the landscape of higher education itself was changing. Societal changes such as globalization, economic uncertainty, technological advances and the need for greater accountability caused disruption in higher education (Bok, 2013; Richardson et al., 2017, Skiba, 2012). According to Christensen, Horn, Caldera, and Soares (2011), “disruption innovation” referred to the process whereby an innovation was introduced, and replaced an original expensive product at a much less expensive cost, thereby increasing access to many who otherwise could not afford it (p. 2).

The rising costs of tuition as well as decreased state funding for education, collided with inadequate budgets, making college unaffordable for many (Christensen et al., 2011; Richardson et al., 2017). Traditional colleges and universities were facing financial crisis in the form of rising operational costs, and many were struggling simply to stay afloat (Christensen et al.; Richardson et al.). Very often, these operational costs were transferred to students and their families in the form of tuition increases. Soaring costs and limited availability of financial aid resulted in students accumulating mountains of student loan debt, many of which ended up in default, further exacerbating the economic decline (Bok, 2013; Robb, Moody, & Abdel-Ghany, 2012).

One response to these challenges was the emergence and gaining popularity of online/e-learning. Bell and Frederman (2013) suggested the increase in the use of e-learning in postsecondary institutions was attributed to “ (1) the need to generate new income; (2) the desire to provide greater access to education; (3) the need to increase scheduling flexibility; (4) the ability to allow students to work at their own pace; and (5) the need to curtail increasing costs” (p. 166). According to Derek Bok (2013) one of the major cost saving aspects of online classes was the ability to accommodate greater numbers of students without incurring the expense of “building additional classrooms and dormitories” (p. 115). While proponents argued that online education increased access to education and decreased educational costs, opponents pointed to the lack of technological access among minority and lower income groups as barriers which prevented these marginalized groups from being able to take advantage of the benefits of online courses to the same extent as their White peers (Bok, 2013).

Christensen et al. (2011), suggested that in order for an innovation to be disruptive, certain elements must exist, including a technological element and a business model (p. 2). Using higher education as an example, the authors purported “online learning” was the technology component which increased access for many who previously were unable to be served. Christensen et al., suggested that in addition to increasing access, online learning sparked the growth of the “for profit” sector of higher education. The authors stated that online learning established a business model, which focused on “teaching and learning” and “career preparation” as opposed to research, thereby mitigating costs and altering the where, when and how of higher education (Christensen et al., 2011; Richardson et al., 2017). The infinite amount of information

available on the World Wide Web transformed the curriculum and instruction platform, and allowed the focus to move from credit hour accumulation and “seat time” requirements, to mastery and competency assessments (Christensen et al.).

Urbina and Wright (2015), asserted the inequities inherent within our educational system not only resulted in educational gaps, but also carried economic, social, and political repercussions for Latinos and other marginalized segments of society. Therefore, an examination of the Latina experience in higher education was necessary in order to identify factors, which affected Latina participation in higher education, as well as to identify barriers to participation and persistence for this growing segment of the American population.

#### Enrollment vs. Attainment

According to Gilroy (2011), the college enrollment rate of Latina women compared equally with that of Non-Latina women; however, Latina women were not as likely to complete their degrees, and or go on to pursue higher degree levels (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Gandara, 2015; Lopez & Barrera, 2014; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). During the 18-year span between 1994 to 2012, research conducted by the Pew Research Center, discovered that college enrollment of Latina women increased by 13% over Latino men (Lopez & Barrera, 2014). During the same time, the enrollment of black women increased 12% over black men, while the enrollment of white women increased 6% over that of white males, and the rate of Asian women and men increased proportionately, with a much smaller rate of difference than any other group observed (Lopez & Barrera, 2014).

During the 10-year span between 2002 and 2012, the enrollment of Latina women increased over Latino males by 78%, while the difference in enrollment of Black women over Black males increased 43%, followed by the difference in Asian American women over Asian American men of 5.3%, and the difference of White women over White males of 5.0% (Garibaldi, 2014). The largest percentage of Latina women enrolled in postsecondary education was comprised of Latinas born in the U.S. (Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). While college enrollment rates for Latinas increased, research by the U.S. Department of Education indicated that Latinas were least likely to enroll in a postsecondary institution straight out of high school (Urbina & Wright, 2015). Many factors contributed to these statistics, including familial obligations, limited access, economic factors, systemic and institutional racism, and lack of college readiness just to name a few (Lopez & Barrera, 2014; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012; Solorzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Storlie et al., 2016; Urbina & Wright, 2015).

