

ABSTRACT

Understanding Supporting Factors to Student Success in Higher Education: An Emphasis on

First-Generation Hispanic Students

Kristopher Garza

Texas A&M University – Kingsville

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate supporting factors of college seniors with an emphasis on first- and continued-generation Hispanic students. Qualitative interviews were conducted to examine retention influences among Hispanic college seniors. The rates of retention amongst this group of college students continues to confuse faculty and staff in higher education.

Through these qualitative interviews, focused on eight Hispanic college seniors, the resolve was to expand the understanding of influences that offered support to the conclusion of their academic career. Six comparable dynamics surfaced as success factors. Those dynamics were resiliency, family support, university support system, difficulty adjusting to college life, personal traits, and family expectations. Research revealed that the students profited from strong role models including internal and external resources that helped steer them through their college experience.

The qualitative element included in this study afforded the researcher a clearer understanding of the dynamics from the student's lived experiences. Using this approach allowed the researcher to include an important voice that provides crucial information about students as human beings and permits counselors and educators to consider this point of view (Patton, 2002; Marshall & Rossman, 1990).

In this study, the researcher used open ended questions which were thoughtfully developed in order to discuss the lived experiences of the participants, and explore their journey through their senior year. Interviews allowed for the collection of insights and experiences from the participants. The objective of the researcher and this study was to understand the perspective of a Hispanic college senior's ability to maintain enrollment and persist towards their final goal of graduation.

The research data repercussions provide counselors working with students, insight into college, career, school and community as well as the opportunity to contribute to improving university programs. This allows for counselors to focus and support the requirements of first generation students and continued generation Hispanic students. Further research with an emphasis on the strategies of retention for Hispanic college graduates requires a pledge from all levels across the campus community.