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This dissertation, *Analyzing Dimensions of Academic Persistence: A Case Study of a Transfer Student Program at a Public University in California*, by Thomas Tyner, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

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**Analyzing Dimensions of Academic Persistence: A Case Study of a Transfer Student
Program at a Public University in California**

by

THOMAS TYNER

Under the Direction of Dr. Jennifer Esposito

ABSTRACT

Using case study methodology/methods, this study explored the perspectives of current and former participants in a university-based program designed to increase the graduation rates of Latinx students who have transferred from a community college to a specific Hispanic-Serving Institution in California. Data were collected in the form of interviews of 12 program participants, 2 focus groups of program participants, 2 class observations and different archival records and documents on the program. The main research question explores what ways the program has impacted the lives of its students. Tinto's Persistence Theory (Tinto, 1993) and Yosso's Community Cultural Capital Wealth Model (Yosso, 2005) were used as the main theoretical frameworks to analyze different aspects of the program.

INDEX WORDS: Latinx Student Resilience, Latinx Student Programming

**Analyzing Dimensions of Academic Persistence: A Case Study of a Transfer Student
Program at a Public University in California**

by

Thomas Tyner

A Dissertation

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in

Department of Educational Policy Studies

in

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2019

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work the person who has also supported me. She taught me to respect and love all people and always encouraged me to do my best. Thank you mom for being there through everything.

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GLOSSARY

California Plan: The California Master Plan for Higher Education

Chicana/o: Term to describe individuals of Mexican Decent

Hispanic: Term to describe individuals who have ties to Spanish-speaking countries.

Latino/Latina: Term to describe individuals who have ties to Spanish-speaking countries

and sometimes of countries who speak Latin-derived languages such as Portuguese.

Latinx: Term to describe Latino or Latina with no gender specificity.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINING THE PROBLEM

Diversity

Over the past decade, Latinxs have been the fastest growing population in the United States with over 16 percent of the US population identifying as Latinx and accounting for over 50% of the total population growth (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2010). The US Census predicts that the population will become the largest group in the United States in the year 2050 (Ortman & Guarneri, 2008).

While the overall increase is quite remarkable, one outstanding fact is more than half of the Latinx population in the United States is below the age of 18-years-old (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). This has even greater implications for the entire U.S. education system (Crosnoe & Benner, 2012), but profoundly impacts school systems in the states where the Latinx population is the greatest. Over 50% of the Latinx population in the United States resides in the states of California, Texas, and Florida (Ennis et al., 2010). The influx of Latinx students, both immigrants and native-born, has forced curricular and pedagogical changes in both K-12 and post-secondary education (Casas & Ryan, 2010; Catalano, 2013; Hook & Snyder, 2007).

Statistically, the percentage of Latinx students entering institutions of higher learning in the United States has significantly increased in the past two decades. While this number indicates greater participation in higher education, the actual Latinx population has increased far beyond the percentages attending college and university (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). While the overall participation in higher education in numbers has increased along with completion rates, the levels of educational attainment for Latinxs remains lower than other ethnic and racial groups. In 2015, only 15% of the Latinx population, both US and foreign-born above the age of 25 years

had a bachelor's degree, as compared to more than 22% of African-Americans. The number increases to 20% when looking at US -born Latinxs exclusively. The comparison between the two groups is significant as in 1988, both Latinxs and African-Americans above 25 years-of-age with bachelor's degrees were tied at 12% (C. Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Many educators consider that higher education for Latinx students to be in a state of crisis. Gandara and Contreras (2009) state that “about half of all Latin[x] students fail to even graduate from high school, and while all other ethnic groups—including African Americans—have gradually increased their college graduation rates, Latin[x] have seen almost no such progress over the last three decades” (p. 1). As of 2014, although the most recent high school pushout rates for Latinxs have decreased, Latinxs still have the highest high school pushout rate in the United States and remain the least likely to graduate from university with a bachelor's degree (Krogstad, 2016). The term “pushout” is preferred over “dropout” because it implies that there are internal school factors that discourage students of color to continue their studies (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011) In California, the Latinx high school pushout rate has increased significantly over the past 7 years. The high school graduation rate is higher for Latinx students in California than non-Latinx Native Americans and African-Americans, while university graduation rates for Latinxs at California public institutions remain the lowest among all groups, except non-Latinx Native Americans. Latinxs are now the majority group in California; therefore, the high pushout rates demand an immediate examination on how to combat this problem (Bradley & Renzulli, 2011; Fry, 2010).

This research study examined a special program for Latinx university students at a public university in California. The program was designed to combat the low graduation rates of Latinx students at the university level with a specific focus on students transferring from community

college. This case study explored the impact such a specialized program can make on the lives of the students, as well as on their academic careers.

While the university is diverse and serves many cultures, graduation rates for male Latino and African American males remain disproportionately low (CSU, 2016). Social and academic programs designed to provide assistance for university students of color have shown academic success (Cameron & Heckman, 2001; Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011), however, there is a lack of research focusing on social and academic programs that give assistance to Latinx university students (Gandara, 2010). A qualitative research approach will provide a holistic understanding of the factors surrounding a select group of Latinx students by not only relying on program data but also providing a voice for the students. While the study of educational attainment of minority students is not new, the analysis of educational success in the higher education of Latinx students is emerging and perfect for qualitative research (Major & Savin-Baden, 2010). The research will examine a program that was designed to help Latinx students who transferred from a community college to graduate from a 4-year university.

Much of the scholarly research on Latinx education focuses on underachievement and takes a “deficit approach” to explain lower performance (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lynn, Yosso, Solórzano, & Parker, 2002). Educational disparities are found at all levels and can be attributed to many different factors, and with many educators describing such a disparity as the “achievement gap” (Ornstein, 2010; Simon et al., 2011). Latinx students are often categorized as a group that underperforms in education, as measured by education attainment levels. Latinxs are a diverse group, so it is very important to have an understanding of the meaning of Latinx. The meaning of Latinx and other similar terms will be explored in this chapter.

As the research focuses on a group of students studying in California, it is important to understand that Latinxs have made tremendous contributions to the state throughout its history. I will explain the history of Latinxs in California and important movements that have influenced the community. As these students are participants of higher education in California, I will also provide a thorough overview of the unique system of higher education found in the state and explore the possible reasons why so few Latinx students graduate from universities in California.

Achievement Gaps

In education, the term “achievement gap” refers to a divergence in academic performance among different members of society, including variations among nations (Akiba, LeTendre, & Scribner, 2007; Ornstein, 2010), socio-economic classes (Kennedy, 2010; Sandy & Duncan, 2010), racial and ethnic groups (Bainbridge & Lasley, 2002; Buttaro, Battle, & Pastrana, 2010; Williams, 2011), and similar gaps are evident in access to healthcare, environmental surroundings (Basch, 2011; Fiscella & Kitzman, 2009; Miranda, Kim, Reiter, Overstreet Galeano, & Maxson, 2009), and language proficiency (Good, Masewicz, & Vogel, 2010; Lindholm-Leary & Hernández, 2011). Considerable research has been devoted to the reasons for and causes of inequalities and disparities in educational achievement (Bradbury, 2011; Jacobson, Olsen, Rice, Sweetland, & Ralph, 2001; Roscigno & Ainsworth-Darnell, 1999); however, far fewer researchers have examined how to overcome the limitations and remedy the problems of this “achievement gap” (Ladson-Billings, 2006; L. J. White et al., 2010). This point is very important when trying to understand the ways to address the needs of Latino students in higher education.

The achievement gap at the secondary school level is often measured in three major areas: standardized test scores, high school graduation rates, and college and university admissions rates (Balfanz, Almeida, Steinberg, Santos, & Hornig Fox, 2009; Kalogrides, 2009; Walpole, 2007). Not only do Latinx students fall behind White students in all three areas, but they are also well behind all other minority groups (Carpenter II, Ramirez, & Severn, 2006; M. H. Lopez, 2009; Saenz, 2009). Even more disconcerting is that trends indicate the achievement gap is widening (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008).

Dismal conditions in public schools in the United States such as overcrowding, lack of resources and school violence have contributed to the high rate of high school pushouts and lower university entrance rates (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; L. F. Rodriguez, 2008). Even with encouraging decreases in high school dropout rates among other minorities, Latinx student pushout rates have continued to increase (Swanson, 2011). The educational neglect of providing resources found in many high schools serving minority students has only exacerbated the problems (T. Brown, 2009; Fry, 2010).

Regional and local differences compounded by complicated and contrived funding sources for public education have produced a very unequal and inconsistent model of education in the United States (Black, 1998; Haberman, 1999; Lubetkin, 1996). The United States does not have a national curriculum or national standards, as found in many countries (Cornbleth, 2008a; M. Watt, 2009). The sheer size and scope of education in the United States makes drawing comparisons with educational outcomes to other nations complicated. Some research has shown that in the United States the gap between socioeconomic status (SES) and racial and ethnic groups is much larger than in other countries (Akiba et al., 2007; D. C. Miller & Warren, 2011). The complicated funding structures and striking inequalities of resources contribute to the decay

of urban and rural schools (Kozol, 1992, 2005), and ultimately led to this divisive achievement gap.

Beyond funding and resources, ideologies and beliefs such as racial and ethnic biases held by teachers can affect learning and educational outcomes. For example, research indicates that both White and non-White teachers often see Black (Gay, 2004; Milner, 2007) and Latinx (Boden, 2011; C. S. Brown, 2006) students as less prepared or less capable than White and Asian students. This places lower expectations on minority students and causes stress. Students of color may choose to not to actively participate in the learning process or feel that their contributions are not valued. Stress has a detrimental role in learning at all levels of education (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008; Fisher, Wallace, & Fenton, 2000; Tinto, 1975).

In addition to teacher/student relationships and interactions, the actual curriculum taught in schools also plays a major role in how the students perceive themselves and their own cultures (Atwater, 2010; Chan, 2007; Cornbleth, 2008b). For example, the contributions of minorities to American culture have often been underemphasized in school curriculum. The curriculum can be modified and influenced by current events and situations (Cornbleth, 2008a). The setting of the classroom and “geography” of the school also leads to different outcomes in relation to location (Simon et al., 2011; Strange et al., 2012; Taylor, 2009). For example, urban schools in a blighted neighbor may negatively impact students when compared to a school setting in a wealthy suburban school. Acknowledging the need for a curriculum that addresses the culture of a diverse population at schools that also employed diverse teachers and staff members, a new “multicultural” curriculum became a popular goal or objective in many school districts across the United States (Banks, 2006; Cammarota, 2011; Cargle, 1993; Gay, 2004; J. Zimmerman, 2004).

This multicultural curriculum slowly developed from the “multiculturalism” movement that was founded in the mid-1940s in response to cultural upheavals during World War II, and really became popular in the United States after the Civil Rights Movement (Banks, 1993). While the multiculturalism and the multicultural curriculum is not without its opponents (Ogbu, 1992; Putnam, 2007), issues regarding diverse populations have become a major consideration in curriculum and textbook adoptions across the United States. The movement also has extended to higher education with the need to globalize the university curriculum. Across university campuses in many countries, courses and programs have been developed or redesigned to address the need to have a better global understanding (Jackson, 2003; Jones & Killick, 2013).

Diversity and issues of diversity are currently a major concern for many US educational institutions purely based on the new realities of student populations and quickly changing demographics. For example, according to US Census in 2010, the Latinx population grew over 43% in one decade, compared to a 5% growth in the overall population, 12% in the non-Latino/Black population, and 1% in the non-Latino/White population (Humes, Jones, & Ramirez, 2011). The US Census Bureau also predicts that there will be a greater diversity across the entire US population, with a larger Asian population and different ethnic and racial groups; however, the Latinx population will become the dominant group in the United States (Humes et al., 2011).

Clearly, the United States is a very different country demographically than it was just a few years ago. Issues surrounding race and ethnicity have been salient throughout the history of the United States and, as a result, the federal and state governments have continuously collected data on race throughout the years since the very first census. The challenge has been how to describe populations that are of mixed race and different ethnicities. This is especially true with

the Latinx population. As this study proposes to examine a group of participants from a program developed to address the needs of a population that self-identifies as Latinx, it is essential to understand that the usage of the term Latinx and other associated words, such as Hispanic, can be contentious and complicated.

Race versus Ethnicity

Historically, in the United States, race has been legally used to segregate society and to promote the societal and economic interests of the White European majority. Race is often used to describe a group of people who share similar physical characteristics and similar genetic backgrounds and can be extended to a shared culture. Ethnicity is a term to describe “relations between groups as defined by descent—whether real or presumptive” (Glazer, 1974, p. 17) and denotes a cultural commonality. Race is often associated with biological terms, whereas ethnicity is often associated with language, culture, and tradition. The term “Hispanic” and “Latinx” are frequently used interchangeably to define a distinct ethnic group; specifically, a subgroup within US society that has a connection to the Spanish language and Spain. The concept of being Hispanic often implies a connection to descendants of people from Latin America. Also, the term Latinx is sometimes extended to encompass speakers of all Romance languages or Latin derivation. Latinx or Hispanic relates to one’s ethnicity and not one’s race. Latinx includes those with connections to the Spanish language, but also Portuguese, French, and Italian, for example. The term “Hispanic” sometimes refers to individuals with connections to the Spanish language and excludes other Latin-derived languages. However, the US government defines Latinx as being synonymous with Hispanic, therefore, according to US law, for example, most individuals

with Brazilian origins without ties to the Spanish language are not considered Latinx (Flores-Hughes, 2006).

Latinx or Hispanic relates to one's ethnicity and not one's race. Individuals who are classified as Latinx are of very diverse racial backgrounds and originate from many different countries and regions (Fry & Gonzales, 2008; Ortman & Guarneri, 2008; Padilla, 1984). They also encompass a great range of socio-economic classes and educational backgrounds ("Statistical Abstract of the United States," 2011).

The terms Latino/a and Hispanic have their origins in Europe. The classification of races promulgated in the late eighteenth century Germany when the naturalist Johann Freidrich Blumenbach categorized all humans into four and, later, five racial categories (Gould, 1994). Around the same time, the US government began collecting ethnic and racial data with the first census in 1790 (Aspinall, 2009). The US government historically tracked Whites, Blacks, American Indians, and Asians, along with the place of birth, to determine ethnic origins. However, even though the federal government has recognized the significance of race and the need for protection from racial discrimination in the United States, there is no federal legal definition of race (Wright, 1995). Individual states legally defined race, and the differences varied greatly and often very broadly for non-Whites, especially in the Southern states. According to Wright (1995), by 1910, all Southern states had adopted the "one drop" policy, meaning anyone with a trace of African or Black blood would be classified as Black.

As Mora (2014) states, prior to 1970:

The U.S. Census Bureau classified Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans, the nation's three largest Latin American groups at the time, as [W]hite, effectively lumping their information in with data on Anglo Americans. A third-

generation— Mexican American, for example, would be classified in the same category as a person of Irish descent. (p. 17)

Historically, Latinxs would be included in one of the racial groups; however, certain states, such as Texas and California, began using the classification, “Mexican,” to denote race. In 1930, the US Census Bureau added 4 new categories for race: Mexican, Filipino, Hindu, and Korean (Snipp, 2003). In 1940, Mexican-Americans successfully lobbied for the US census bureau to drop the term “Mexican” and to be classified as White. With changes in US immigration laws in 1965, there was an increase in immigration from other Latin American countries from both Central and South America (Alcoff, 2005). Advocates for these new immigrants encouraged the federal government to recognize their ethnicity, and in the 1970 census, created an elaborate and complicated system of measuring “Spanish origin” by “nativity” and “surnames” (Snipp, 2003). In 1978, the Federal Office of Management of Budget issued directive 15, which defined all people of Spanish “culture or origin,” regardless of race, as Hispanic, which became the official name used by the US government (Alcoff, 2005). In the 1980 US Census, respondents were asked if they were of “Spanish/Hispanic origin” and then asked to specify as Mexican, Mexican-Amer., Chicano; Puerto Rican; Cuban; or other Spanish/Hispanic (Cohn, 2010).

The use of the terms Latino/a, Latinx, and Hispanic to describe groups of people with linguistic ties to Europe and Spain can be quite contentious. Latino and Latina also indicate a gender, deriving from the original Spanish. In recent years, a new term that includes both male and female genders and all other gender identities is Latinx. To be more inclusive, I chose to use this term; however, I acknowledge that it still denotes a connection to Europe.

The majority of the Latinx population in the United States, and particularly in California, is from Mexico or of Mexican origin (Ennis et al., 2010). Another term used to describe Mexican-Americans is “Chicana/o,” which removes “Spain” and “Spanish” from the term (Fairchild & Cozens, 1981) and uses a word purportedly derived from the ancient native language of the Aztecs (Gutierrez, 2011; F. Rios, 2008). Some scholars believe that because many Latinx people have no real cultural ties to Europe, except for language; the term Hispanic or Latinx does not adequately describe them (Gimenez, 1998). According to the Pew Foundation survey, most Latinxs preferred to be identified according to their nation of origin, such as Puerto Rican, Cuban, or Colombian (Fry & Gonzales, 2008) over Latinx or Hispanic.

While the term Latinx indicates ethnic background, it is very difficult to escape the presence of race in the meaning of the various terms. In the United States, the term “Hispanic” was first used as a classification for Native Americans with origins from Latin America, mainly Mexico; however, Latinx were considered white based on appearance. R. Rodriguez (2002) describes his preference for the term Hispanic because it denotes a stronger sense of race and satirizes the notion that such terms have linguistic ties:

In fact, I do have a preference for Hispanic over Latino. To call oneself Hispanic is to admit a relation to Latin America in English. *Soy Hispanic* is a brown assertion.

Hispanic nativists who, of course, would never call themselves Hispanic, nonetheless, have a telling name for their next-door neighbors, who are not Hispanic. The word is “Anglo.” Do Irish Americans become Anglos? And do you suppose a Chinese American or African American is an Anglo? Does the term define a group of Americans by virtue of a linguistic tie to England or the lack of a tie to Spain? (p. 110)

As a Mexican-American from California, Rodriguez exposes the precarious labels given to different groups in the United States. However, a vast area of the United States, including California, was once a part of Mexico, and hence the Spanish language and culture have undeniably played a very important part of the cultural make-up of the states of the western and southwestern United States (Kilty & de Haymes, 2000) and Florida.