Cammarota (2004) described educational achievement and degree attainment among Latinas as a form of resistance to societal inequalities and injustices faced by Latinas and other marginalized segments of society. Degree attainment offered Latinas social status and upward mobility, which was used as a foundation to achieve a better life for themselves and their families (Clark, 2003; Espinoza, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Furthermore, Cammarota (2004) stated that Latinas in his study viewed degree attainment as an outward representation of “showing respect” or validation for the struggles which their mothers and previous generations endured to provide the opportunity of a better life for their children (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Behnke, Piercy, & Diversi, 2004; Cammarota, 2004). In addition to providing social status and upward

mobility, First Generation Latina(o)s recognized that degree attainment was essential to obtain “equal footing” with their peers in the dominant culture (Espinoza, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Educational achievement and degree attainment resulted in a new generation of independent Latina women who achieved and provided for themselves, and had access to higher status in life than ever before (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006). Educational achievement and attainment offered Latinas new opportunities and options, and caused many Latinas to reevaluate traditional roles.

## Factors that impact Latina participation in Higher Education

### Familial Obligations

Traditional roles for Latina women were changing, and these changes could be seen in the experience of Latina women in higher education (Cooper, 2014; Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Gilroy, 2011; Storlie et al., 2016). Sy and Brittian (2008) demonstrated the impact of familial obligations on Latina women’s transition to college, and how those familial obligations influenced where Latinas chose to live and/or work while in school. The struggle to balance education and familial demands was a concept that was common to women in general, and to Latina women in particular. Sy and Brittian found that Latinas fulfilled family obligations during their first semester in college to a greater degree than did Asian and European women (2008). Roberta Espinoza (2010) explored the phenomenon of balancing education and familial obligations among Latinas, and termed it the “Good Daughter” dilemma. Espinoza described this dilemma succinctly as the effort to maintain “Good Daughter” status and

all that it implied in the Hispanic tradition, while simultaneously attempting to pursue individual educational aspirations and goals. Being a “Good Daughter” in the Hispanic culture carried implicit expectations and demands. In the Hispanic culture, the norm was that women were expected to assume more familial responsibility than men did, and a “Good Daughter” always put the needs of her family before her own (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Storlie et al., 2016). Latinas were expected to be submissive and docile, self-sacrificing and committed to their husbands, families, as well as their extended families. Latinas were expected to be creative and resourceful as well as strong and determined in the face of hardship (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Storlie et al., 2016). Latinas were expected to foster and maintain ties to their communities as well as with each other. Spirituality was also an expectation within the Latina culture, and considered an integral function of the woman of the house (Storlie et al., 2016; Espinoza, 2010). The challenge for Latinas seeking postsecondary education became how to successfully navigate this new and uncharted terrain while still meeting the expectations of being “a good daughter, wife, mother and Latina woman” (Storlie et al., 2016, p. 16).

Storlie et al. (2016) examined the impact of culture, values and life-role salience on the career development of Latina first generation college students. According to Storlie et al., role salience was defined as the manifestation of the various roles within a person’s life which comprised the whole. Latina college students often had numerous roles in which they must operate, each with its’ own set of rules and expectations. Oftentimes these roles competed and collided with each other however, Latinas were taught to place the familial roles above all other roles (Espinoza, 2010; Storlie et al.,

2016). The challenge of effectively managing and prioritizing these competing roles often created a dissonance for Latinas seeking higher education, which sometimes manifested in feelings of isolation, contradiction and searching for “belonging” (Storlie et al., 2016; Urbina & Wright, 2015).

Traditionally, in the Hispanic culture, males were viewed as dominant, and women were expected to be subservient, submissive and selfless (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Negative stereotypes categorized Latinas as “docile” and as having “little ambition” (Rodriguez et al., 2000). The concept of “marianismo” in the Latino community referred to the expectation of Latinas to be selfless and to prioritize the role of family caretaker above individual or professional roles (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Sy & Brittian, 2008). The expectation was for Latinas to be “women of the home,” only leaving their family of origin to marry and begin a family of their own (Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010; Sy & Brittian;). Research conducted by Cammarota suggested that Latinas in his study viewed educational achievement as a means of changing this dynamic (Rodriguez et al.; Espinoza). Latinas who persisted and went to college were exposed to new concepts of gender roles, which caused them to reconsider, and reject previously held beliefs. Thus, Latinas became empowered to redefine their roles and goals in life and in society (Cammarota; Espinoza; Rodriguez et al., 2000).

The concept of “familismo,” which was defined as prioritizing the needs of the family above those of the individual, traditionally influenced educational choices and attainment in the Latina community (Martinez, 2013). Research conducted by Martinez examined the impact of “familismo” on Mexican American students’ college choices in a

school district in South Texas. Martinez indicated that when students contemplated making decisions about which colleges to apply to, the students based their decision in large part on how their choice affected their family structure. This dynamic was seen throughout the literature, and as Barajas and Pierce (2001) pointed out in their research, the decision to pursue education on all levels was a family choice, as opposed to an individual one. The interdependence of the familial structure required consideration of how the Latina's educational choice impacted the family. The financial impact on the family as a unit was very significant, and considered as such. Not only must the cost of attendance be factored into the equation, but the loss of potential income, which the student could otherwise contribute needed to be factored in as well. Also of critical importance was whether the Latina was eligible for financial aid based on residency requirements. Additionally, reassignment of roles performed by the Latina student needed to be considered. Given these considerations, it became apparent why the decision to pursue higher education was never made nonchalantly by Latinas, and was often tied to other dynamics (Barajas & Pierce; Storlie et al., 2016). Additionally, parental lack of understanding and unfamiliarity with the collegiate process often served to deter parental encouragement for students to leave home (Martinez).

Familial support was a major factor contributing to student persistence among Hispanic undergraduate students (Arana et al., 2011; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Storlie et al., 2016). Sy (2006) indicated that Latina students who spent more time socially with their family experienced a smoother transition to college than Latinas who spent less social time with their family. First Generation Hispanic students observed by Arana et al., stated that being First Generation college students

served as motivation for their persistence (Arana et al., 2011; McCarron & Inkelas). This intrinsic motivation not only fueled them to persist, but also served as a reminder of the importance that their success meant for their families and communities. Oftentimes, First Generation Latinas envisioned themselves as groundbreaking pioneers plowing the way for those coming behind them (Arana et al.; Storlie et al., 2016). Espinoza (2010) revealed two distinctly different strategies employed by Latina doctoral students in negotiating the balance between familial and educational responsibilities. According to Espinoza, the Latina doctoral students in her study negotiated the vying demands of family and school by either integrating their families into the equation via soliciting their support, or they kept the two completely separate to avoid conflict.

### Biculturalism

Another aspect that characterized the dilemma faced by Latina women in their quest for higher education involved the managing of two distinct cultures, which at times seemed to be diametrically opposed to each other. Latina women struggled to maintain traditional cultural values and traditions while operating within the dominant American culture (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010). The Hispanic culture stressed community and collectivism, while American culture stressed individualism and competition (Espinoza, 2010; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Cammarota stated that the “peer culture” of Latinas placed higher value on traditional gender roles such as wife and mother over the attainment of professional roles. According to Cammarota, the challenge of balancing traditional gender roles and educational achievement goals largely determined the academic experience and success of Latinas. The management of the two cultures took on many forms, and the astute Latina became

fluent in both cultures and transitioned between the two effectively (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Blancero & Cruz, 2014; Cammarota, 2004; Espinoza, 2010). This phenomenon was termed “biculturalism” (Espinoza, 2010). Biculturalism as defined by Smokowski, Rose, & Bacallao, (2008) referred to the integration of both the dominant host culture and the culture of origin at “moderate or high “levels. Assimilation occurred when there was more involvement by “the host culture” than the culture of origin (Smokowski et. al).