In addition to contributing to Mexican-American culture, other Latinx groups have enhanced the cultural framework of the country. Puerto Rican immigrants to New York during the Great Migration of the 1940s and 1950s, along with the Cuban immigrants in the 1960s to south Florida, have greatly influenced the social and political fabric of their regions. Despite having a similar linguistic heritage, the issues and concerns surrounding the various groups have been quite unique. The term Latinx does not provide a rich description of the heritage of the individual groups; however, it does provide a term that does not include gender. The term Latino/a is the most common descriptor used in the United States.

As this study examines a group of students in California, many of whom are of Mexican descent, it is important to acknowledge the important historical role of Mexicans in California. California was once part of the Spanish Empire in the Americas, and after Mexican independence, it formed a part of Mexico. This period in history has had an indelible effect on the state, as evidenced by the Spanish place names still used throughout the state and by the various cultural references as a whole. Today, the majority of the population of California has origins in or strong ties to Mexico. Despite the majority status, and coupled with the fact that California has such a high percentage of Hispanic-serving institutions of higher education, the numbers of university graduates are still considerably low.

Mexican California

In 1821, after the War of Mexican Independence, the present state of California was located in the territory of Alta California, Mexico with its capital being Monterey. Prior to independence from Spain, the population of California mainly comprised Native Americans with only a small minority people of Spanish descent and *mestizos*—individuals of mixed European and indigenous origin (King, 2000). Spanish law forbade immigration from Europe, the United States, and other foreign nations in the northern regions of New Spain. After independence, the local authorities in northern Mexico attempted to encourage White immigration in 1823 with the passage of the Imperial Colonization Law. The law encouraged White settlers from the United States and Europe to immigrate under two stipulations—that the settlers would have to convert to Catholicism, if they were not already Catholic, and that they would have to learn and speak Spanish (Hernández, 2010). The White settlers did arrive, and in significant numbers—over 20,000 in less than a decade, thus causing the Mexican authorities to stop all immigration from the US with the passage of the Law of April 6, 1830 (King, 2000). There were also very few converts to Catholicism and English remained the dominant language of the new settlers.

In 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the Mexican-American War, presenting a dire situation for Mexican-Americans living in the United States (Duncan-Andrade, 2005; MacDonald, 2001; J. F. Moreno, 1999; Portales, 2000). The US Congress gave individual territories the right to grant citizenship to former Mexican citizens living in the jurisdiction of the United States. California, which had become dominated by Anglo-Americans, first refused citizenship to all inhabitants except White males of pure European descent. In contrast, the territory of New Mexico awarded citizenship to all people regardless of race or gender, whereas Texas gave citizenship to all Whites (as long as there was no mix of any African origin) and to Native

Americans without any African origins and who claimed to be Christian (Menchaca, 2011). Many of the former Mexican inhabitants, with the encouragement of the US government, chose to move within the new boundaries of Mexico (Menchaca, 2011; G. San Miguel, 1987).

Mexicans who remained in the United States often faced poverty and discrimination. While the US government promised to recognize the right of all landowners in new territories acquired from Mexico, the constant legal challenges forced many *Californios*, Spanish-speaking residents of California, to lose their property in costly litigation (Heidenreich, 2007). After the California Gold Rush in 1849, the population and economic growth resulted in greater White immigration from other parts of the United States to the state, further decreasing the numbers of Californios. After World War I, immigration to California from Europe also increased exponentially as many Europeans fled the post-war economic hardship that characterized this period (Cherny, 2005).

The plight of Mexican-Americans living in the United States was quite similar throughout the lands that were acquired from Mexico. After World War I, a group of Mexican-American war veterans united to create the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) with two main goals: to fight discriminatory practices in public education and to promote educational opportunities to improve the economic and political situation for Mexican-Americans (Kaplowitz, 2003; W. J. Urban & Wagoner, 2004). LULAC was one of the first organizations to address the unfair treatment of Mexican-Americans in the United States and developed a plan to combat discrimination (Marquez, 1991) with a strong focus on education.

LULAC's early ideology was very popular with most Mexican-Americans, and membership and influence continued to grow. With the end of World War I, many Mexican-American veterans returned to the United States with a newfound hope and demanded equality and

supported LULAC to encourage social change (Murata, 2001). LULAC was especially influential in Texas, where it was founded.

Shortly after the establishment of LULAC, the Bracero program (1942-1964) was introduced, this allowed unskilled laborers from Mexico to enter the United States legally. Mexicans could work legally in the agriculture sector and other menial labor jobs, while they were also promised “fair wages” of at least the minimum wage and that they would not be excluded from “White areas” of the United States. The program was bilaterally managed by the US and Mexican governments. While Bracero allowed legal immigration, a new clause in 1951 in the program gave workers already in the US without proper documentation the preference to work in the Bracero program. This provision encouraged many Mexicans to come to the United States without visas in order to benefit from this ruling (Bickerton, 2001).

As the number of undocumented immigrants increased during the “Bracero Era,” Murata (2001) pointed out that tensions between new Mexican immigrants and Mexican-Americans ran high; some Mexican-Americans saw no need to embrace a shared Mexican culture and felt no kinship to the new immigrants. Leadership in LULAC espoused a “Mexican-American” agenda that encouraged “good citizenship” and promoted the English language and inclusion of Mexican-Americans in US society (Kaplowitz, 2003; J. San Miguel, Guadalupe 1983). These tensions had serious implications for regional politics in Texas and California.

The Bracero program increased the total number of Mexican immigrants to the United States, especially in the state of California. The program brought many agricultural workers to Californian farms. Agriculture still remains a very important component of California’s economy, with most farm workers of Mexican origin. After World War II, California’s economy was strengthened by a significant increase in manufacturing and government jobs. The strong economy

also led to greater immigration from Mexico, which then fed into other parts of California's economy.

During the mid-20th century, working conditions for California farm workers were quite dismal and attracted national attention. The National Farm Workers Association, later renamed United Farm Workers (UFW), was a labor union founded to improve conditions for farm workers with a staunchly anti-Bracero platform. This organization was co-founded by Cesar Chavez and Delores Huerta, both Mexican-Americans who fought passionately for the rights of farm workers, especially migrant workers from Mexico. Members of the UFW wanted to stop additional immigration because they believed that conditions for current migrant workers were already deplorable and that additional farm workers would deteriorate conditions for all workers.

The Bracero program encouraged hundreds of thousands of Mexicans to immigrate to California. Today, California has the largest number of Latinx residents in the US, totaling approximately 15 million, which comprises 39 percent of the total population of the most populous state in the USA. As of 2015, over 50 percent of the California population below 18 years-of-age identifies as Latinx (Stepler & Lopez, 2016) surpassing Non-Latinx White to become the largest ethnic group in California.

As the population of California has become more Latinx, so have the educational institutions. This includes all PreK-12 schools, colleges, and universities. For many years, California has been at the forefront of reform and change in education, particularly for college and university-level education. California's system of higher education is based on a plan that was created in the mid-20th century that recognized the state's rapid growth and the need to prepare for further growth in various professions and careers (Douglass, 2000). The goal was to provide higher education to all parts of the state and to assure that all students in public schools

would be permitted to study beyond high school. This ambitious plan was called the California Master Plan, or the California Plan for short. While the plan called for greater access to higher education, the modern system seems to provide a 3-tier approach to higher education with most Latinxs entering the lowest tier (Chapa & Schink, 2006a).

California Master Plan

In 1960, the chancellor of the University of California, Clark Kerr, along with several educators and politicians, implemented the California Master Plan to address the needs of the rapidly growing state of California (Douglass, 2000; Geiser & Atkinson, 2013). This plan called for the creation of three different systems of higher education: the University of California System (UC), which would focus on research and graduate studies; the California State Normal College System (now California State University, CSU), which would focus on regional undergraduate education and a few professional master's programs; and finally, the Community Colleges of California System (CCC), which would focus on vocational and general education and serve every county in the state. The California Plan created a multi-tiered system that ended up not only segregating students by race and ethnicity but also socio-economic classes. While the CCC provided more access to many rural and urban areas, the separate system also assured inequality, which still contributes to the low college and university graduation rates of Latinxs today. Moreover, the higher costs for the UC system make higher education unreachable for many Latinx students, who tend to choose more affordable options for higher education (Gandara & Contreras, 2009).

Greater access to higher education for a growing nation with a plan for less costly options appealed to many states. Educational authorities throughout the United States were encouraged

by the scope and range of the California Master Plan, and similar higher education plans were replicated in many other states as a result (Rothblatt, 2012). A major component of the plan was to provide free or affordable higher education to all residents of California. To address the complaint of different “tiers” of education, the plan called for the three systems to allow for transfers between institutions of all types. The plan would also permit low-performing students a second chance to attend a four-year institution. The plan mandated that the top 12% of high school students would be guaranteed admission to an institution in the UC system, and that the top 34% would be guaranteed space in the CSU system (Douglass, 2000). In addition, community colleges, which would be established throughout the state, would provide open admissions to anyone.

The ambitious “California Plan” was created after a period of massive growth and economic prosperity with optimism that growth would continue. Upon implementation of the California Plan, California was predominately White, and while there were demographic shifts in race and ethnicity taking place, the plan encouraged segregation based on SES. Both the CC and the CSU were created to provide free education, whereas the University of California was created to provide “affordable” education to California residents. While the systems were created during prosperity, the size and scope of the plan has far exceeded the original expectations.

Since the creation of the plan, funding has remained a serious point of contention. As the CCC system grew at an exponential rate, the state funding was inadequate to support the system; as a result, many colleges have struggled to accommodate the volume of students.

Administrators in both the CSU and UC systems have also consistently complained that state funding is too low to fulfill the missions of the systems, thus resulting in tuition increases and impacted programs or programs that are so full they cannot accommodate highly qualified

students. Access to higher education has become more limited, and declining graduation rates are often cited as an example of how the systems are failing students. According to Douglass (2010):

Today, California is mediocre in terms of access rates among the 50 states, and ranks among the bottom ten in the proportion of its youth who achieve a bachelor's or associate of arts degree. California is losing ground, relative to other states, and, just as important, to emerging economic competitors throughout the world. For the first time in the state's history, the older generation has a higher educational attainment level than the younger generation. (p 12)

Current Results of the California Plan

Graduation rates among all students within the California State University System, including Latinxs, are alarmingly low when viewed in relation to their numbers within the state (see Table 1).-One of the campuses of the CSU has developed a mentoring program that was designed to assist Latinx students to increase graduation rates and to promote academic success for the participants. To protect the university and the program, I will use the pseudonym West Coast State University (WCSU). Below is a table highlighting the 4-year graduation rates for all students and Latinx students in the CSU and WCSU:

Table 1 *Graduation Percentage Rates*

	Systemwide				West Coast State University			
	Freshman		Transfers		Freshman		Transfers	
Fall Cohort	All	Latinx	All	Latinx	All	Latinx	All	Latinx
2006	15.8	10.4	23.5	21.7	14.9	8.0	27.5	28.3
2007	15.9	10.3	22.4	20.8	10.8	7.2	27.7	29.3
2008	16.2	10.4	23.3	21.3	10.4	6.4	25.7	28.3
2009	17.8	11.7	24.5	22.9	12.8	11.9	29.3	28.8
2010	18.6	12.1	27.8	27.3	14.1	12.3	36.8	37.6
2011	19.1	12.4	26.7	25.6	10.3	8.3	35.0	34.8
2012	20.7	14.4	28.3	28.2	10.7	8.2	32.1	31.0
2013	-	-	30.5	30.8	-	-	37.0	41.4
2014	-	-	32.6	33.3	-	-	35.2	38.5

Note. Freshman are 4-year rates, Transfers are 2-year rates. Dashes indicate students have not graduated yet. From "California State University Graduation Rates Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE)"

WCSU is located in a very racially and ethnically diverse working-class suburb of a major California city. Although the campus is located in a relatively safe area, it is within a few miles of a number of neighborhoods characterized by their very high crime rates, while it is equally close to some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the United States. The majority of WCSU students are Latinx and Asian, and most students are first-generation college students.

In 2013, the university implemented the Forward Program (also a pseudonym) in an effort to create a sense of community for Latinx students who were transferring from community colleges. The program was developed to curb the decreasing graduation rates of Latinx students who transfer to the school. The program was rather unique, and the Forward Founders were

admittedly unsure as to whether the program would work. It is important to note that the founders of the program were also Latinx and predominately female.

Research Questions

In this study, I examined the impact of the Forward Program on the student participants with an additional analysis of the program data to assess whether it met its goal of increasing graduation rates among Latinx students. I also explored how the participants navigated the process of transferring and sustaining their academic and personal lives while at the university. Both nationally and in California, the problem is that so many Latinx students do not graduate from universities. My main research question is:

- In what ways does the Forward Program impact the lives of student participants?

I will further explore these sub-questions:

- How do Forward Program participants describe the process of joining the program?
- What is the perceived value of having the Forward Program?
- How do the Forward Program participants describe WCSU and the local community and how are these relationships perceived?

Student resilience, persistence, and graduation are all important topics that encompass the research questions, and thus lead to my theoretical framework. Tinto (1993) argues that post-secondary students who develop a positive relationship with their higher education institution will most likely persist and graduate. As this study explores a program that focuses on a bounded group of university students, all of whom transferred from community colleges into the same institution, the institutional educational relationships may be more complex. Research indicates

that institutions that provide support structures that consider the psychological, social, and cultural factors lead to greater student resilience (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

Tinto's Persistence theory provides a very strong base from which to examine the Forward Program since the Forward Program was created with the goal of providing a compassionate, cultural, and sensitive support structure. The university intended to develop a program that would forge closer relationships among Latinx transfer students and with faculty and staff. Forward Program administrators established the program by also providing Latinx mentors for Latinx students or students interested in Latinx issues. Tinto's theory was based on the research of predominately White institutions of higher learning with a White majority (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997). The Psychosociocultural Model (PSC) expands Tinto's theories and specifically addresses issues concerning Latinx students. The PSC model emerged from the field of counseling and considers the complexity of multiple identities that students take on while in school (Reynolds & Pope, 1991). Persistence is a key motivating factor for this framework and this model highlights the special importance of "societal support" in student resilience (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000).

Persistence Theory

Departure from higher education can be the result of many factors; however, only 25% of the departures are a result of dismissal (Tinto, 1993). Most students who do not continue their studies do so for a myriad of reasons. According to Tinto, students will leave college as the result of determining that the school does not meet their needs for their current or future career or life situation. Departures from higher education are a result of incongruence and isolation of the

student in the academy. Tinto (1993) places an emphasis on the interrelation between the institution and the student:

Incongruence refers, in general, to the mismatch or lack of fit between the needs, interests, and preference of the individual and those of the institution; it springs from individual perceptions of not fitting into and/or of being at odds with the social and intellectual fabric of institutional life. In such situations, individuals leave not so much for the absence of integration as from the judgment of the undesirability of integration.

Withdrawal mirrors, in effect, the person's decision that further attendance would not be in his/her own best interests. (p. 50)

Students base the decision to leave or persist in college on both extrinsic and intrinsic factors such as cost/benefit perceptions, established relationships. There are certain strategies that colleges and universities can take in order to decrease the departure rate. One important factor is to focus on the actual learning that is taking place in the classroom (Braxton, Milem, & Sullivan, 2001; Dietz, 2002). Instructors who use active learning and who engage students allow the students to become engaged in class and feel connected with the college or university.

Tinto's original theories of student resilience were based on the work of French sociologist Emile Durkheim's explanations on suicide and the Spady Model, which explained student retention in terms of the congruence of campus environment with student characteristics i.e student's pre-entry attributes, goals and ambitions. (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's theory of higher education retention has become one of the most popular models describing post-secondary dropouts, as widely cited in many peer-reviewed publications (Braxton et al., 1997). The strength of the model is that this positive approach provides proactive suggestions for institutions of higher learning to follow that can lead to greater student retention and graduation. Tinto and

research based on Tinto's theoretical perspective find that special programming, such as mentoring, student activities, and residential services can contribute to the retention of students (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 1993).

Persistence Theory examines several factors with a great emphasis on the interaction between the student and institution. The theory examines the student path in longitudinal terms, examining the initial characteristics and then how they are shaped while interacting with members of the college. Braxton et al. (1997) concluded that researchers had found reasonable concerns for the validity of certain aspects of persistence theory especially emphasizing that Tinto focused his research with traditional White university students; however, the researchers also indicated that the theory should not be dismissed and needs further investigation. As higher education in the United States changes with more non-traditional students, new issues surrounding these diverse populations are important factors that need further research. The studies that focused on traditional residential campuses generally supported Tinto's propositions; however, this was not as consistent in non-tradition commuter campuses and community colleges (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983). Research also needs to be expanded to encompass communities from different ethnic groups. Attinasi (1989) studied first-year Mexican-American university students and concluded that, "A student's interaction with others is important for his or her persistence in college, not simply or primarily because it leads to the sharing of general values and orientations, but because it assists the student in developing specific strategies for negotiating the physical, social, and cognitive academic geographies" (p. 267). While Attinasi suggested different approaches to research as alternatives to Tinto's work, again, like many other researchers, the author concluded that social interaction is a key factor to preventing departure (Braxton et al., 1997).

Another important theory cited to explain college student resilience is the theory of Student Attrition by J. Bean (1980). Both Bean and Tinto agree that social interaction is essential for student persistence; however, Bean's theory addresses the external factors that contribute to student attrition. Unlike Tinto's theory, Bean addresses the importance of institutional differences, i.e., commuter versus traditional residential, and includes the interplay of multiple external factors, including race and ethnicity (J. P. Bean & Metzner, 1985). Central to Bean's research is organizational theory and the interplay of factors similar to those found in the workplace. While Bean's theory provides additional principles to address the complexity found in the diversity of higher education when compared with Tinto's work, Cabrera, Castañeda, Nora, and Hengstler (1992) concluded that Tinto's theory showed more validity with their research when comparing the two theories. Tinto's work indicates that there are steps that institutions can follow in order to increase student persistence and resilience, whereas, Bean's work focused on more on outcomes based on the interplay of experiences.