In a study conducted by Storlie et al. (2016), the participants reported feelings of dissonance in terms of “fitting in” with their families as well as within the academic environment. The Latinas in this study were all First Generation college students. The Latinas in this study reported feelings of judgement and isolation based upon their cultural background as well as their skin color, both within the Latino community as well as within the dominant culture (Storlie et al., 2016). The conflict experienced by the Latinas in the study conducted by Storlie et al., was indicative of questions pertaining to cultural identity and belonging which Latinas faced when they moved away from traditional roles and expectations set for them (Storlie et al.). This dissonance was representative of the lived experiences of Latinas encountered during the pursuit of higher education.

#### Relationship Building/Mentorship

According to Barajas and Pierce (2001), Latina students successfully navigated the collegiate experience by fostering and maintaining positive relationships with other Latina students. These Latinas successfully navigated the educational landscape, and now served as “cultural translators” in order to teach others how to operate within the dominant culture while still maintaining their own cultural identity. According to Barajas

and Pierce, the Latina women in the study utilized bonding relationships and mentoring to combat negative stereotypes and racism and to redefine and establish positive self-identity. Barajas and Pierce described this use of fostering and maintaining relationships between the Latina women in the study with other successful Latina students as well as with the Hispanic community at large, as “safe spaces” where Latinas were empowered to redefine and overcome negative stereotypes and self-perceptions, while creating opportunities for mentorship as well.

The importance of mentorship to Latina persistence and achievement could not be overlooked. In a study conducted by Garcia and Henderson (2015), the results validated the importance of mentoring relationships among Latinas in the successful navigation of graduate school. The participants in this study stressed the importance of mentoring techniques, which established trust, respect and fostered ethnic identity and pride. Research by Castellanos and Gloria (2007) also exhibited a positive relationship between culturally relevant mentoring of Latinas and academic achievement. Research by Bordes and Arredondo (2005) indicated that Latina undergraduate students who were mentored had increasingly positive views regarding their collegiate environment as well as increased sense of belonging.

### [Lack of Access](#)

The issue of access to higher education was an important one, which spanned across socioeconomic status as well as across racial and gender lines. Urbina and Wright (2015), stated that in 2010, approximately 60% percent of Latinos lived in poverty. Gandara (2015) stated, approximately one fourth of the Latino population in America lived at or below poverty level. Thus, many Latinos lived in high poverty areas, and

attended less than adequate schools with access to little or no resources, leaving them poorly prepared for college (Saenz, Rodriguez, Martinez, & Romo, 2011; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2005; Yamamura, Martinez, & Saenz, 2010). The issue of inadequate access to college for Latino students did not begin at the high school level, although it was at this point that the manifestation of the problem often became apparent. According to Saenz et al. (2011), limited access began at the preschool and elementary levels where Latinas did not enjoy the same access to state funded quality programs such as Head Start and Pre-K programs, which started children on a path to academic success. This deficit often increased along the P-12 continuum, especially among undocumented students and English Language Learners (ELL) who not only had the challenge of mastering curriculum concepts, but had also to learn to read, write, and think in another language (Saenz et al.). The resulting frustration accounted in large part, for the reason many Latinos decided to drop out before graduating from high school. Lack of role models and unfamiliarity on how to navigate through the educational pipeline compounded this scenario (Oliva, 2004; Rios-Aguilar & Kiyanna, 2012; Saenz et al.; Sciarra & Whitson; Solorzano et al.).

Research by Oliva (2004) explored how the K-16 partnerships and policy regulations affected Latina(o) college access. Using the state of Texas as a backdrop, Oliva examined how the change in legislation over the years affected access to Latinos and other minorities. After the Hopwood v. Texas ruling of 1996, which prohibited the use of race in college admissions and scholarships, access to postsecondary education by minorities decreased. As a result, the focus of achieving greater access had to focus on other areas (Oliver).