In support of Tinto's theory is Astin's theory of Student Involvement, which equates student participation within extracurricular activities at a university as the key factor for retention and student success. Astin (1985) developed his theory by examining empirical data for over 200,000 students and discovered that any form of student involvement contributed to the retention of the student, more significantly than the characteristics of the student or the institution. Astin's work validates Tinto's idea that students who connect with the institution are more than likely to persist and graduate since acculturation to university is a process which progresses in stages.

Tinto (1993) argues that college students engage in three stages of post-secondary growth and passage (separation from past friends/experiences, transition to new university life,

and incorporation into the institution). According to Tinto's theory, successful college and university students go through these stages before graduation; however, this does not always represent the experiences of students of color (Tierney, 1999). According to Yosso, Smith, Ceja, and Solórzano (2009), Latinx students, along with other minority students, also experience three distinct processes, interpersonal microaggressions, racial jokes, and institutional microaggressions. Students of color are confronted with incessant and subtle, yet stunning racial assaults, or microaggressions. In response to these pervasive messages of rejection, Yosso et al. (2009) state that Latinxs "foster academic and social counter spaces in which they build a culturally supportive community and develop skills to critically navigate between their worlds of school and home" p. 660. While this theory defines the stages in different terms, upon analysis it does not contradict Tinto's stages, but in fact, helps support the theory. Latinx students respond to university life and can persist by developing negotiation skills.

A major criticism of Tinto's work is that it has focused on traditional higher education settings and with White majority populations (Braxton et al., 2001; Braxton et al., 1997). A major premise of Tinto's work is that once a student feels connected to the institution and determines it is a safe place, the student will most likely succeed. A very important counter-argument to this idea is based on the idea that higher education in the United States was created both for and by the White male majority with higher SES, and that minority students must navigate the perils of injustice and a system of unfairness.

Limitations with Persistence Theory

Educators have begun to analyze education from a different perspective by challenging the ideology beyond meritocracy and the notion of liberal fairness in the academy. The Critical

Race Theory (CRT) and Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) both challenge the assumptions that higher education is a safe place for students of color. At the higher education level, inequity begins from the very initial entry into college. As Villalpando (2004) states,

...higher education operates under the illusion that Latin[as]os have an opportunity to succeed that is equal to that of majority (W)hite students. CRT and LatCrit challenge this ideology by exposing how, for example, notions of meritocracy and race neutrality in the college admission process benefit majority (W)hite students while harming Latin[as]os.

(p. 44)

Tinto's theories are based on the premise that persistent and successful students are able to navigate higher education and overcome adversity in stages and through integration. CRT and LatCrit provides a framework that addresses adversity by examining social injustices and how patterns of inequity influence people of color at many levels and facets (Delgado, 2012; Lynn et al., 2002; Yosso et al., 2009). False assumptions are often made when researching Latinx students in relation to education at all levels. LatCrit addresses the context and conditions in which illustrate the realities of many Latinx students and implications for action.

Yosso et al. (2009) state that, for White students from middle and upper-class backgrounds, the school curriculum functions to maintain a hierarchical power structure. In contrast to an intellectually stimulating curriculum, K-12 schools often prepare students of color and low-income students to merely memorize without critical analysis and focus on a remedial, blue-collar focused curriculum rather than a college-bound curriculum. According to Minikel-Lacocque (2013), normative frameworks conceive of the needs of Latinxs in higher education within the same paradigm that the needs of White, middle-class college students are understood. The result of having different needs, university faculty can perceive Latinx college students from

a deficit perspective. To combat this deficit orientation, the experiences of underrepresented college students must be brought to the foreground of academia (p. 438). Further, the academic experiences of Latinx students may indeed be different from White students; however, issues of socio-economic class and environmental settings, such as urban or rural, can be examined with similar negative preconceptions. The deficit model literature focuses on the negative factors that contribute to academic failure and makes assumptions about the relative likelihood of academic success as tied to different factors. These factors can be educational, such as early tracking, unsupportive educators, and underperforming schools. The factors can also be societal; for example, poverty, early pregnancy, crime, and gang involvement.

Community Cultural Wealth Theory

According to the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu, family and schooling both play two very important roles in the success and failures of all members of society (Robbins, 2000). Bourdieu states that there are three forms of capital, cultural which includes education and language, social which includes networks and connections and finally economic capital which includes finances and material possessions (Yosso, 2005). Bourdieu proposed that capital could be inherited from family or could be obtained by schooling (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu's theory implies that capital can be gained and transferred and that some individuals are better equipped to obtain capital than others.

While Bourdieu's work argues that individuals, groups, and socio-economic classes are not in fixed states and that changes in the position of class both upwards and downwards are dynamic responses to position-taking (Robbins, 2000). However, there is an implied assumption that certain forms of capital are more valued than others and that individuals and groups who learn to adapt

and acquire these valued forms of capital are able to transcend class. Yosso (2005) argues that, “Bourdieu’s work sought to provide a structural critique of social and cultural reproduction, his theory of cultural capital has been used to assert that some communities are culturally wealthy while others are culturally poor.” (p 76). To counter this argument, Yosso indicates that Latinx students have different forms of cultural capital and these forms of capital should not be considered a deficit but rather as “wealth to the community.” The examples are as follows:

1. Aspirational Capital – refers to maintain confidence to persevere and to maintain hopes and dreams even under dire circumstances.
2. Linguistic Capital – refers to the communication skills attained that allow for connections and inclusion, for many Latinx this would include more than one language and/or style.
3. Familial Capital – refers to cultural knowledge gain from *familia*. This capital is nurtured by close and extended family, and also that of the community as a whole. The concept extends to family created through sports, school, religious organizations and other community settings.
4. Social Capital- refers to the networks of people and connections that can provide support to navigate institutions.
5. Navigational Capital- like social capital, this capital describes the skills of maneuvering through social institutions, but for people of color, this type of capital implies navigation through hostile or unfriendly environments.
6. Resistance Capital- refers to capital to resist inequality and subordination. This involves knowledge of and recognizing oppressive structures such as racism and sexism. (p 77-81)

It is important to note that Yosso acknowledges that the different forms of capital overlap. For example, aspirations are formed through family and social settings. Also, navigational capital also requires social capital and sometimes linguistic capital. Yosso explains that these forms of capital, provide wealth to the Latinx community with an array of knowledge, skills, abilities and contacts.

Conclusion

Latinxs currently make-up the largest group in the state of California, and by the year 2050, they will be the largest group in the United States (Ortman & Guarneri, 2008). Despite the growing numbers, Latinxs have very low university graduation rates in California and the United States (Chapa & Schink, 2006a; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). In California, the majority of Latinx students are Mexican or are of Mexican descent (Ennis et al., 2010), and despite their long history in the state, many Latinxs have had to adjust to numerous obstacles and challenges, in turn influencing educational opportunities. The unique system of a three-tiered public higher education system implemented by the California Master Plan for higher education, while creating more access to higher education, has also kept more Latinx students in community colleges, more so than in any other state (Chacon, 2013).

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This study of the educational attainment of the Latinx population is timely. In 2012, Latinxs became the largest minority in the United States (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). By 2050, the U.S. Census predicts that Latinxs will be the largest racial group in the United States (Ortman & Guarneri, 2008). In California, the growth of diverse populations, including Latinxs, greatly preceded the demographic changes in the rest of the country. Latinxs currently make up the largest ethnic group in California, including native-born citizens and immigrants to the United States (Flores, 2017). The growth of the Latinx community is similar to the growth of other minority communities in California, which makes California the most diverse state in the United States (Chapa & Schink, 2006a).

This chapter includes a review the literature regarding issues related to special programming for Latinx students at the post-secondary level and issues and themes related to this group. In California and many other parts of the United States, community colleges play an important role in the higher education of Latinx students (Crisp & Nora, 2010). After reviewing the literature on Latinx college students, two themes emerged most prominently: the important role of family and the impact of financial concerns. Latinx students enter higher education with cultural capital, but also face many challenges (Yosso, 2005). This review includes an examination of the strengths and challenges (e.g., immigration status) of Latinx students. The review includes research on programs to increase student persistence and resilience.

Participation in higher education increased throughout the United States; however, Latinx students are still unlikely to graduate from bachelor's programs (Alon, Domina, & Tienda, 2010; Chapa & Schink, 2006a; Stepler & Lopez, 2016). Traditionally, higher education completion rates correlate with differential preparation at both the elementary and secondary levels; students

who are better prepared for college-level work are more likely to graduate than students who enter college in need of remediation (Alon et al., 2010; Bettinger & Boatman, 2013; Kalogrides & Grodsky, 2011). Throughout the United States and sometimes with the same school district, there are great disparities in academic preparation at public schools (García, Weiss, & Broader, 2017; Woodhead, Doman, & Murray, 2014). In addition to providing instruction, teachers and counselors prepare students for university entrance, which greatly influences college choice (Castellanos, Gloria, Besson, & Clark Harvey, 2016). Choosing the right college or university is a major determining factor of successful completion rates and continued career success (Tovar, 2015). The college completion rates of Latinx students in the United States, especially Latino males, is woefully low and alarming. Many theories for why undergraduates drop out of school are general and do not specifically address the experiences of non-White students at minority-serving institutions (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). For many Latinx students, the path to higher education is very different from that of White students, especially in California (Chapa & Schink, 2006a; Garcia, Yosso, & Barajas, 2012).

A comprehensive study of Latinx students in higher education in California requires adequate examination of the role of community colleges. Most Latinx students in California enter higher education through the CCC (Chapa & Schink, 2006a). Central to Tinto's (1993) theories of student success are the importance of adequate preparation the secondary level and institutional relationships. Better preparation in community colleges results in higher success rates beyond community college (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Kraemer, 1995; Tuttle & Musoba, 2013). Latinx students who attend community college and participate in extracurricular events are also more likely to persist (Amaury, Attinasi, & Matonak, 1990; Amico, Dika, Elling, Algozzine, & Ginn, 2014). Much research exists on the ways students of color, including Latinx students,

struggle to persist in education. However, there has been much less research on how colleges and universities can assist students. Many higher learning institutions create special programs for Latinx students, but there is limited research regarding how these programs affect the lives of students.

The Important Role of Community Colleges

As more Latinxs enter college in the United States, there is a strong preference for public two-year community colleges (Stepler & Lopez, 2016). There are many reasons for this phenomenon; the first reason is practicality. The two states with the largest Latinx populations (Texas and California) have extensive community college systems. The CCC is the largest system of higher education in the world with over two million students; more than 40% of them were Latinx students during Fall 2016 (CCC, July 2017). The CCC had the highest percentage of Latinx students of all public systems of higher education in California; only 20% of students in the University of California (UC, 2018) and 39% of students in the CSU (CSU, 2017) self-identified as Latinx. As guaranteed in the California Plan, community colleges exist throughout the state in every county and region. Community colleges are easily accessible in urban regions of California and are equally accessible in the rural and agricultural regions, making proximity a compelling factor.

Another important factor is that the costs of higher education in the United States make community colleges more attractive to students who are very cost-conscious. Students of a lower SES reported that cost of tuition is a major factor in college choice (McDonough, 1997). Statistically, more Latinx students have lower SES than White post-secondary students (Kurlaender, 2006). The dramatic rise in higher education costs created great interest in the

community college model as promoted by President Barack Obama in his American Graduation Initiative (AGI) (Blose, 2010). Many Latinx students in California chose a community college based solely on the cost (Chapa & Schink, 2006a).

Socioeconomic class and academic preparation influence knowledge of the admissions process (Contreras, 2011). Secondary schools who serve higher SES students better prepare students for the admissions process and university entrance examinations (Sanchez, Usinger, & Thornton, 2015; Walker II, 2016). Children of university-educated parents are more familiar with admissions requirements and selection process (McDonough, 1997). There is a strong correlation between university admissions selectivity and graduation rates; academically better-prepared students who begin at four-year schools are more likely to graduate than students at community colleges (Alfonso, 2006; Goenner & Snaith, 2004). Community colleges offer open admissions to all students, which simplifies the complicated admissions process of public and private colleges and universities that often require longer applications with essay questions (Chacon, 2013; Kurlaender, 2006).

Since many Latinx students in California first enter higher education through community colleges, the education they receive during this stage could profoundly affect their completion rates. Community colleges serve many different populations throughout the country, but a common refrain is a dearth of funding and resources for community colleges throughout the United States (Joch, 2011; Phelan, 2014), particularly in California (Flynn, 2012). Despite the increased demand for community colleges in California, funding is not available to meet the need. Decreased funding often leads to decreases in support structures and academic resources, which negatively affect students (Chacon, 2013; Chen, 2017).

The California Plan mandated an increase in community colleges, but funding is not assured. Prior to the implementation of the California Plan, community colleges were a part of the K-14 system in California; most funding came from local property taxes with state funds. Funding often comes directly from the state of California, which experienced a policy change with the passing of Proposition 31 in 1996 for providing local tax money to the CCC. The CCC had to make major reductions that compounded due to the 2008 recession (Chen, 2017). Due to funding constraints, the CCC was unable to offer the necessary number of sections of required courses. During Fall 2010, the lack of access to required courses in California was much higher than other states, which resulted in students taking unnecessary classes and spending more time and money in CCC before transferring (Mellander, 2012). Between 2008 and 2012, funding for the CCC was cut by over \$800 million, leading to a decline of more than 485,000 students (Whissemore & Kent, 2012).

The CCC had great success in recruiting Latinx students in California, but increasing the number of CCC transfers into the UC with more success into the CSU was challenging (Chapa & Schink, 2006b). Students who begin in the CCC are less likely to graduate with a bachelor's degree than students who directly enter four-year institutions (Alfonso, 2006). However, Latinx students who transfer to Hispanic-serving institutions from community colleges are more likely to graduate than students transferring to predominately White Institutions (Hagedorn, Chi, Cepeda, & McLain, 2007). The U.S. government (20 U.S. Code § 1101a) defined Hispanic-serving institutions as eligible institutions that enroll 25% or more Latinx undergraduate students. While 18 of the 23 campuses of the CSU qualify for Hispanic-serving status, the graduation rates for Latinx students remain quite low, especially when including transfer student rates (CSU, 2016).

Graduation rates of the CSU declined for transfer students and students who first enter as freshmen (see Table 2 in Chapter 1). In 2016, the Chancellor of the CSU, Dr. Timothy White, introduced two new initiatives to improve graduation rates in the CSU. The first initiative was an executive order to no longer offer remedial courses; students begin with credit-courses in Fall 2018 (C. White, 2017). A second system-wide initiative, Graduation Initiative 2025, began in 2016 to increase overall graduation rates, including transfer graduation rates (CSU, 2018). The initiative ensured that any student transferring from a CCC program with an associate degree would be guaranteed available coursework to graduate in two years. This implies that future CCC graduates, many of whom are Latinx, will enter the CSU academically prepared to graduate within two years.

In addition to academic preparation, students are influenced by external factors. Successful educators have acknowledged that many Latinx students come from supportive backgrounds with a rich culture (Matos, 2015). Gandara and Contreras (2009) suggested that family and peers play major roles in determining whether a Latinx student attends college. Many high school Latinx students indicate that they would like to attend university upon graduation, but they also exhibit low school effort. Gandara and Contreras (2009) argued that Latinx students aspire to go to university but do not know how to prepare for university and this paradox leads to many Latinx students choosing colleges that are less selective (e.g., community colleges). Graduation rates are much higher at more selective colleges and universities (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; Wagner, 2015; Walker II, 2016). Latinx students from various socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be conscious of educational costs and frequently cite the importance of saving money for the family (Chacon, 2013; Gandara, 2010; Kurlaender, 2006).

There is extensive research on resilience at predominately White institutions, but there are few studies of resilience at minority-serving universities (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). The main criticism of Tinto's persistence theory is the lack of research in non-White settings (Braxton et al., 2001; Braxton et al., 1997). Persistence theory can be useful to explain the higher educational experiences of students with diverse backgrounds, including Latinxs, because major components include academic preparedness and social interactions. Latinx students respond to social interactions with family members and peers (Contreras, 2011; Schwartz, Donovan, & Guido-Dibrito, 2009). Further, many Latinxs allow family members, especially siblings, to make important choices about education (Carey, 2016; Esparza & Sánchez, 2008; Kurlaender, 2006; Sy & Romero, 2008). Latinx students with strong family bonds to family members who are supportive are more likely to be happy (Hinojosa & Vela, 2017); however, these strong bonds can lead to additional stress (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013).

The decision to attend a community college often depends on academic achievement, finances, and geography (Hillman, 2016). Many students with lower SES attend community colleges; this is especially true for Latinx students who are disproportionately represented in community colleges (Connor, 2009; Gandara & Contreras, 2009). Attendance at community colleges reduces the chances of graduation compared to four-year college; therefore, minority attending community experience higher education differently than White students who attend four-year colleges.

Yosso's (2005) community wealth capital model is a strength-based approach to examining how students of color negotiate the academy based on six aspects of cultural wealth capital. According to Yosso (2005), African American and Latinx students use forms of cultural capital for empowerment to persist in higher education Applying Yosso's model to a group of

community college students, Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, and Klingsmith (2014) researched African-American and Latinx students and discovered that four aspects of Yosso's theory clearly influenced participants to persist and graduate: (a) meaningful relationships with faculty members; (b) family social support; (c) family financial support; and (d) campus engagement.

Using Yosso's framework, Pérez II (2017) researched a group of male Latinx students from two elite, predominantly White universities and found two reoccurring themes: (a) students had high aspirations for educational attainment but received little staff and faculty mentorship; and (b) students relied on peer advice. Pérez II (2017) concluded:

...despite their high aspirations, most participants entered college with unclear educational goals. These goals evolved into aspirations to become ideal college students, which participants equated with being academically and socially engaged on campus. In this study, although a few Latin[x] males were able to identify faculty and administrators who supported them in working toward their goals, participants relied primarily on peer networks to translate their aspirations into tangible outcomes. (p. 134)

Mi Familia

There is a wide body of psychological research investigating the importance of *familismo* (family) for Latinxs and the necessity for family approval and acceptance of individual decisions, especially those that relate to education (Good et al., 2010; Woolley, 2009). Families also influence decisions concerning careers, marriages, and other life events. Woolley (2009) stated that, for Latin families, "familismo is the centrality of strong family ties within the family, simultaneously positioning the family as the key source of strength and support while expecting individual family members to place the family's needs above their own" (p. 8). For many Latinxs, the extended

family of aunts, uncles, and godparents are all part of the family (A. N. Rios, 1990). According to Turcios-Cotto and Milan (2013), “the belief that higher education inevitably causes one to leave home may create conflict and distress for Latino families, especially when considering cultural values like *familismo*” (p. 1409).

Many of the most successful programs that promote the academic success of Latinxs prior to high school graduation specifically address the role of family (Behnke & Kelly, 2011; Santiago & Wadsworth, 2011). Academic programs that include parental engagement and participation are especially effective when working with Latinx youth and young adults (Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; C. S. Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010). Family involvement among all ethnic groups positively affects educational success, but the special role of family for Latinx students is especially strong.

A key concept of *familismo* is the placing of needs of the family unit above the needs of individuals; this often results in families with traditional roles for men and women (Yowell, 2000). Males enter the workforce and females take care of home matters. Many Latinx students who are immigrants or first-generation citizens with low SES emphasize the importance of assisting immigrant parents who made great sacrifices to meet the needs of the family (Gandara & Contreras, 2009). This is especially true for male students who family members expect to contribute financially to the family unit (Torres & Solberg, 2001).

Family members often decide whether individuals will attend college and select their school. In addition to cost factors, there is an expectation that the student will stay close to the family and participate in the family life (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Kurlaender, 2006). A sense of collectiveness is very important, as opposed to the individualism that is prevalent in U.S. higher education. Shared language and culture often strengthen Latinx families. For first- and second-

generation immigrant families, acculturation to the United States can be difficult (Kilty & de Haymes, 2000). Therefore, first-generation students often bear the responsibility of translating and interpreting language and context for their families (M. H. Lopez, 2009).

Latinx students often negotiate between two cultures and either acculturate to an individualistic stance or develop a bicultural outlook. Some researchers indicated greater academic success for Latinx students who adapt to a White-dominated U.S. culture (Hurtado-Ortiz & Gauvain, 2007), but a growing body of evidence indicates that biculturalism results in greater academic resilience (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; Matos, 2015). First-generation Latinx students are more likely to deeply appreciate their culture, country of origin, and their parents' aspirations for success in the United States (Hill & Torres, 2010). Esparza and Sánchez (2008) found that Latinx students with strong family attachments are more likely to succeed; they noted a strong correlation to academic success of the mother and less correlation to academic achievement of the father. Latinx students whose mothers had some form of higher education were more likely to graduate (Esparza & Sánchez, 2008).

Latinx Decisions Based on Finances

Employment is a reoccurring theme for many Latinx students who are academically successful and those who are not. Latinx students are more likely to stress the importance of materialism when discussing future ambitions than White students (Turcios-Cotto & Milan, 2013). Addressing the financial needs of Latinx students is an essential part of developing a successful retention program for students (L. S. Miller & Garcia, 2004). Even if funding is available, many Latinx students are unaware of the procurement process and assume that higher education is unaffordable for them (Sanchez et al., 2015). Latinx students are more averse to acquiring debt for

higher education and are more likely to take on employment that requires more time away from school than other groups (Sáenz, García-Louis, Drake, & Guida, 2018).

Many Latinx students, especially males, begin employment during high school, which may detrimentally affect high school graduation rates (Fry, 2010; Marsh & Kleitman, 2005; Nagengast, Marsh, Chiorri, & Hau, 2014). Many Latinx students feel an obligation to contribute financially to the family; this is especially true for Mexican-Americans. According to (Olatunji, 2005) Mexicans and Mexican-Americans are the largest group of Latinxs in the United States and have the lowest level of educational attainment of any group in the United States, especially compared to the other two large Latinx groups (i.e., Puerto Ricans and Cubans). Olatunji (2005) concluded that early employment is harmful; it may lead to depression and other psychopathies due to the pressures of employment.

Most Latinx students in the United States are first-generation college students; students with parents with college backgrounds tend to work fewer hours in employment (Greene & Maggs, 2015; Pern, 2010). First-generation Latinx students often have strong encouragement from their immigrant parents to seek a better life; however, funding is often the main constraint on their own personal educational success (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013). Working during college increases the likelihood of dropping out, but there are also many positive effects (e.g., improved future employment prospects and a better understanding of the workforce) (Pern, 2010). In general, having work experience complements education, especially after completing a degree resulting in better career prospects.

The importance of finances and family cohesion highlight the significance of cultural factors related to student resilience and persistence. These two cultural components indicate how psychological and social factors shape academic decision-making. Recognizing that family and

finances influence many educational and life decisions is important when conducting a research study of the higher education of Latinx students.

Psychosocialcultural Model and the Study of Latinx

Tinto's (1993) persistence theory describes why students persist in college and the importance of social interactions. However, as LatCrit authors indicated, context is necessary to accurately consider the special circumstances of minority students (Villalpando, 2004; Yosso et al., 2009). The psychosociocultural theoretical model (PSC) complements Tinto's work by emphasizing the interdependence of the psychological, social, and cultural factors that affect minority students. According to Gloria and Rodriguez (2000), "cultural environment, ethnic identity, acculturation, and social support (e.g., family and role models/mentors) are important psychosociocultural constructs to consider when providing holistic, context-specific, and culturally relevant services to Latin[x] university students" (p. 145). The PSC model acknowledges the importance of student well-being for academic success, and like Tinto, directly relates to the institution, services provided by the institution, and the cultural environment at the institution.

Well-being includes three elements: psychological, social, and cultural (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). Family and employment issues are cultural; issues of self-efficacy (defined as a belief in one's ability to succeed) are a psychological aspect that students use to protect against distress (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Emotional and relational support can come from the college or university or from other students; these are social aspects of well-being (Gloria, Castellanos, & Lopez, 2005). All of these aspects interact with each other. For example, family support may increase facility in the university environment (Solberg & Villarreal, 1997) and issues of congruity

may improve if students feel the institution values their culture (Castellanos et al., 2016; Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005; Gloria, Castellanos, Park, & Kim, 2008; Gloria & Ho, 2003). Table 2 shows the psychosociocultural model.

Table 2 *Psychosociocultural Model*

Psychological	Social	Cultural
Self-Efficacy	Family	Congruity
Self-Esteem	Peers	Ethnic Identify
Motivation	Student Organizations	Acculturation
Resiliency	Faculty Mentors	Gender role
		Community Responsibility

The PSC model specifically addresses the needs of Latinx students at the higher education level and contrasts deficit models that researchers often used to examine minority student experiences. The emphasis of the PSC model includes three aspects that can improve the well-being of Latinx students (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000; Sanchez et al., 2015). The framework also applies to other minority students (Gloria et al., 2008; Gloria & Ho, 2003). Most researchers used empirical means to measure PSC theory; there is little qualitative research. The terms and concepts that researchers used to describe the PSC model provide a way to pursue a better understanding of Latinx persistence at the higher education level.

Many theories of student persistence emphasize students' relationships with an institution; the PSC model examines how institutions engage students' well-being (Gloria & Rodriguez, 2000). In the Forward Program, students come from different community colleges in different regions of California; however, they all share the same university environment. This institution is a Hispanic-serving university, which is a more supportive and stable environment for Latinx students (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Conrad & Gasman, 2015; Núñez, 2017; Tuttle & Musoba, 2013).

Supportive Community Environment and Immigration

To better understand students in the Forward Program, it is important to understand issues in the community-at-large. California is predominately Latinx, and the issue of immigration, especially the plight of undocumented immigrants, is a very pressing subject in the state in terms of employment, education, government etc. The increase of immigration from Mexico to California continues, both officially and unofficially, and has serious immediate effects on the education and well-being of Latinx students in California. According to the Pew Research Center PRC (2015) in 2014, California had a population of more than 2.3 million undocumented immigrants; 13.2% of students in California had at least one parent who was undocumented.

Undocumented immigrants in the United States do not have access to U.S. federal financial aid and must often pay out-of-state tuition at state institutions. California is more liberal than most states and allows any immigrant who studied for at least three years in a California high school, community college, or adult program to access in-state tuition and state financial aid. California financial aid can cover the full cost of public education, regardless of

documented status. However, other costs associated with higher education (e.g., delayed work entry, transportation, books, and fees) prevent many undocumented immigrants from attending college (Gandara & Contreras, 2009; W. Pérez, Cortés, Ramos, & Coronado, 2010).

Since 2001, the U.S. Congress considered a law to give undocumented youth who entered the United States before the age of 16 the right to legal status (A. Zimmerman, 2011). The proposed law would gradually grant permanent residency to undocumented immigrants of high moral character with no convictions of any major crime. The participants would have to pursue some form of higher education. In 2010, the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act (2011) did not pass a Senate vote due to a Republican filibuster and five Democrat votes. In 2011, the bill again failed to get the necessary votes.

The Obama administration responded by creating the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a memorandum by the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano on June 15, 2012. Obama proposed expanding the scope of DACA but was unable to accomplish this due to congressional opposition. During the 2016 Presidential election, Donald Trump pledged to make immigration a central part of his term as President with promises to limit immigration (G. Lopez & Krogstad, 2017). After his election, Trump signed an executive order that phased out DACA. Trump publicly announced that he supports DACA recipients; however, the lack of reinstatement indicates that the future of the program is uncertain.

DACA received very positive praise in California from recipients. As of March 2017, over 415,000 California residents participated in the program (G. Lopez & Krogstad, 2017). The DACA program does not limit participation to Latinx people, but it greatly affected the Latinx community. Unlike many other states, California embraced DACA and created infrastructures to

facilitate recipients and increase health insurance benefits for them (Patler & Pirtle, 2017). In addition, the CCC, CSU, and UC schools created special offices for *dreamers*. After Trump announced the plan to dismantle DACA, executives in all three California higher educational systems pledged to fully support recipients in terms of finances and protection.

These uncertainties in the system disrupted the lives of many students and family members. Stability and security are very important to student persistence (Carolan-Silva & Reyes, 2013; L. S. Miller & Garcia, 2004; Sáenz et al., 2018). Although DACA presented hope to many undocumented students, recent changes led to instability (Siemons, Raymond-Flesh, Auerswald, & Brindis, 2017). Patler and Laster Pirtle (2017) researched undocumented residents and discovered that “DACA status significantly reduces the likelihood of distress, negative emotions, and deportation worry, yet we also observed a reduction (albeit much less drastic) in these concerns among respondents who remain undocumented” (p. 46). While DACA reduced stress, DACA dismantlement and the increase in immigration and customs enforcement leading to deportations of many undocumented immigrants had the opposite effect (Zamudio-Suaréz).

Treviño, García, and Bybee (2017) published the testimony of a young teacher and DACA recipient who poignantly described his experiences and fears.

My life has been ruled by two-year intervals since 2012 and, although I am thankful for the opportunity to work every day, it weighs heavy on my conscience. I must keep teaching and I must remain in the classroom because I am incredibly committed to my school, my students, and their families. My job and my future are in jeopardy in my country. (Treviño, García, & Bybee, 2017, p. 640)

Teachers of undocumented students must navigate their own fears as well as the concerns of students and their families. This story accurately reflects the anxiety that many undocumented immigrants experience.

The DACA program had a tremendous effect on many Latinx students. Prior to the Trump administration, researchers clearly indicated that being able to plan a secure future was a significant factor for student persistence in higher education. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct additional research on the effects of such factors of immigration uncertainties of Latinx students.

Research on Programs for Latinx students

Many programs for Latinx students in California assist students, but little research examines such programs. Research on programs for students of color tend to focus on mentorship from faculty, staff, and peers and direct student advisement (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Gandara, 2002). One of the closest studies to my research involves a peer mentorship program for Latinx students at California State University, Long Beach. Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) examined how training Latinx peer mentors to work with other Latinx students to negotiate academic and financial resources, such as tutoring, financial aid, and other campus resources influenced student resilience. The researchers presented a detailed description of the program; however, they did not provide data regarding how the program influenced the lives of the participants. Rios-Ellis et al. (2015) indicated that future evaluation of the program was necessary because “at the college and university level, few education programs attempt to incorporate an understanding of the cultural context and structural environmental issues in the conceptualization of the Latino educational experience” (p 50).

In another study, Tovar (2015) used quantitative data to study Latinx students at a community college in California to determine resilience factors. The data indicated that interaction with faculty and staff increased grade point averages (GPAs); however, the data did not find no correlation to student persistence. One limitation of this study was that the research occurred at one community college and exclusively focused on Latinx students with no comparison to other students who presumably interact with the same faculty and staff. Tovar (2015) found that “having supportive family and friends, receiving transition assistance from the institution, spending adequate time studying, and committing to the pursuit of a major or a degree exercised a powerful influence on the intention to persist with degree completion” (p. 63). These findings contrasted studies indicating that student-faculty interaction greatly increases persistence (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016; Crisp & Nora, 2010). Tovar (2015) agreed that college programs (e.g., support groups, mentoring, and advising) led to greater student resilience.

One of the earliest programs for Latinx students at the post-secondary level is the Puente Program. English instructor, Patricia McGrath, and counselor, Félix Galaviz, began this program in 1981 at Chabot Community College in Hayward, CA in the San Francisco Bay Area (Duarte, 1994). The program objective was to assist Latinx students with navigation of the higher education system in California to increase transfers to the UC system and other four-year programs in California (Rendon, 2002). The scope of the program later expanded to high schools to increase university and college attendance of Latinx students in California and beyond (Duarte, 1994). The Puente program was successful in achieving this goal; participants are more likely to attend a college or university. According to Gardner (2003):

Puente has been credited with nearly doubling the enrollment and transfer rates of its students into four-year college and universities, significantly increasing high school graduation rates, notably raising course and test completion rates, and substantially boosting parent and community involvement. (p. 29)

The Forward Program model includes three components of the Puente program: curriculum, peer mentoring, and intrusive or required advising/counseling. For Puente, the curriculum entailed improving English writing skills with culturally relevant themes (Gardner, 2003). The Forward Program focused on courses with Latinx themes that meet upper-division general education requirements. Both programs have similar mentoring and advising methods and goals. Unlike the Forward Program, Puente received funding from the UC system supplemented with local and private funds.

Even though the Puente program started at a community college, much of the published research on it focused on the high school component (Gandara, 2002; Grubb, Lara, & Valdez, 2002; J. Moreno, 2002). Laden (2000) researched the counseling and mentoring modules of the Puente program at the community college level and reported positive findings. However, Laden (2000) concluded:

...while there are clear indicators that mentoring has positive psychological and instrumental effects on students, the fact that mentoring is inextricably mingled with the writing and counseling components makes it difficult to assess its direct impact. A need for more research to assess the specific impact of mentoring remains. It is anticipated that the elements that contribute to mentoring success and its actual impact on Puente community college students can be assessed through a longitudinal, quantitative, and qualitative study. (p.90).

In another study, C. Rodriguez (2007) examined three Puente programs at different community colleges in southern California and noted similarities in all three programs, and argued that social capital greatly influenced the educational outcomes of the participants. This included the wealth of the institutions and the knowledge base of the advisors and counselors. This was similar to findings at high school Puente programs (Grubb et al., 2002). The Puente program established the framework; individual programs and institutions influence outcomes. Enquist (2011) concluded that a key factor in the success of the Puente Program is that the curriculum is student-centered rather than teacher-centered. The students take courses that assist them in achieving their goals.

Research on programs for Latinx students is limited and Latinx researchers often include Latinx students within other groups of minority students. J. C. Pérez (2018) researched a program that ten students of color completed at a predominately White research institution in Utah. The program provided mentorship and advising for students who enrolled in a specially designed course, many of whom were Latinx. The students also performed community service in a project that addressed social justice and inequalities. Students who participated were more resilient and all the student participants graduated. J. C. Pérez (2018) noted that all participants indicated that they felt dedicated to social justice, regardless of their majors. The “richness of the program nurtured and empowered the academic success of all the Students of Color in this study and beyond the institution” (J. C. Pérez (2018), p. 14). However, there was very little data regarding outcomes of the program or if outcomes differed among participants who were not Latinx. J. C. Pérez (2018) provided no information regarding the status of the program or any suggestions as to how to expand it.

Past studies of students of color may align with findings regarding first-generation university students. Swanbrow Becker, Schelbe, Romano, and Spinelli (2017) examined a multi-cultural group of students who were all first-generation students at a large university in the Southeast. The program provided these students with a special orientation and assigned faculty and staff mentors. Swanbrow Becker et al. (2017) used focus groups to collect data on 25 participants and concluded that the program provided a stronger sense of well-being that improved more than student resilience. Family, finances, and a sense of belonging were very important factors for this population. A major limitation of this study was that most of the participants were students of color, but Swanbrow Becker et al. (2017) failed to analyze the differences among the students or explore issues of race and culture.

In contrast to a special programming, Crisp and Nora (2010) researched a group of Latinx students attending a community college by investigating the role of developmental or remedial classes in relation to persistence and graduation rates. They found clear differences between Latinx students who needed developmental or remedial courses and those who did not. For example, developmental students whose parents had higher levels of education were more likely to persist to graduation, a factor that was less strong among non-developmental students (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Student persistence and graduation rates were higher at Hispanic-serving institutes for all Latinx students compared to predominately White institutions. Also, strong financial support was a positive factor for both groups (Crisp & Nora, 2010). A limitation of this study was the focus on community college two-year degrees and a lack of investigation of whether students continued to a bachelor degrees to determine the effects of developmental courses on future educational pursuits.

Compensatory Program Research

Research on programs that assist Latinx students persist to graduation from college is minimal, but there are many studies of compensatory programs for economically disadvantaged youths. The term *compensatory* commonly implies education for disadvantaged students from a deficit approach, which has connotations of failed programs (Beatty, 2012; Spencer, 2012). However, the frequent use of the term indicates that it is current; researchers use it to describe a range of public programs with complex social histories (Connell, 1994; W. Urban, 2012).