Other factors that acted as barriers to access to postsecondary education among Latinos included a lack of knowledge about navigating the college admissions process, lack of financial resources as well as inexperience and lack of adult guidance in the college selection process (Oliva, 2004; Fry, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2005; Urbina & Wright, 2015; Yasso & Solorzano, 2006). Additionally, limited access to resources such as Advanced Placement (AP) courses, college bound curriculums and technology; placed Latinas at further disadvantage in terms of college readiness (Arana et al., 2011; Fry, 2004; Oliva, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2005; Urbina & Wright, 2015; Yasso & Solorzano, 2006). Inadequate counseling by school counselors as well as the necessity to debunk negative perceptions and stereotypes of Latina(o) students also contributed to this dilemma (Cavazos, Cavazos, Hinojosa & Silva, 2009; Urbina & Wright, 2015; Yasso & Solorzano).

Systemic barriers to access included policies and regulations regarding enrollment of Latina(o) students based on residency and race/ethnicity (Kantamneni, Shada, Consley, Hellwege, Tate, & Wang, 2015;; Nguyen & Hoy, 2015; Rios-Agulilar & Kiyama, 2012). In the case of undocumented Latina students, the problem of access was further exacerbated due to immigration laws regarding post-secondary education eligibility for undocumented students. While the decision in Plyler v. Doe (1982), ensured access to K-12 education for all students regardless of citizenship status, this right did not extend to postsecondary education. The Federal government left the regulation of postsecondary education primarily in the hands of the states, and the states addressed this issue in various ways. Some states enacted laws allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition rates for higher education. Among these states were

Texas, New York, California, and Connecticut to name a few (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). In all but twelve states, undocumented students were required to pay out of state tuition fees for post-secondary education, regardless of how long they resided in that state (Kim & Diaz, 2013). Other states, for example Maryland, allowed limited access to postsecondary education for undocumented students, and limited undocumented students access to only attend community colleges, while other states such as Alabama, prohibited undocumented students from attending post-secondary institutions completely (Nguyen & Serna, 2014). Some states such as South Carolina required students to prove that they were in the country legally to enroll in postsecondary institutions. In addition to state legislation and policies that regulated access, several states such as Georgia, Rhode Island, Michigan and Hawaii implemented additional criteria for access regarding undocumented students dictated by the states' Boards of Regents (Nguyen & Hoy, 2015). In Georgia for example, the Board of Regents required all students who applied within the University System of Georgia to verify lawful presence to qualify for in-state tuition, while the Board of Regents in Michigan allowed in-state tuition for undocumented students (Nguyen & Hoy, 2015).

Additionally, state and federal laws regarding eligibility for student aid contributed to limited access (Kantamneni et al., 2015; Nguyen & Hoy, 2015). Undocumented students were ineligible to apply for any federal loan or grant programs due to their immigration status (Kantamneni et al.; Nguyen & Hoy). According to Nguyen and Hoy (2015), only five of twenty-two states that allowed undocumented students to apply as residents for tuition purposes, allowed undocumented students to apply for financial aid. The ineligibility to receive financial aid, coupled with the

inability to obtain work legally because of their immigration status further limited access to Latina undocumented students in higher education (Kim & Diaz, 2013; Nguyen & Hoy).

Other attempts at immigration reform failed, notably the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act, which attempted to address the issue of access to postsecondary education for undocumented students who were brought to this country as minors and lived in the U.S. for at least five years and graduated from a U. S. high school. The DREAM Act also reversed the section of the (Illegal Immigrant Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), which served as the basis for allowing states to be able to determine tuition based on the definition of residency (Nguyen & Hoy, 2015). The issue of Latina access to higher education was shaped by all of these factors, and became part of the Latina experience in higher education.

### Barriers to Success

According to Solorzano et al., (2005), years of research pointed to the lack of reliability of standardized tests as predictors of academic success for “students of color” (p. 287). To circumvent the obstacles associated with standardized testing and the high cost of attendance of four-year institutions, many Latina students began their pursuit of postsecondary education at the community college level (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2005). It was estimated that approximately 40% of Latino college age students between the ages of 18-24 began their college careers at two year colleges as compared to 25% of White and Black students in that age group (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Dougherty, 2002; Fry, 2004; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). This disproportionate enrollment of Latino students enrolled in two-year colleges was

problematic because, Latinas who entered college at the community college level were at greater risk of not successfully transferring to a four-year institution and completing a bachelor degree (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Dougherty, 2002; Fry, 2004; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007; Solorzano et al., 2005; Yazedjian, Toews, & Navarro, 2009). There were numerous factors which contributed to this phenomenon including poor counseling, tracking of Latinas into non-college preparatory curricular in high school, the need for remediation, and the necessity to work full time while attending school to name a few (Cavazos et al., 2009; Fry, 2004; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Solorzano et al., 2005).