Compensatory programs in the United States are often federally funded programs for disadvantaged youths who lack certain skills or knowledge; these programs prepare individuals for placement in mainstream education or society (Holzman & Boes, 1973). Public institutions, especially school systems, are the greatest benefactors of funds and the supporting research to continue these programs is under constant scrutiny. For example, in a report on the success of compensatory programs, Holzman and Boes (1973) explained:

Despite a barrage of rhetoric to the contrary, numerous compensatory education programs for disadvantaged children in schools around the country are achieving their goals. Many program administrators and state officials highly praise compensatory education efforts, yet some critics have assailed all such efforts as failures. They say the federal government cannot solve all the problems of society by sinking money into efforts to reduce the multiple inequalities that can lead to educational deprivation. (Prologue)

Holzman and Boes (1973) lauded the numerous successes of federal compensatory programs created by Title 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965. They noted that 60% of Title 1 program participants were White (Holzman & Boes, 1973). Programs that benefit from Title 1 funding include head start programs, special math and reading programs,

special education programs, and English as a second language programs. The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and the Higher Education Act of 1965 began programs for disadvantaged youths to increase enrollment in higher education; this legislation led to the creation of the Trio programs. Currently, there are eight programs within the Trio programs; however, the term trio is not an acronym; the term describes the first three programs (Education, n.d.). The oldest of the Trio programs, Upward Bound, began in 1964. (Education, n.d.) . Upward Bound serves high school students from low-income families; and high school students from families in which neither parent holds a bachelor's degree. The goal of Upward Bound is to increase the rate at which participants complete secondary education and enroll in and graduate from institutions of postsecondary education.

Historically, the Upward Bound program was successful at providing participants with college-bound instruction. Statistically, Upward Bound students are more likely to attend college or university than similar students who do not participate in the program (Edward & Maria, 1998) and are better equipped to navigate the higher education process (Gail & Roger, 1998). Like many federal programs, research results often determine funding, which often resulted in discrepancies and controversies (Cahalan & Goodwin, 2014).

With funding from other Trio programs (e.g., the Educational Opportunity Center, Talent Search, and Student Support Services) many colleges and universities established educational opportunity programs (EOPs) to assist underrepresented students in admissions and retention. Winograd, Verkuilen, Weingarten, and Walker (2018) studied such a program at a selective public university and found that EOP participants were very competitive with non-EOP students regarding grades and resilience; however, EOP participants were less likely to graduate within four

years because they did not enter the university with extra college credit. EOP students in the study continued their studies at their own expense in order to graduate (Winograd et al., 2018).

Wooten (2016) studied the effects of a compensatory program for African-Americans in a mid-western city during the 1980s. Participants were at least juniors in high school with a minimum 2.8 GPA. The program promoted interest in math and science and was offered at a local university. Students who excelled in the program received an admission offer to the university upon high school completion; the top performers received merit scholarships. Wooten (2016) found that 44% of the participants ended up studying more in the program; the program was a major contributing factor for this high percentage of academic achievement.

DeMirjyn (2011) studied 12 female Latinx in their 3rd and 4th years of undergraduate study at the University of California, Berkeley. Despite participating in support programs, some participants indicated feeling isolated from the campus and experienced subtle forms of racism from White classmates. Participants indicated that such incidents led to more self-segregation of Latinx students (DeMirjyn, 2011). Participants were all either Chicano Studies or Sociology majors. A shortcoming of the study was the researchers selected a narrow range of students in just two disciplines.

The Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) program is another program to further the education of disadvantaged students. A high school English teacher, Mary Catherine Swanson, developed AVID in 1980 in response to an increase in disadvantaged students bussed into her more affluent public school in San Diego (K. Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008). The AVID program trains teachers to develop techniques to assess and encourage students while redesigning the curriculum to address multicultural issues. School systems in over 47 states and foreign countries adopted the AVID system (Bernhardt, 2013). The program began as a service

for high school students and expanded to secondary education and higher education. AVID is now a non-profit organization, but much of the funding that supports implementation of the program comes from Title 1 and Trio funds.

In a study at four different high schools in Texas and California, K. Watt et al. (2008) found that students in AVID programs built strong family-like bonds with fellow participants and indicated that they felt better prepared for college. Students perceived that AVID teachers were well-prepared and provided them with information that they needed to enter college (Watt et al., 2008). According to Bernhardt (2013), “for the typical AVID student, the kinds of information, knowledge, understandings, and experiences necessary to prepare for and successfully gain admission into a postsecondary institution are often absent at home” (p. 210). The strengths of the AVID program include student-centered instruction that emphasizes better study and organizational skills in a supportive environment (Kirk & Watt, 2018; Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009; K. Watt et al., 2008; M. Watt, 2009).

Conclusion

The demographics of the United States, particularly California, greatly changed over the past few decades. Currently, Latinxs are the largest ethnic group in California (Ortman & Guarneri, 2008). California’s Latinx population is young and large; however, proportionately fewer Latinxs participate in higher education and college graduation rates are low (Chacon, 2013). Hence, there is a need to conduct further research to discover factors that increase persistence and graduation rates. In surveying past research studies, I noted a lack of research on Latinx students, especially those at Hispanic-serving universities. Qualitative research on the subject indicated that certain factors (e.g., family/financial pressures and social capital)

significantly affect resilience and persistence (Boden, 2011; Contreras, 2011). The current research may determine ways for colleges to increase these rates with the development of programs specifically targeting select students.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Researchers of Latinx educational experiences often focused on determining why there are dismal participation and graduation rates for Latinx students and why Latinx students struggle with educational obtainment prior to higher education (Garcia et al., 2012; Villalpando, 2004; Yosso et al., 2009). There is a clear deficiency in research that investigates solutions that may increase university graduation and participation rates for this population. Thus, the research in this study thoroughly examines the Forward Program, which was explicitly created by concerned faculty and staff to increase the graduation rates of Latinx students who transferred from community colleges to West Coast State University.

According to one of the founding faculty members of the program, the Forward Program's goal was "to build a sense of belonging and community" in a desperate attempt to increase the graduation rates among this population.

We didn't know what to do, so we just created a program to support the students to treat them like family and let them know that someone cared. We didn't know if it would work, but we just had to do something for these kids, they are our future, and we were failing them. (E. Martinez, personal communication, September 2015)

Martinez believed that the program was unique; they based it on the Puente Program because no other programs specifically addressed the needs of Latinx transfer students.

The Forward Program began in Fall 2013 with 35 Latinx students, both male and female. These students applied for admission to the new program, which the college promoted as a year-long mentorship program to assist Latinx transfer students. Accepted students worked with mentors from a pool of Latinx faculty/staff from the university or other local colleges and Latinx community leaders. A Forward advisor was hired to act as an academic and social counselor for

the whole group. All Forward students would also take a specially designed curriculum. Students shared three courses in different subjects that addressed multicultural themes with an emphasis on Latinx Studies. Latinx faculty members who agreed to work with the Forward Program taught all such courses. Forward were required to take all assigned courses to stay in the program with no exceptions.

Most of the initial cohort of students were first-generation college students. Over 80% of the original Forward students had jobs while studying full-time. Time management and finding a quiet place to study were key concerns for this group. As a result, the university provided a private temporary modular office that housed a comfortable meeting place with a lounge and spaces for students to gather, study, and rest. The trailer was centrally located on the campus and open to students 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Twenty-five members of the initial 32 Forward cohort members graduated in June 2015 with a two-year graduation rate of over 70% compared to the total two-year graduation rate of 37% for all transfer students at the university (CSU, 2016). Forward students also had overall higher GPAs than all transfer students and much higher GPAs than other Latinx transfer students on campus. According to the program data, the first cohort of Forward students was very successful; however, further research examining the impact the program has made beyond persistence, and graduation rates should be measured, especially as the program develops over the years.

The Forward Program changed several times since its foundation in 2013. First, the program procured additional funding from a grant that permitted the university to expand its services. Most students in the program identified as Latinx, but the program includes all students with interest in Latinx issues. According to a program administrator, very few non-Latinx

students apply. Since the creation of the Forward Program, WCSU implemented three similar programs to serve other underserved communities based on the Forward model.

Research Site

According to the Carnegie classification of institutions of higher education, WCSU is a master's degree granting institution; the institution offers a full range of undergraduate programs but graduate education is mainly at the master level. As of Fall 2017, the total population was 15,435 students. Also as of Fall 2017, WCSU had only 1,650 beds for on-campus housing; most students commute or live in adjacent apartment communities. The U.S. Department of Education defines WCSU as a Hispanic-serving institution (i.e., over 25% of undergraduate students identify as Latinx); however, the university also has an almost equal number of Asian and White students. The Chronicle of Higher Education ranked WCSU as one of the most diverse universities in the United States and one with the largest percentages of African-African students in California (see Table 2).

Historically, WCSU began as a predominately White-serving institution and remained that way until 2007. After 2007, the number of both Asian and Latino students exceeded the White population for the first time. During the Fall of 2017, the university's student enrollment included almost 9% international students (i.e., students studying on student visas who were most likely educated outside of the United States prior to coming to WCSU). The staff of the university is diverse, but the faculty remain predominately White.

Table 3 West Coast State University Enrollment Fall 2017

Enrollment	Undergrad	Grad/ Post-Bacc	Total
Total	12,998	2,437	15,435
Status			
Full-Time	11,306	1,259	12,565
Part-time	1,692	1,178	2,870
Gender			
Female	7,995	1,549	9,544
Male	5,013	878	5,891
Race/Ethnicity/Domestic			
African American/Black	1,319	210	1,529
American Indian or Alaska Native	27	7	34
Asian	3,071	459	3,530
Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	115	15	130
Hispanic/Latino	4,472	366	4,838
White	1,933	568	2,501
Multiple Ethnicity	746	106	852
Race/Ethnicity Unknown	494	114	608
International			
Nonresident Aliens (International)	821	592	1,413

Note. From California State University Graduation Rates Consortium for Student Retention Data Exchange (CSRDE).

As the demographic makeup of the United States continues to change, educators require better understanding of ethnically diverse student populations. Research providing a voice for representatives of the largest ethnic group in California with the lowest university graduation rates may enhance understanding of the program. All participants experienced the California

educational system and explained ideas that may assist institutions of higher education in better serving students. The findings may assist other similar students who could benefit from comparable interactions. The qualitative approach permits educators to self-examine their misconceptions and prejudices by developing careful research that yields holistic understanding. As Bogdan and Biklen (2003) argued:

When practitioners employ the qualitative approach, they systematically try to understand the different people in their subject schools as they see themselves. The approach requires that educators be more rigorous and observant in collecting information in order to recognize their own points of view and to break through the stereotypical images that may govern their behavior towards others. (p. 230)

Thus, qualitative researchers must be attentive to the many facets that could influence participants and avoid over-generalizations that may stereotype a collective group. Latinx students are singled out as a group, but meanings of this racial designation are quite disparate as described in the previous chapters. It is important to determine whether culture influences educational outcomes. Two cultural attributes are common among Latinx students: the importance of family and extended family in life decisions and familial financial contributions. I began the current research by examining how participants present these two cultural concepts while investigating any additional concepts that influenced success in the Forward Program. Students in the Forward Program entered WCSU after transferring from a community college. Therefore, they had academic experiences at multiple campuses, which permits examination of correlations between prior academic experiences and recent college experiences.

Creation of the Forward Program

The Forward Program began in response to concerns about the retention and graduation rates of Latinx students at the institution. The first cohort began in 2013, but program development began several years earlier. In April 2011, the chair of the Chicano/Latino Staff and Faculty Association (CLSFA) decided to schedule a group meeting with the new interim president to discuss the status of the fastest growing population on campus. The plan was for faculty and staff members to give statistical updates about Latinx students at WCSU and present the discouraging numbers of pushouts of Latinx students at WCSU and beyond. The CLSFA members suggested gaining federal funding by receiving official DOE recognition as a Hispanic-serving institution. This distinction led to funding to assist with projects to address the needs of the students who received benefits under the California Dream Act and AB 540 and to hire more Latinx faculty members. The California Dream Act is a state law that provides undocumented immigrants who graduate from California high schools the right to state-funded financial aid. AB 540 is a state law that grants California high school graduates or former attendees the right to pay in-state tuition rates at all public colleges and universities in California.

After the initial meeting with the president, the attendees created an action plan and an unofficial task force of faculty and staff who would volunteer their time and efforts to the project. The Latino Retention Task Force (LRTF) included 12 individuals committed to finding ways to increase student retention for the growing Latinx student population.

Community colleges play an important role in the higher education of Latinx students in the state of California; therefore, many LRTF members thought that community college students transferring into WCSU should be the first group they should assist. One of the task members was very familiar with the Puente Project because she participated in the program when she attended

community college herself. The Puente Project provides special advising for Chicana students. Since beginning in 1981, the Puente Project has grown to include over 60 community colleges and high schools in California with expanded services ("Puente," n.d.). Puente has three main components: assistance in English instruction with Latinx themes, sustained academic counseling, and mentorship from Latinx school and community members (Laden, 2000; Lara & Valdez, 2002).

Puente was the model for the Forward Program's strong curriculum component. The LRTF developed new courses to emphasize intensive English writing skills and Latinx themes. During the summer of 2012, the LRTF received a \$10,000 grant from WCSU's provost office to implement the program. They recruited students, staff, and faculty mentors. In May of 2013, the LRTF received an additional WCSU grant of \$70,000 and hired a full-time coordinator and part-time counselor and added classes to the program.

The LRTF initially capped enrollment in the program at 35 students as this was the maximum number of students permitted in an intensive writing course under the negotiations of the CSU faculty union. Students interested in the program applied through a form that included questions about their financial and academic needs and required an essay about challenges they experienced and overcame (see Appendix B). Applicants were required to submit a confidential recommendation from a counselor, teacher, or someone familiar with the student's academic preparation. Admission into the program depended on need (financial, social etc as determined by several staff members) with preference for former Puente participants. Students self-identified as Latinx; any transfer applicant with need could apply regardless of ethnicity, race, national origin, immigration status, gender, or sexual orientation or expression.

The original students were recruited by contacting Puente Program advisors and also promoting the program at the annual Welcome Day on campus. The Welcome Day is an annual

event that invites admitted students to campus to learn more about the campus, majors, facilities, clubs, residential life etc. Unlike campus orientations for admitted students that occur throughout the summer, the Welcome Day is to showcase the campus and with the goal to convince prospective students to select WCSU. During the event, programs such as the Forward Program set up booths to meet perspective students and parents and also have the opportunity to present to a group of attendees during the event. The Forward Program even gives a formal presentation in Spanish. Several of the Forward Program participants interviewed in the study indicated that the Welcome Day was how they first learned about the program.

For this first year, there were 69 applications and 35 were selected. The total number resulted in 32, as 3 of the accepted students were not able to take the required courses because of work or family obligations at the same time. As this was the first year of the program, it was not clear how to add replacements for the 3 students, but for future cohorts, the time and days of the classes were provided for consideration in advance.

Over 100 students applied to become part of the second cohort in Fall 2014. Because of the interest in the program and the strong persistence rates of participants, funding continued through a grant from the CSU chancellor's office; it provided matching funds to a grant from WCSU. After the second year, the Forward Program added peer mentoring and funding was not solely based on grant or foundation funds. The program received a renewable state approved budget. In the third year, the program hired additional full-time staff, including a full-time counselor. Despite the popularity of the program and financial support from the CSU chancellor's office, local funding for the program decreased during the 2018-2019 academic year. This resulted in a decrease in peer mentoring and social activities. The Forward Program still maintains the three key elements: teaching, counseling, and mentoring (see Figure 1).

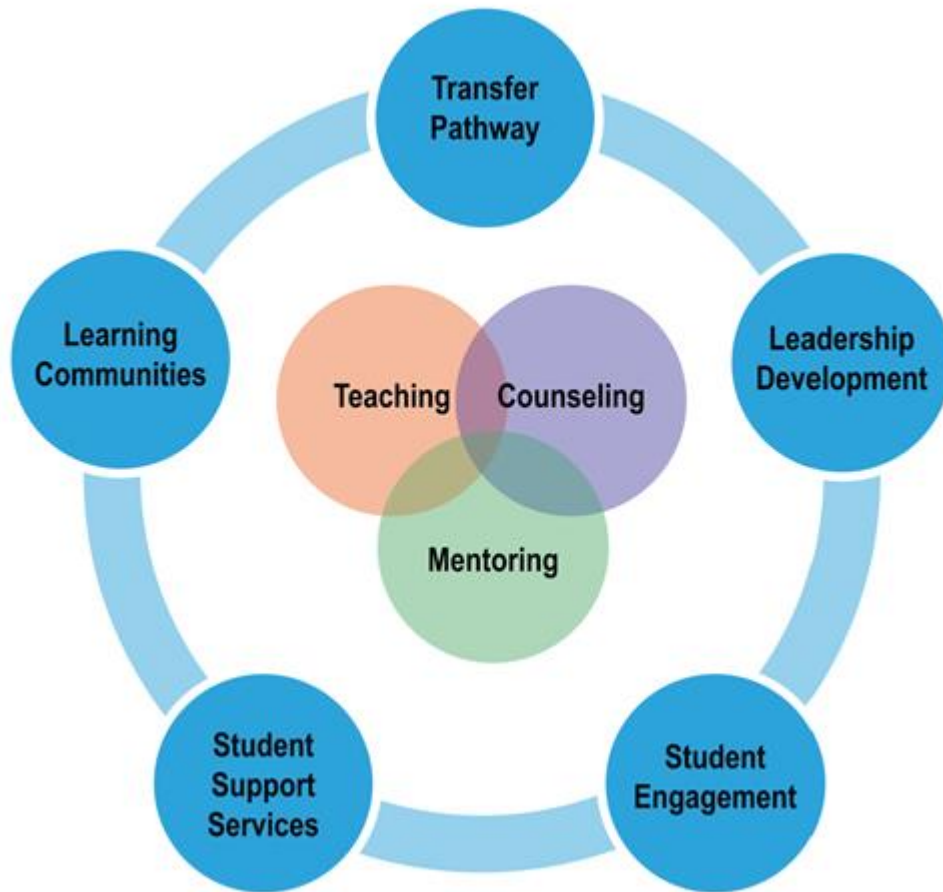


Figure 1 Forward Program Goals (from program website).

The Forward Program is currently housed in the Office of Student Affairs and Enrollment Management. This office is responsible for university admissions, academic records, financial aid, residential life, student activities, and student academic success programs. The organizational chart for the program is found in Figure 2.

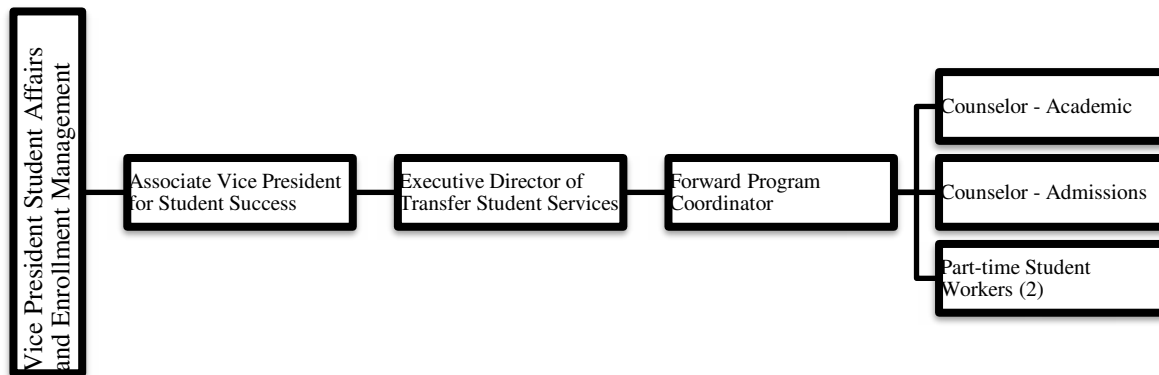


Figure 2 Forward Program – Organization Chart Fall 2018

Students are expected to meet an advisor for initial advising at least twice during the second semester. All Forward students must attend a special course during the first semester that covers adjustment to college life, access to student resources, and career exploration with frequent guest presenters. The Forward Program staff also encourages students to participate in campus wide seminars and lectures on such topics. There is a study lounge for around 15 students right beside the Forward Program offices which is open for all students; however, during the week you would normally find at least 4 to 5 Forward students studying there. This number increases during exam times. Students tend to also use the lobby in front of the offices as a meeting place on-campus. Because of the proximity of the lounge and lobby, there is frequent contact with Forward staff. Some students will make appointments to see as staff member, some will just drop in to meet with either of the two counselors or the Forward Program coordinator. Both staff members and student participants indicated that the Forward Program had an open door policy, meaning that that staff members were happy to meet students without a formal appointment.

The Forward students are also often greeted by the student workers in the Forward Program. The student workers in the office are former Forward students who normally sit at the

front desk as you enter the Forward Program office suite. Throughout the year, the Forward staff plan social activities for the students such as cook-outs and parties. However, during the year of the study, the Forward Program sponsored activities had been greatly reduced because of funding constraints.

Both Forward students and staff members indicated that students often will meet on campus to study and socialize and that is also continued with activities off campus. Some students indicated that the cohorts are strong; however, the interactions between cohort members vary according to individuals. One student indicated that sometimes all Forward student members may be invited to outside social activities by student members, but it seems that invitations are more informal and limited to the cohort. While Forward Program students share common courses and often class schedules, student participation in extracurricular activities and their study habits vary. Participation in the program does seem to provide enhanced opportunities for the students to socialize and perhaps encourages students to improve study habits.

Case Study

The objective of this study was to gain insight into how the Forward Program influenced students' lives (e.g., student persistence, graduation). Using Tinto's (1993) persistence theory as a guideline, I noted how students engaged with the program and institution (e.g. participation in activities, social activities). According to Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth capital theory, I also examined which forms of capital participants used to encourage persistence while in the program. To gather this information, I asked questions about participants' financial, familial, social, and educational influences and their individual aspirations. I wanted to determine what factors contributed to their successes and failures and how the Forward Program contributed to

academic success. As success and failure can be subjective terms, I wanted to determine how participants defined success rather than focus on program data, even though the institution defines programmatic success as graduation within two years of entry into the Forward Program.

My main research question was as follows: in what ways does the Forward Program impact the lives of student participants? To begin to answer this question, I first met with key administrators who helped to start the program in order to gain a descriptive understanding of the Forward Program. The study entailed in-depth analysis of this local program that addresses the national problem of low graduation rates among Latinx students. Three features that I embed in my study (particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic) are qualities of a case study (Merriam, 2009).

I thoroughly examined the Forward Program but the study was bounded by activity and time. The case that I investigated was the Forward Program and the time boundaries were from the implementation of the program in 2013 until 2018. I took a historical approach and used various procedures to collect data to provide a comprehensive report on the phenomenon. According to Stake (1995), this is the quintessential definition of a case study. The Forward Program exists on a campus that serves a large population of Latinx students; therefore, it is difficult to distinguish the phenomenon and the context. Yin (2014) described the two-fold definition of a case study.

1. A case study is an empirical inquiry that:
 - investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within the real-world context, especially when the boundary between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident.
2. A case study inquiry:

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis. (Yin, 2014, p. 16-17)

Yin (2014) argued that case studies are useful when trying to determine *how* and *why*. Case studies often use qualitative methods of observation and interviews to explore activities. When using qualitative methods to evaluate an organization, the researcher must address the concerns, assumptions, and relationships of all participants in that organization (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). For the case study of the Forward Program, I used interviews, focus groups, observations, documents, and quantitative data from sources at WCSU to examine how the program impacts the lives of participants.

Forward participants have similar backgrounds, but many variable influenced the persistence of student participants; this provided a rich and complex diversity of data. According to Merriam (2009), “the case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (p. 50). The case study of the Forward Program provided a deeper understanding of the issues of this subgroup and whether this particular case is valuable for similar groups.

I examined the data collected from interviews and focus group meetings with the participants, classroom observations and the empirical graduation rates to create an *analytic generalization* of the findings. This approach solely emphasizes statistical analysis. Analytic generalization occurs when the researcher “corroborates, modifies, rejects, advances, or

generates a theory upon completion of the case study” (Yin, 2014, p. 41). Analytic generalization is common in case studies because statistical generalization may result in inadequate generalizations of a small population sample. The case of the Forward Program focuses on a small subgroup within the university.

The initial purpose of the study was to determine how participants’ own personal sense of connectedness with the Forward Program and the university related to perceptions and outcomes of success. I also attempted to determine whether student participants had a sense of connectedness to their previous community college. Tinto’s and Yosso’s theories require context; the participants in the study were members of a minority-serving institution. The research question addressed the impact of the Forward Program; yet, other factors such as personal traits may also influence students.

I explored how the Forward Program prepared a group of Latinx students for graduation and academic success. According to the Tinto’s Persistence Theory, students who share similar values to the institution are more likely also to persevere and graduate. In this case study, I explored the students knowledge of the mission of the university and whether the Forward Program feels like an extension of the university as a whole. I also determined whether students experienced any of Tinto’s three stages of post-secondary growth: separation, transition, and incorporation. Tinto’s Persistence Theory applies to general populations; researchers rarely use it to describe the experiences of Latinx students. I also examined whether students experienced different stages of post-secondary growth to determine if Tinto’s (1993) theory was applicable to transfer students who previously attended at least one other institute of higher learning as determined by students’ self-assessment in interviews and focus groups. This was challenging because many participants attended multiple colleges and universities prior to WCSU.

Participants identified as Latinx; therefore, it was imperative to address issues of race and ethnicity. I used Yosso's (2005) cultural wealth community capital theory to complement Tinto by considering additional factors along with the influence of the institution or program as a key conduit for success. As a White non-Latino male, I was aware of my own background and acknowledged that my presence may influence responses from student, staff, and faculty participants. As a researcher at WCSU, they might consider me a part of the institution and consider my research work an institution interaction, which could influence the responses of current students at WCSU. I have not personally experienced being Latinx but I experienced the feeling of being *the other* during experiences studying in the United States and living in other countries. It was very important that I built rapport with participants and ensured they felt comfortable presenting their experiences and opinions freely, without any hesitation.

Students in the Forward Program all participated in the program at the same university and reported many similar experiences. The student participants took the same classes with the same instructors; however, different dynamics outside of the classroom often influenced the educational experience. I examined the variables of family and funding. These two factors are important in both theories in my framework, as they are in Yosso's (2005) work.

Subjectivity

Family and finance issues are common among Latinx students. They were also present in my own college experience as a White male. Like many of the participants in this study, I was a first-generation college student. My parents wanted me to attend college but had little knowledge of how to get me there. My father was a mechanic at a manufacturing plant with little money saved for my education. Upon entering high school, my mom found a job on the assembly line of

a factory and saved most of her income for my school. She worked long, hard hours and accepted all the overtime she could get. I also worked to save money for school throughout high school and college.

When it was time to decide which university to attend, I decided that I would only go to a school that would be close to my family and preferably within the same town as relatives. I won a merit scholarship to help pay for an elite private university, which was in a city where my uncle lived. I entered this university and found that I was very different from everyone else. I did not meet any other first-generation college students, nor did I meet anyone else who had to work to help pay for expenses. Many of my classmates attended private high schools and seemed much better prepared for the rigors of the new university.

The institution was predominately White and most of my friends and classmates were White. I had a few friends who were African-American; however, they too were sons and daughters of well-educated successful people and seemed economically privileged. I experienced a strong sense of initial isolation but met very sympathetic staff members and instructors who understood that I was different from many other students. I developed great relationships with a few of them who were very encouraging and invited me into their homes. I felt a connection with professors who encouraged me and gave me a sense of belonging at the university.

One professor had a profound influence on my life and introduced me to different global perspectives. During the spring semester of my junior year, I started a course entitled *The Philosophy of Liberation in Literature* with Dr. Maya Angelou. Dr. Angelou encouraged me, gave me high praise for my writing, and persuaded me to pursue my dream to travel and see the world. Honestly, I had always been fascinated with foreign languages and different cultures but accepted that such travel was meant for my richer, more privileged classmates. With Dr.

Angelou's reinforcement, I decided to study abroad. I embarked on my first real attempt to understand the world outside the one that I knew.

The process to study abroad was not easy. When I first approached the study abroad advisor and informed her of my interests, I asked if I could use my scholarship funds to study abroad. Her immediate response was "So, are you on financial aid, do you know how expensive it is to study in Western Europe?" I will never forget this reaction, nor her reaction when I submitted my personal check for the study abroad fee. She asked me twice if I was certain the check was good, a question that she did not ask the previous student who just paid the same amount by check. She clearly believed I was different from the typical study abroad student. Her departing words were not "have a great trip," but rather, "if you don't do well you will not be able to graduate on time, don't forget that."

Personal experiences like this led me to a theory that meaningful interactions (both positive and negative) with members of the university community have deep and lasting impacts on students' immediate success and success after graduation. As a university administrator for over 25 years, I have a keen interest in interactions between faculty, staff, and students. In my experience, when university faculty or staff take genuine and caring interest in students, the students normally respond positively.

As a White male studying a program to assist Latinx students, I knew my presence in the research could influence data collection. However, in prior research studies that I conducted with Latinx students, I believe that I was able to build trust and rapport that allowed me to gather rich data. There is great diversity in the Latinx community, which many participants frequently mentioned. Throughout my graduate academic career, faculty members of diverse backgrounds strongly encouraged my interest to study university access for minority students.

Research Design

A case study can be a challenging endeavor; it is easy to expand upon the existing project and extend the data collection process to provide more insight into the phenomenon. Clear research design and planning is essential when developing a good case study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Wolcott, 2009). To learn more about the Forward Program and explore the issue of Latinx students failing to graduate from college, I approached used four different forms of data collection: interviews, focus groups, observations, and the examination of archival and program data.

Interviews

In any case study, it is important to obtain the descriptions and interpretations of others such as the active participants in the case to be studied (Stake, 1995). In this research, I wanted to learn about the impact of the Forward Program on students from their own perspectives; interviews provided participants with opportunities to describe their experiences and articulate their reactions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015; Merriam, 2009). To begin data collection, I first sought approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Georgia State University (GSU). With IRB approval from GSU, I then sought IRB approval from WCSU. This process took approximately three months, which was much longer than I originally hoped. I made the original IRB submission to GSU immediately after receiving permission from my advisor upon successful defense of my research prospectus; however, the timing of the submission was not ideal for either of the busy institutions.

I received IRB approvals after the academic year ended, a time when I would have little access to students and full-time faculty. Fortunately, I had access to Forward administrators; so, I

began my first three interviews, out of a total of 12, with Forward staff members. During staff interviews, I asked for assistance in sending requests to interview students. The program coordinator agreed to send my IRB-approved email to recruit students from the list serve of all current and former student participants in the Forward Program. Other staff members offered suggestions for recruitment techniques, such as providing coffee shop gift cards or food for students. The program coordinator suggested I wait until classes started before sending the recruitment email because the list serve would be complete with all new students.

With great anticipation, I waited for the Forward coordinator to send the first recruitment email. She sent it on Thursday during the first week of classes, one of the busiest days of the week for most faculty and students on-campus. Unfortunately, there were no immediate responses. After a week, I met with the Forward coordinator to ask for advice. She reassured me that I would get responses soon and that Forward participants were very busy. She promised to resend the email to remind everyone. Later that day, I received five responses from interested potential participants. Scheduling interviews was challenging because the participants were very busy. I had to schedule times around school and work schedules, childcare needs, and other family obligations. Several participants offered to meet late in the day or on weekends for interviews.

In selecting candidates to interview, I wanted a good longitudinal cross-section of program members. My main consideration for participants was to find individuals at different stages in their academic/professional careers. I selected recent participants and also those who graduated from the program within the previous two years. I did not consider age, race, ethnicity, or gender. Details of participants' age, race, class, and gender emerged during data collection;

however, my main research goal was to focus on how the Forward Program impacted individuals' lives.

I interviewed four current Forward participants (i.e., students currently in the program or from the last year's cohort), four former participants at different stages in their careers, three staff members, and one faculty member. I recorded interviews using my cellular phone and used a commercial transcription company to transcribe audio data within one day of the interview to ensure the timeliness of the research. I stored all transcriptions and recordings on my personal laptop computer, which is password-protected and locked in my office when it is not with me. To protect the identities of participants, I assigned pseudonyms.

To obtain meaningful data, I asked probing questions to elicit thoughtful responses from the participants. Such questions asked for meaning, examples, and descriptions of feelings and emotions. I avoided questions that could be answered with *yes*, *no*, or short answers (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). Successful interviews should sound like a conversation, but it was important that I give the speaker my full attention (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). I was older than many of the student participants and was careful to treat students as experts on their own success. For the interviews, especially those with faculty and staff, I remained adaptive in my data collection and allowed them to explore and investigate new ideas.

I devised a system of coding to analyze the data, paying special attention to issues of finances, family, and mentorship. I tried to anticipate different themes that could emerge from the data. Before the interviews, I made a list of concepts that I might encounter during the interviews, focus groups, and archival data analysis based on my review of literature. The list included concepts within Tinto's work (e.g., connections to an institution and stages of academic resilience) (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 1975, 1993). I also considered the community

cultural wealth model, which includes various types of cultural capital that Latinx students bring to the institutional setting to assist them in graduating (Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). This form of initial coding was provisional coding; I grouped ideas during initial coding while building on previous research and investigations (Saldaña, 2009).

Coding is the process of organizing data into categories (Creswell, 2003). According to Bogdan and Biklen (2003), “developing a list of coding categories after the data have been collected and you are ready to mechanically sort them is...a crucial step in data analysis” (p. 161). Researchers have different approaches to initial coding (Saldaña, 2009). Creswell (2003) recommended beginning with a smaller number of codes during the first analysis. Bogdan and Biklen (2003) described a more detailed process of coding that includes many more codes and category groups. My initial rubric included 12 codes based on concepts that I found in the literature (see Appendix C). The initial coding was divided into three groups, Tinto’s Persistence Theory concepts, Yosso’s Cultural Wealth Model concepts which emerged from the literature, including family and finance

After receiving the typed transcriptions, I listened to recordings and made changes to transcriptions to accurately reflect the interview data. I then printed a copy of the transcript. Using my coding rubric, I began looking for concepts and circled and underlined anything that looked interesting while adding codes in the margins (Saldaña, 2009). I used blue ink for the initial notes and coding and wrote memos including my observations to describe the interviews and my initial reactions to the data. In my initial analytic memos, I considered data from throughout the study and noted patterns in the research. After completing all the interviews, I reread them with the knowledge of the collected data.

During my second cycle of analysis, I specifically looked for distinct themes across all data. For interviews, I used green ink to find patterns and themes. Provisional coding provided me with a strategy to consider the theoretical frameworks and secondary coding revealed true themes in the data. This was a process of pattern coding (Saldaña, 2009). I began data collection by interviewing three staff members and one faculty member who had intimate knowledge of the Forward Program. This provided the opportunity to collect valuable data about the history of the program and to ask for access to documents or written information about the program for later evaluation. While interviewing other participants, I conducted two focus group meetings with incoming Forward students who started the program three weeks prior and with students who completed the program in prior years.

Focus Groups

One-on-one interviews provide individuals with opportunities to privately share insights; focus groups allow individuals to respond to the comments and perspectives of group members. Focus group participant may expand on ideas that they took for granted or failed to mention during personal interviews (Merriam, 2009). Like interviews, I recorded the focus group interviews using my cellular phone, I then sent my recording to a transcription service and upon receiving transcription, I completed the same provisional coding rubric that I used with the interviews to discover patterns.

The first major hurdle to planning the focus group was to find a time that was convenient for students who had different schedules and very busy lives. WCSU established a *university hour* during the middle of the day on Tuesdays and Thursdays with no classes so that students can participate in clubs and activities. I used this time for focus groups because all new Forward

students attended Tuesday/Thursday classes. This time was also convenient for participants who recently finished the Forward Program and were in their last year of studies.

To promote the focus groups, I received permission to speak to all new Forward students during a special workshop that the program required them to attend. I sent a recruitment email to all participants to advertise the focus group meeting. This was the only lunchtime for many participants who had five classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays; therefore, I offered the incentive of free pizza. This was a positive deciding factor for the students to participate. During both focus group sessions, I had between 10 and 15 participants. Almost all participants were current students and came late.