According to Urbina and Wright (2015), community colleges tended to attract students who were “challenged academically, economically, and socially” (p. 60). Fry (2004) noted that even among Latina(o) students who were well prepared for college, this phenomenon still emerged because of differing pathways chosen by Latina(o) students versus their White counterparts. Latina(o) students tended to enroll in less selective colleges than their White peers, which contributed to lower completion rates among Latina(o) students (Fry, 2004).

Research from The Pew Hispanic Center compared college outcomes of “equally prepared” high school students across racial and ethnic lines. Of notable interest in the findings was the observation that amongst the “best prepared” students, 60 percent of Latino students attended “non-selective” colleges as opposed to 52 percent of White students, while 66 percent of “less prepared” Latina(o) students enrolled in “open door” institutions versus 45 percent of “less prepared” White students (Fry, 2004). Researchers suggested that the only exception to the enrollment pattern of Latinos and selective school choice, lay amongst “highly prepared” Latinos, who enrolled in the nations “most

selective” institutions at the same rate as their “White” counterparts and persisted equally (Fry, 2002). Evidence suggested there was a positive correlation between the selectivity of an institution and the completion rate of the student population (Fry, 2004). Among the “best prepared” students who attended non-selective institutions, 81 percent of White students completed bachelor’s degrees versus 57 percent of Latina(o) students (Fry, 2004). Among “minimally prepared” students who began their collegiate trajectory at the community college level, 16 percent of White students were found to complete a bachelor’s degree versus 7 percent of Latina(o) students (Fry, 2004). While the data collected by the Pew Hispanic center compared “equally prepared” students in their research, data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) did not make this distinction when reporting their findings that in 2015, White students at 2 year institutions completed an award or degree at 55.1% versus Latino students who completed an award or degree at 17.1% (Ginder et al., 2016). These findings illuminated the experience of Latinas in higher education who began their college career at two-year institutions.

## Trends in participation and persistence among Latinas in Higher Education

### College Readiness

Oftentimes, Latinas who successfully graduated high school and entered college found that they were not adequately prepared for college level work (Yasso & Solorzano, 2006). Data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics found that among Latino high school graduates, 46% had not taken Algebra 2 or higher versus their white

counterparts, giving credence to the lack of college readiness experienced by many Latinos (Fry, 2004). Results from research conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress showed significant gaps in reading and mathematics among Latino middle school students (Lopez, 2009). Research conducted by Karen Boden (2011), identified essential characteristics necessary for successful college readiness. Among the characteristics identified were: perseverance, time management, organizational skills, math and reading abilities, involvement in significant extracurricular activities, and effective rapport with key high school personnel (Boden, 2011). Participants in research conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center ranked the top three factors responsible for lack of college readiness among Latino students as: poor parenting, poor English skills, and poor teachers (Lopez, 2009). Lack of familiarity with navigating through the postsecondary admissions and financial aid processes, as well as poor guidance and tracking to vocational and remedial curriculums by high school counselors contributed to the lack of college readiness of Latinos (Fry, 2004; Oliva, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2005; Urbina & Wright, 2015; Yasso & Solorzano, 2006). In addition, lack of access to technology, AP courses, Gifted and Talented Education (GATE), “hands on” science classes, and poor time management and study skills compounded this dilemma (Reid & Moore, 2008; Yasso & Solorzano, 2006).