During the focus group, I collected data from many students. Participants had opportunities to expand on the comments of others and explore their experiences in the context of others. I wanted to learn more about the impact of the Forward Program on individuals' lives or their expectations of its impact on their lives. Therefore, this forum contributed to the collection of rich data that emphasized the importance of a sense of collectiveness for students.

Observation

Another important component of the Forward Program is a special curriculum with Latinx themes. To comprehensively review the Forward Program, I observed special cohort classes. Merriam (2009) stated that "observation is a major means of collecting data in qualitative research. It offers a firsthand account of the situation under study, and when combined with interviewing and document analysis, allows for a holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated" (p. 137). Observations provided excellent opportunities to witness student/faculty interaction and the academic lives of current participants. Observation

permitted me to briefly experience a component of the Forward Program in what Wolcott (2009) referred to as one of the three key categories of qualitative research representation: experiencing. The other two are enquiring (interviewing) and examining (archival research) (Wolcott, 2009). I initially thought observations would be the easiest to schedule because class times were regular and set and the initial difficulty surprised me.

During each fall term, all Forward students take a Latinx Studies course that meets upper division general education requirements and a special seminar course that provides study and coping skills. Because there are two cohorts, I observed the same two Latinx Studies courses taught by two different professors. Like the students within the Forward Program, instructors were very busy and it was challenging to schedule the observations and get in touch with them. A full-time tenured associate professor taught one of the sections and an adjunct assistant professor taught the other. I contacted both instructors by email. The full-time instructor immediately responded and asked me to contact her again in two weeks when she was less busy. The second instructor responded after three messages. I initially wondered if this indicated a lack of interest in the study. I was very persistent and observed a class with both instructors. In conversation, both were very supportive of the research.

During the day of the both observations, I arrived to class a few minutes early to remind the instructor of the observation and confirm she/he would still allow it. I asked where to sit in the room. I took handwritten notes about the class. The same day, I wrote a memo describing my experiences and observations of the class and interactions. After the second observation, I revisited the write-ups of the first classroom observation and wrote a memo comparing and contrasting the two classes.

Archival Data

In addition to experiencing the program through observation and enquiring into the perspectives of participants through interviews and focus groups, I collected data via the examination of documents (Wolcott, 2009). According to Coffey (2014) “If we wish to understand how organizations and social settings operate and how people work with/in them, then it makes sense to consider social actors’ various activities as authors and audiences of documents” (p. 368). Various documents regarding the creation of the Forward Program and its recruitment process exist. These documents include initial memos, interdepartmental correspondence, program reports, and promotional materials. There is also program data from WCSU regarding graduation rates of Forward Program participants. Graduation and persistence rates are data that organizations use to determine program effectiveness (Merriam, 2009).

According to Marshall and Rossman (2016), “to propose gathering and analyzing documents or archival records should be linked to the research questions developed in the conceptual framework for the study” (p. 165). Understanding the impact of the Forward Program on student participants was the focus of my analysis. When examining memos and lengthier documents, I used my initial coding rubric to search for any concepts that were similar to data from the other collection methods. I examined seven different memos and reports as well as promotional and recruitment materials. For program data, I considered student impact and implications of graduation rates. Factors such as author and audience influenced my analysis of the documents. I reviewed patterns in the documents, similar to ideas in the other data.

Ethical Concerns and Potential Risks

Within the parameters the IRBs approved, I asked participants to divulge personal information about their lives and educational experiences. Participants made evaluative comments about the Forward Program, which may be incongruent with the opinions of faculty, staff, and other students. All information was and will be confidential; I protected all identities. Any participant who felt uncomfortable with the research had the right to withdraw from participation immediately and without hesitation. I did not work directly with the administrators or students of the Forward Program and did not have a position of power in this group.

To gain valuable information, I needed participants to share their honest opinions, which could result in some discomfort. I carefully protected participants from any harm and avoided any type of deception during the data collection process. My goal was to keep all risks to a minimum and protect the privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

Benefits

To all participants in the study, I explained that participation in this project would contribute to the body of knowledge regarding solutions to one of the greatest problems facing higher education today (i.e., low college graduation rates among Latinx students). Participants provided personal insights into the issue in a safe, non-threatening environment. I listened to their experiences and shared some of the challenges of being a modern university student. The risks were very low and all participants were volunteers throughout the data collection process.

Summary

The Latinx population in the United States continues to grow; however, few Latinx students obtain university degrees compared to other racial and ethnic groups. This achievement gap has serious implications for higher education in the future. Researchers closely examined the achievement gap and the possible reasons for secondary dropouts, but few researchers focused on possible solutions to the problem (Hemphill & Vanneman, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2006). In this study, I closely examined a program that increases Latinx student graduation rates at a post-secondary institution of higher learning.

This research was a study of a bounded case; therefore, a case study was the ideal method to explore the program while providing a voice for a group of Latinx students. In this case study, I carefully examined this program via collection of different forms of data (e.g., personal interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents). The use of multiple forms of data contributed to a deeper understanding of this program and resulted in recommendations of ways to improve low university graduation rates of Latinx youth in California.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The data in this chapter reflects responses to interviews with 12 individual participants in the Forward Program, two structured focus group meetings, two classroom observations, and archival data from the institution. Students who entered the Forward Program endured many challenges and used their cultural capital to persevere. The program data regarding participants' persistence and graduation rates indicated that the Forward Program increased graduation rates especially and decreased the time it takes to graduate compared to non-Forward Program students.

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Forward Program on students' lives. Findings indicated that the program significantly enhanced students' university experiences. This chapter begins with details of the findings regarding themes of participants' data from interview and focus groups and includes an examination of the graduation rates of the participants. Three major themes emerged from the data (see Table 4) and will be described in detail in this chapter.

Table 4 *Themes Developed from the Research Study*

Themes	Theme assertions
The Forward Program was integral to participants' sense of academic success	Structures in program facilitated navigation of the institution. Students entered the program with high aspirations of graduation and career ambitions. Students faced many challenges and obstacles but entered the university with various forms of social wealth capital.
Participants had a strong positive attachment to the Forward Program and the university	Students felt institution was concerned about them. Students indicated that the institution had shared values. Students participated in activities.
Participants felt that fellow classmates, staff, and faculty members in the Forward Program provided family-like support that was lacking from their own family members.	Strong sense of family among participants.

Discovery of Theme

To begin data analysis, I decided on an analytic strategy. According to Yin (2014), one effective strategy is to “follow the theoretical propositions that lead to your case study” (p. 135). With this in mind, my initial coding of data included a search for examples of themes from Tinto (1993) and Yosso (2005). I created a coding bank with codes that aligned with the two frameworks based on the provisional coding process. This process is very useful for many types of qualitative study; however, a common error is to find data specifically based on preconceptions or

expectations (Saldaña, 2009). I was careful to avoid this pitfall and remained open to new ideas. I looked for examples of the theories; however, I underlined or circled any words that conveyed meaningful statements.

After completing data collection, I had an interesting discovery. Despite my expectations, I did not find examples of Tinto's (1993) stages of resilience or several codes from Yosso's (2005) work. Therefore, I reviewed the data with a different approach. For secondary coding, I used the pattern approach (Saldaña, 2009) to determine whether certain concepts and ideas matched. I explored any new ideas and concepts that appeared as well as social networks and patterns of human relationships. This approach allowed me to examine the data from a different perspective and I found emergent themes that differed from my original expectations. I began to really see how passionate the participants were in their experiences. I saw clear patterns where participants indicated feelings of gratitude, aspiration, and frustration over past experiences.

Participants

One of the most striking revelations of this study was the level of determination of Forward students to graduate and enter the workforce. Their tenacity was remarkable and inspiring. During interviews, I was moved by the challenges and obstacles many participants overcame. Table 5 lists the interview participants' demographic details and majors.

Table 5 Interview Participants

Participant	Racial Identity	Age	Major	Or Position
Anna	Latina	26	Health Sciences	
Juan	Multiracial	27	Anthropology	
Jennifer	Chicana	27	Engineering	
Marcia	Chicana	31	Health Sciences	
Cindy	Mexicana	28	Health Sciences	
David	Chicano	36	English	
Jessica	Mexican-American	23	Sociology	
Serge	Mexican	24	Sociology	
Teresa	Chicana	41		Administrator
Lisa	Puerto Rican	?		Administrator
Elena	Hispanic	60		Faculty Member
Miguel	Hispanic	44		Administrator

I did not learn as much about the backgrounds of participants in the focus groups as I did from personal interviews due to time limitations. During focus groups, several participants arrived late and two participants left early. All interview participants identified as Latinx; one focus group participant noted that she was not Latinx, but Filipino and Turkish. During classroom observations, both classes gave group presentations during my visit. In both cases, I was extremely impressed by the students' consideration for their classmates; they provided positive reinforcement for each other. There was a strong sense of collegiality and mutual respect among students and instructors.

Forward and Academic Success

One theme that clearly emerged from the data was that participants felt the Forward Program was integral to their academic success. The students overcame many obstacles and had a great sense of self-efficacy that participation in the Forward Program enhanced. Participants entered the Forward Program with various forms of community wealth capital that Yosso (2005) described; the program accentuated and celebrated the capital they brought with them. Students indicated major hurdles during their academic careers and said the Forward Program helped them counter some challenges. Within the data, I found patterns that I termed *gratitude* (i.e., the students expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the program). Participants formed a strong community that guided them through the travails of university study.

Most students shared that they joined the Forward Program because they wanted to graduate within two years and the program would help them do so. Joining the program was fairly simple; they completed an application that included essay questions and provided references (see Appendix B). Administrators recruit students for the program at community colleges and during student orientation. Students indicated in their application essay how the program could assist them with their academic success. The program's goal to increase the likelihood of graduation was apparent to students before they entered the program due to the recruitment materials for the program.

During interviews, students described the positive impact the program had on their academic careers. The practicalities of the program (e.g., taking required courses during the first year, meeting with advisors to create an academic plan to graduate) were some of the reasons for student success. Students also provided descriptive explanations of ways that emotional support from members of the Forward Program compelled them to strive to succeed and graduate.

I really excelled here at [WCSU]. The [Forward] program definitely saved my life as a student, and I needed that extra push, and I needed that support. I feel without the [Forward] program I wouldn't have, necessarily, I would have graduated, but maybe not as fast as I would have liked. (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

Juan and his classmates passionately described ways the program provided them with motivation to graduate and begin their careers. Forward students entered WCSU with different forms of social capital and the Forward Program assisted in their process to graduate. Marcia was a student who entered the Forward Program during the second cohort. She had a history of entering college and dropping out. She described how she attended three different schools and took seven years to complete community college. She said that the Forward Program changed her whole perspective on higher education and she even became involved in campus life.

Long story short, by the end of the program, I graduated. And I graduated within the amount of time that I should have, and that they had set up. My grades were, significantly better, than when I entered. Just everything about Forward, makes you feel good. And I wasn't one of those students that came on to the campus and was like, wanting to be involved with people, or even talk to people. Or go in my classes and make friends. I'm so not that person. (Marcia, interview, August 27, 2018)

Not only did Marcia graduate within two years, she also went on to earn her Master's degree at WCSU just after her undergraduate graduation. Throughout her studies, Marcia maintained various part-time jobs, even during her time at WCSU she had three part-time jobs working more than 40 hours per week. She attributed her graduation with a bachelor's degree within two years to Forward.

Positivity in the Program – Classroom Observation

The student participants in the interviews and the focus groups were extremely positive about the Forward Program. I thought that perhaps their enthusiasm was also a reason that they volunteered to participate in the study. However, I was quite surprised that I found this same enthusiasm when I observed the classes and met the students during the Forward seminar. I observed two sections of a Latinx Studies class that focused on nutrition and health with a special emphasis on pre-Colombian foods found in the Americas.

During my first observation, I arrived early to class and announced my presence to the instructor. I sat quietly as the students arrived, and I felt noticeably out-of-place, as the students seemed very well acquainted with each other as indicated by the warm greetings they had for each other as they arrived. At the beginning of the class, the instructor explained that I would be observing and asked me to explain why I was doing this. I gave a brief introduction just telling them that I was researching the Forward Program and the impact on student participants. After my explanation, one student commented “Forward is the best- it is my family, I can tell you anything you need to know, see me after class.” The students applauded. The instructor added “we all feel very strong” about the Forward Program.

During this classroom observation, a group of 5 students gave a presentation on an article that they all were supposed to read previously. The article was on the unhealthy diets of working class Latinx in the United States. I was very impressed with how encouraging the students were of each other. The student presenters tried to call on all students first by asking questions, then with a class game with audience participation. I noticed that the students were quite engaged and surprisingly not on their cell phones.

Like in the first observation, the second class was also very positive. This class had a more laid back atmosphere. This class also had a group presentation, presenting on an article the state of chicken farms throughout the United States. Many of the students seemed to get into the discussion. The presenters made comprehension checks throughout. The students would all applaud when the answers were correct. Once when a student got the answer wrong, one of the presenters responded “Very close amigo, you may just want to consider...”

I heard more Spanish spoken among several classmates, the instructor also would use Spanish during his discussions. The instructor and two of the presenters also used “hella” as an intensive at least three times during the class. “Hella” is a term that is commonly used by locals of Northern California and for many a way to distinguish those from other regions of California. The instructor used both language and references that the students understood.

In both classes, the atmosphere for the students was both warm and welcoming and very nonthreatening. Both instructors expected the students to fully participate and be prepared for the course. One class seemed more formal, and I later discovered that one of the student participants complained in the interview that he was in the section with the strict instructor who assigned more work and more papers. This student felt that the classes should contain equal work. I also heard from several participants that the course with the so-called strict instructor was life changing and made them look at their own culture differently.

These two sections of the same course are restricted to Forward students, but there are other sections open to the entire university. This class is considered a writing intense course, so the enrollment is capped at 35 students. The Forward sections actually receive a small amount of funding from the Forward Program to supplement the learning with materials and supplies for the class. As food was central to the class, the students actually prepared meals.

Community Cultural Wealth Capital

Yosso (2005) explained that all Latinx students enter higher education with their own social capital, counter to the Bourdieu's (1977) theory that a preferred social capital guides societies and success can be achieved by adopted the preferred forms of social capital. Yosso (2005) argued that Latinx and other people of color have different forms of social capital that are valuable and that these forms of capital create a community of cultural wealth. Students who utilize the community of wealth can resist macro- and mico-forms of oppression and aggression. They overcome adversity and transcend boundaries. During the present study, all students mentioned at least one type of community cultural wealth.

Aspirational capital refers to the aspirations that Latinx students maintain, even when there are great barriers to success. Many Forward students struggled in high school and community college settings but never gave up the dream to finish a university degree and strive for a better career than their parents had.

It's just pretty much the influence of your upbringing. So it's that of falling to conformity, thinking that you are right, you finish school, you got a job, you got a car, you got a house, now start a family. It shouldn't be always like that. If you want to, really to overachieve, and pretty much be the face of your community. Over excel, everything no matter if it's boundaries, obstacles; if you want to achieve it you could achieve it. And it's pretty much the discipline and the determination that we must mentally have within ourselves. (Focus group, September 6, 2018)

A male student from a focus group meeting indicated that he wanted more out life than the manual labor employment of many of his family members and friends. Like this student, Juan also indicated that he always knew he would graduate from college even though his grades in high

school and community college were very low; he said that he never stopped and never gave up his academic aspirations.

My story is powerful, and [to realize] that you really did do a 360 with your life, because it's very unique and rare that that happens. That I [was stuck at] community college especially just repeating more than two years of coursework, and yes I did that. I still think back, how did I do that? I always think about every day, that's so rare anyone to do that. They just drop out. I actually refused to drop out. That's how I knew there was something in me that wanted to succeed because I could've dropped out if I wanted to. But, something kept going back. (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

The Forward Program helped Juan focus his attention to graduate. He and many of the participants indicated that they felt lost in community colleges or prior schools. Juan said he had no initial advising at the community college level and no idea whether he signed up for too many classes or which classes to take. The Forward Program provided him with the structure to focus on graduation.

Many participants expressed a desire to be the first in their families to graduate and have a successful professional career. Each of the interviewees faced hardships and failures; yet, many remained resilient, persisted, and graduated. Family was a frequent topic for the participants. According to Yosso (2005), Latinx students have the wealth of families, both by blood and within the community to assist them with the many challenges that they may face. Several participants indicated that they felt pressure to help family members ; in return, they received help from family.

Also, being the oldest of five, I had to set the bar for my siblings. My parents came from Mexico, so I had to make their sacrifice worth it. It was really stressful setting the bar up and graduating for me. For me, it's stressful. I did graduate already. I'm just finishing up

my courses. I just had a baby too, so it's very hectic. My sisters, they have no excuse to not to get an education. They know. I preached to them so many times. They know our parents sacrificed, left everything behind for us to get, to have a better future. I'm like, "That's the least you can do for your parents." I told them, "You need to get your stuff together and do something with your life. Don't just waste it away. Don't be like those people that just stop at high school and don't do nothing with their lives. At least do something. Don't disappoint our mom and dad. They did a lot for us." Like I tell them, "It's the least you can give back." (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

Jennifer also mentioned the very important role parents played in the life of her Forward classmates and fellow Latinx students:

Honestly, I want to say it goes back to our parents. We need to try to get our parents more involved in their education because regardless who cares how many generations ago, it's always put into our mind, especially women. By the age of 25, you're supposed to be married, have a family and be a housewife. It's like, no. There's way more you can be doing with your life. You don't have to be married. You don't have to do this. It's like somehow, the education just has to also evolve with parents to let them know like, "You want more for your kids," because I've noticed in my small town, everybody's very close-minded over there. At 18, a lot of the girls are already pregnant, or they get married right off the bat. That's it, no education, no nothing more. They're like, "No, this is enough. This was enough for my family." It's like, no. The men, they're supposed to be manly. They're supposed to be making the money for the family. It's like, "You can get an education too and be making more. You don't have to be working out in the field or working so many hours just to provide for your family. You can get an education, get paid more and have to stress less."