Thus, many Latinas found they needed to take remedial courses in order to bridge this gap. The need for remediation signified the lack of college readiness experienced by Latinos (Adelman, 1990; Urbina & Wright, 2015). Research conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010) showed that 43% of Latino students in the lower socioeconomic category took at least one remedial course in 2007. The cycle of

remediation became a catch 22 situation for many Latinas because the need to take remedial classes as prerequisites for entering college level courses presented another hurdle to jump over, and sometimes the remediation still did not level the playing field. This issue was further exacerbated by the fact that credit was not awarded for remedial courses, which then increased the number of classes necessary, and increased the cost of attendance in the long run (Oliva, 2004; Solorzano et al., 2005). Research conducted by Adelman (1990) suggested a negative relationship between students who took remedial courses and degree completion (Urbina & Wright, 2015). This scenario was further aggravated because Latinas many times could not afford to take college preparatory courses, which helped bolster their college readiness and helped improve test scores. According to Solorzano et al. (2005), the use of standardized tests as admission requirements to four year institutions served to limit access for Latinas(o)s, and widened the academic gap between Latinos and White students (Greene, Marti, & McClenney, 2008; O'Connor, Hammack, & Scott; Solorzano et al., 2005; Urbina & Wright, 2015; Yasso & Solorzano, 2006). As seen in the literature, the area of college readiness was a challenge experienced by many Latinas in search of higher education.

### Persistence

Research conducted by Arana, Castaneda-Sound, Blanchard and Aguilar (2011) examined factors which affected persistence to graduation of Hispanic undergraduate students in a Hispanic serving institution in the Southwestern region of the United States. Arana et al. indicated that the support of family was an important factor leading to student persistence among Hispanic undergraduate students. First Generation Hispanic students observed by Arana et al. indicated that being First Generation college students

served as motivation for their persistence. A common thread in the literature centered on the importance of persistence to completion in terms of the impact that degree attainment made in terms of the family structure, as well as the impact on generations to come (Arana et al. 2011; Cammarota, 2004; Sciarra & Whitson, 2007). The theme of persistence as a form of validation for the struggles endured by other Latinas who might not have been afforded the opportunity to further their education was seen throughout the literature, and constituted a sense of responsibility for giving back (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Cammarota, 2004; Storlie et al., 2016). The desire to give back served as a source of motivation for First Generation Latinas (Barajas & Pierce, 2001; Cammarota, 2004; Storlie et al., 2016).

Rivera and Monzon (2013) examined the impact of access to various forms of capital on Latina(o) student success and persistence. Rivera and Monzon demonstrated that first generation college status and college readiness impacted social and cultural capital necessary for successful acclimation to collegiate life. Additionally, Rivera and Monzon (2013) demonstrated that college readiness and generational status also affected economic and human capital required for successful college navigation (Huber, Huidor, Malagón, Sánchez, & Solórzano, 2006; Rivera & Monzon, 2013). Research conducted by Stanton-Salazar (1997), supported the idea that First Generation students experienced more problems in the college navigation process due to the absence of “familial and nonfamilial” social capital.

The importance of social capital during the transition to college was reiterated by Monica Banks-Gunzenhauser (2009, pp. 38-39), as she attributed the success of the “dominant student population” and their subsequent access to more “selective” schools,

to the existence of social and cultural capital unavailable to first generation college students. Student choices such as choosing to live on campus, attending orientation, declaring a major, applying for financial aid, deciding to join Greek organizations, and participating in programs such as Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), tended to increase students' access to necessary forms of capital required for academic success (Banks-Gunzenhauser, 2009; Huber et al., 2006; Rivera & Monzon, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Stanton-Salazar, 1997). In addition, researchers supported the idea that students who did not have to work off campus, lived on campus, and attended four year institutions were more likely to persist to completion and graduate (Rivera & Monzon, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Rivera and Monzon (2013) supported the value of utilizing Residence Halls as a strategy to increase student retention, and highlighted the importance of programming geared towards helping provide commuting students access to the same types of resources and services available to students who live on campus (Rivera & Monzon, 2013; Rodriguez et al., 2000).

DeMirjyn (2011) examined the impact of ethnic identity, racial integration, campus climate and cultural diversity on Latina academic achievement and persistence. According to DeMirjyn, the need to establish and maintain cultural self-identity for Latinas was both a struggle and a source of motivation for Latinas to persist and succeed. Narratives shared by the participants in the study, established a pattern of overcoming social and institutional stereotypes and racism to prove that they (Latinas) earned the right to belong, while simultaneously attempting to maintain their cultural identity and values (DeMirjyn, 2011). The quest for a sense of "belonging" was linked to the decision by some Latinas to attend community colleges as opposed to four year institutions