To me, it always goes back to family. If your family's not educated, your parents don't try to push you, you're not going to go far. I really feel like it goes back because to me, when I look back at it, if it wasn't for my family pushing me to get an education and then being open, I wouldn't be where I'm at. A lot of families, I noticed, are not like that with this. They lose motivation. (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

The Forward Program provided her with the structure she needed to complete her degree. Jennifer, like Juan, spent over 5 years at a community college. They both indicated a lack of understanding regarding how to navigate the university setting; as first-generation students, they did not know how to plan. Forward Program advising and workshops helped students start planning right away in a positive and encouraging *family-like* environment.

Yosso (2005) also indicated that community can create family capital. In the Forward Program, members use the term *familia* or family. The term was present in every interview and focus group meeting. It was also common in documents associated with the program. The program coordinator, Teresa explains the importance of support.

The thing that kept coming up over and over again is that human connection. That they felt cared for, and looked after, and because of that, felt empowered. So that because they knew someone was looking out for them, they knew there was someone they could ask these questions to, it gave them, the practice of being empowered. So they say, “[Teresa’s] not going to laugh at me, no matter what I ask her, so because I feel comfortable going and talking to her, I’m getting in the habit of going to someone and asking questions.” ...In terms of the, going to faculty office hours, that was a big deal, where they were required to go to office hours for the program and go see the professors that taught our courses. Getting that experience, and doing that, then when it came to their non-[Forward] courses, they

were like, “Okay, well I had to do it for [Elena], so let me go try it over here.” And then finding out that that was the way they were going to get things done and get their questions answered and you know they were feeling empowered. If anything, I would say that the biggest impact that it had, is, because the students felt cared for, and felt like they were comfortable with the folks that were involved with the program, and they knew that we were here to help them, that empowered them to seek that other places, and in other parts, not only in their education but at work, and at other places as well. (Teresa, interview, August 18, 2018)

Several students indicated that they had family support from the Forward Program even when support from their actual parents was not that strong. For example, Serge described how Miguel, one of the Forward advisors, was supportive of him through some difficult situations.

I can remember the first semester that I got here. My dad was kicking my mom out of the house. My mom had nowhere to go. My whole family was calling me to come home. I remember I was rude. I'm not going to come home. I put too much work to leave home so I can do something else. I remember my first semester always thinking of my mom. I was talking to Miguel asking him what should I do? I remember him telling me that your mom has her own life. It's time for you to live your own life. I'm like, wow. He would always have food for thought and always have me thinking. Having someone to check up on you and asking how's your mom. How's it going? How's back home? And stuff like that. It was like, oh you care. You remember. I'm not just a roster on your case for him being a counselor. He got to know me, which was pretty cool. (Serge, interview, August 27, 2018)

I also found the same description of family atmosphere from other student participants. Juan used the term to first introduce the Forward Program and what it meant to him personally.

The first thing to describe the Forward Program is well... very family oriented, and your counselors feel like your family. It's not so much of, "I'm your counselor, you're my student and discuss the bias or statuses." It was more of, "We can speak about whatever we needed to speak about," and I can speak to Teresa if I was having a hard time or else having family challenges, which I did at the time, and I'm able to speak to her outside of this realm of academia. That's, in my opinion, very rare, especially for higher education for these professionals to connect with your students. . (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

Besides taking the required classes for the Forward Program, students are also required to meet with their advisor at least twice a semester. So, for the past few years there have been two full-time counselors that students meet with both during the scheduled required times and also when I want to speak to them. One counselor has the responsibility of outreach and recruitment, the other counselor teaches the weekly workshop/seminar class each week during the first semester. There is also a program coordinator who manages the office and the staff and also assists with planning activities and also meets with the Forward students as needed. The frequent meetings with the students allow them to develop very close connections.

Student participants in the Forward Program frequently mentioned how they navigated the system with help from connections within the program. They considered the Forward Program itself a form of social capital. Participants were proud of their association the Forward Program and often wore Forward t-shirts on campus. They actively recruited students for the program and volunteered time to support the program, including participating in this study. Juan was a past participant of Forward who said that he needed to let everyone know how important the Forward Program was to him and his friends.

The Forward Program is a huge success. Yes. You can see it, and you can see it in the students, being carried to Forward, prophesying. It's like this energy that they carry, and you can see it in their nature when they're in class, when we're in class. It's a certain, a certain culture you learn to take on at that Forward implements in students. Striving to succeed, or we will work hard and we will understand it's not the faculty will take their time, and we'll work on this together as a team and not zoning out. Nobody's questions are stupid. No question is stupid. So, a lot of those foundations. It's a very safe environment. (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

Financial aid is a very important aspect of higher education for Forward students. Most student participants indicated that they received some form of financial aid and that the Forward Program helped them overcome barriers in this office. One student was very proud that she was able to tell a financial aid counselor "I am a Forward student." She felt like she received special treatment. Some participants mentioned that the Forward Program had helpful allies across campus. Several participants indicated that Forward staff members developed positive relationships with several offices. One student said that Forward probably had at least one contact in each office on campus.

Because the thing that I find great about [Forward] is I'll see [Miguel] and [Teresa] around the hallway, and they know people in all these departments. They know people in the first office. They know people in EOP. They know practically everyone on the first and second floor. They know everyone. And that's what I want to see. Because of their connections, I get to know other people too. So when they see me, they're like, "Hey [David]. How's it going?" And it's great to have that feeling of like interaction and getting to know more people outside of the Forward Program. (David, interview, September 4, 2018)

Like social capital, there is navigational capital (i.e., the ability to maneuver within an organization or institution against constraints and difficulties). According to one of the founding faculty members of Forward, even though she worked at WCSU for almost three decades, the concept of creating special programs for students was very new.

[Latinx students] have been very grateful since Forward, because before they would come in as transfers - lost. Before we didn't have anything. So they were still lost and nobody was there to help them. Now we have [Lisa] identified as a transfer person. And also student success - they have other programs that support them. So that has been a big support. So the students, they just love it. They bond, they become like really close and that is what we wanted, a familia, the family, especially with the first gen, they don't know anybody that's ever gone to college, they have no connection to this place. (Elena, interview, August 21, 2018)

The Forward Program helps students graduate by teaching skills to negotiate challenges such as finding the correct courses, interacting with faculty members, finding campus resources, and managing time. One new cohort member indicated that he felt lost before coming to campus; he had no idea what to expect until Forward members guided him. He received new knowledge about navigating the organization and wanted to share it with others.

Well for me a challenge would be just transitioning. Not necessarily like right now, but it was at the beginning like in the summer. I was kind of just like, yeah. I was, how are classes going to be, what I'm going to be? What kind of opportunities are there to go get in? And then luckily I got selected to participate in a summer transfer program, then I learned from attending the Welcome Day. So there was like a whole week where they kind of just gave you, this is what's going on. They kind of introduced you to resources on

campus, so that at the end of that week. I got interested in different situations and thought I should become a president of a club. And then I met other people, then I started doing just that. I'd also tell other people, hey since I'm already informed on this stuff. Hey if other people are struggling, I kind of tell them hey this is where you go, this is what you do, talk to this person. (Focus group, September 7, 2018)

Another important form of community wealth capital is linguistic capital. According to Yosso (2005), many Latinx students come from bilingual backgrounds; knowing multiple languages is a true asset. In the Forward Program, all instruction is in English; however, they sometimes use Spanish, especially in ethnic studies course. Not all Latinx students in the program can speak Spanish; others are native Spanish speakers. Members of the program appreciate and welcome the Spanish language while understanding that English is the language of the institution. Teresa, the coordinator of the Forward Program, informed me that all members of the Forward staff are bilingual and sometimes use Spanish to speak to the local community.

So [our outreach advisor] is completely bilingual. She actually is a double graduate of the campus here...one degree in Spanish, and one in Human Development. Having her as our front-line person that's out in the community, that's out doing outreach and recruitment; it's definitely a benefit that she's bilingual, and that she can speak Spanish in that way. We don't get too many parents, given that it's a transfer student population, but we do get some. And even students themselves, some of them are native Spanish speakers and feel comfortable more in that language, so you'll often come in here and hear Spanish being spoken, just among the staff, or among the students. Just because that's their comfort. In terms of the program itself, and the academics, definitely make sure it's accessible to anyone, as any other class here on campus would be, so they're taught in English. But

definitely, there is the aspect of the language that's here, and that's part of the comfort that we try to build for the students, is having this safe environment where they feel they can codeswitch. And where they're feeling like they can bring their home identity here to their school identity, and kind of marry those two things and have it be a place where they feel like they are comfortable. (Teresa, interview, August 18, 2018)

During classroom observations, I noticed that several students codeswitched, or used both English and Spanish interchangeably, during presentations. Many students used Spanish during the break. The Spanish language was warmly embraced, which contrasted with the experiences that many Latinx students face at the university. In my prior research with Latinx university students in Georgia, I found many incidents of Latinx students feeling that faculty and staff discouraged them from using Spanish. The Forward Program encourages students to embrace their heritage and language.

Issues of Race and Ethnicity

In this study, I examined a group of students who self-identified as an ethnic minority and expected that they might discuss issues of discrimination or racism. Interview participants indicated that they felt very welcome at WCSU and that the campus is diverse and welcoming to all people. However, there were incidents in the past when they felt that race or ethnicity could have been a reason for inequality in treatment. Cindy indicated that her father taught her to expect discrimination but she developed a different opinion.

Yes. I think it's something that my parents kind of taught me wrong that...I think because they're old school, my dad experienced a lot of discrimination so that's something that he taught me to expect and so because of that, I was very reserved about speaking out and like

I said, it doesn't come naturally. Because I'm supposed to expect discrimination. I'm supposed to just live with it and it's okay because that's just what it is and I kind of have changed my mind about that. (Cindy, interview, August 26, 2018)

Cindy said that she was proud to be Mexican, not Mexican-American, and that she always felt comfortable being Mexican at WCSU and within the Forward Program. She also said that she always attended educational institutions that were predominately Latinx but was always reluctant to voice an opinion or question teachers. She said that, within the Forward Program, she felt that everyone wanted her to graduate and that her opinion mattered. She became more outspoken and willing to question injustices that she noticed within her own family.

Jennifer's family background was similar to Cindy's, but her family moved from a diverse urban area to a rural predominately White area when she was in high school. She knew that she wanted to go to a university from a young age; despite her good grades, she never received guidance from teachers or administrators at her high school. She constantly received questions about her heritage at her predominantly White school and said that her high school counselor advised her to go to a community college.

My counselor at the high school. It's like they're really didn't know like, "Oh, what do you do with the student that's undocumented?" I kept battling with them because I told them. They would ask me, "How long have you been in the US?" I'm like, "Well, if you check my grades, I've been here since kindergarten, so obviously, I've been here so many years." I always get the same response. "Well, you don't have an accent." I'm like, "I've been here since I was nine months. Of course, I don't have an accent in Spanish or English." It just felt a little prejudice. They didn't really care. That's how it felt at that school. If you weren't White, they didn't really care...It was a very cultural shock coming from a diverse

area to just mostly Whites, Mexicans and a few other. (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

Students in the Forward Program reported feeling welcomed by fellow students, administrators in the Forward Program, and WCSU in general. The Forward Program provided them with a place to learn more about Latinx themes in a safe environment. They experienced examples of racism or xenophobia in the past, but found the environment of the Forward Program to be very accepting.

Stress of Legal Status

According to the coordinator of the Forward Program, a little over 12% of the students in the program were undocumented. It was clear during interviews that several of students felt vulnerable and experienced challenges (e.g., financial issues or unclear career paths after graduation). Undocumented students frequently expressed gratitude for the Forward Program. The Forward Program staff was knowledgeable of options for undocumented students which include access to scholarships and funds and access to assistance from various non-governmental agencies. They also encouraged and promoted the needs of the undocumented community within the whole institution. For example, the Forward Program staff became responsible for diversity training for issues that undocumented students experience at the university.

I'll say, something a challenge which I can turn out to be motivation is for me personally, I'm a DACA student, and going to work and having a little more less of a resource than born a resident here, it's a challenge because you will always be neglected in certain things. I can't do this; I can't do that, no financial aid for this. And I use it as motivation because that's something, you know what, I'm capable of doing. But it's something a lot of people

are afraid to say. I think it's almost contemporary to society to get brave, to stand out furthermore. And that's why we're here. Because with [Forward] there's the help or you also have like classmates and support staff that will help you through the struggle. And it's just a matter of time, of achieving. (Focus group, interview, September 6, 2018)

Two undocumented participants expressed challenges as DACA students interacting with the financial aid office. Both students complained that the office staff did not seem to understand what to do or what they could do for them.

I always have to tell them, "I'm a DACA recipient, so this is"... They're like, "Oh, okay." It's like we're their guinea pigs because they still don't know a lot. As we're learning, they're learning too. Yes, it could be a little stressful because they're like, "Help me, and you're not helping me." You go back and forth between people. I'm like, "If you can't help me, send me to the main person that knows everything about it so we're not going back and forth." (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

All students who identified as undocumented indicated that they worked 30 or more hours per week to pay for school and living expenses. Forward Program staff helped Forward students get on-campus jobs that were more convenient and accommodating to student schedules. Staff members in the Forward Program were very sensitive to the fact that so many Forward students felt obligated to financially contribute to their families. During advising sessions, staff members emphasized the importance of balance and explained that a bachelor's degree would increase students' earning potential.

According to data from the coordinator of the Forward Program in 2017, students who identified as undocumented, first-generation college students, and students eligible for Pell grants all had lower GPAs than other groups. Undocumented students reported that the Forward Program

made them feel welcome to the university and that their classmates in Forward were very empathetic to their situations. David, a current participant, commented that sometimes he thinks about his challenges during his studies but then realizes that he is not alone and many of his classmates are struggling.

And then when I got to [WCSU], then it's like you meet students that are a part of the DACA program. It's like damn, like they're undocumented and they have it worse than I do, because I hear stories of them saying I had to watch my back, I had to watch over my shoulder, because I don't want ICE to get me. Or I'm trying to do better because my family didn't have any of this coming up. Or my family has gone through this, this and that. And I feel like I'd been a burden and I'm just like, wow, that hits really hard. (David, interview, September 4, 2018)

David, like other Forward students, had great compassion for his fellow classmates. The participants had a strong desire to succeed and also wanted their classmates to succeed. Often times during the interview when David would speak of his challenges, he would also mention that other Forward Program students really had greater struggles to face and that everyone was so grateful to have the Forward Program to support them.

Congruence

One very clear theme from student participants was that they felt passionate about the Forward Program and WCSU. They felt like they belonged at the university; faculty and staff participants also indicated that working with the Forward Program at WCSU was very fulfilling. According to (Tinto, 1993), congruence with an institution leads to greater persistence and higher graduation rates. There were many examples of students feeling connected to the Forward Program

and the university. During interviews and focus groups, most students proudly wore WCSU shirts or sweatshirts. Many past students said that they “loved” their university. According to Juan,

My life would be drastically different if I didn't attend [WCSU] specifically like I said, I love [WCSU] and the [Forward] program. I don't say that to sound cliché; I'm definitely meaningful of that. Because I could have went to [another state university] if I wanted to, it was just down the street from me, but they didn't have a program that catered to what my needs were as a student. My needs were support; I needed extra academic support than the average student needed...I figured I succeeded in [the Forward Program], and this sounds to be even better so why not? That's what attracted me, and I graduated in two years, which is great because now students are going over that mark nowadays. (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

Juan spent over five years at a community college but never felt connected to school until he studied at WCSU. He said that the professors at WCSU understood and encouraged him. He made lifelong friends in the program, both peers and advisors who encouraged him to pursue graduate school. At the time of the interview, Juan was in a graduate program at an elite private university.

Serge was a student from Santa Barbara who was involved in gang activity and abusing drugs during high school. His high school was predominately White, and he felt out of place and struggled to complete his studies. He had a very difficult home life with domestic violence which contributed to his legal troubles. After graduation his mother gave him the ultimatum to either attend college or get a full-time job or attend college. He said he decided to just try college and discovered that when he was not around his friends, he actually enjoyed school. He began

distancing himself from negative influences and decided to attend university further away from home.

I've had a blast here at WCSU. I joined a dance team. I don't know. I have no idea, I won homecoming king last year. I'm in an organization. It's crazy how here at WCSU it's place where I can spread my wings, get to know myself, and learn about myself as a person. I feel like if I would have stayed in Santa Barbara, I would have felt trapped. Or would have felt that I wouldn't be able to express myself like I do here. (Serge, interview, August 27, 2018)

Serge was in his final semester during the interview and he expressed disappointment that he was leaving WCSU- he loved his school so much. He was considering pursuing a Master's degree to remain a part of campus.

Jessica also shared Serge's opinion on WCSU. She went to high school in a very elite predominately White school on California's Central Coast. Her mother actively ensured that she had access to quality high school that would help prepare her to be the first university graduate in her family. She expressed that before coming to WCSU she struggled to express her opinions about education. She recalled that in high school she felt like her opinions were not respected. While she had excellent grades both in high school and community college, she really did not feel comfortable to express her academic curiosity until she came to WCSU.

I feel like WCSU really provides a safe space for people to express themselves. I see the students feel really comfortable and not really being scared to be different ... I mean, from what I have, the time that I've been here, I haven't really seen people judge, just make people feel comfortable enough to express who they really are. So I think WCSU gives students that opportunity to be themselves. I feel like I really have found who, I mean not

completely, but I've found who I really am and more identified myself and just been more comfortable finding myself, as well as having a really good education. (Jessica, interview, August 30, 2018)

Jessica was very positive about WCSU from the very beginning. She also said her mother came with her to Orientation Day and both felt that WCSU was the perfect school to pursue a degree that would lead to a career in criminal justice.

Most student interviewees and focus group members who were past Forward participants were local (i.e., from northern California). Three students who went to high school in the same city as WCSU had negative impressions of the university while they were in high school. After they entered WCSU, they found that the university exceeded their expectations and are now advocates for the school. Anna was a local student who originally wanted to attend a larger university in a larger city; however, she decided to transfer from community college to WCSU because the Forward Program advisor recruited her.

And I want to come here. I love [WCSU] now. Whereas, when I was in high school, [frowning], it was [WCSU] this, [WCSU] that. I love the campus. And I love being an advocate for transfer students. Learning about...I guess, I identify myself only as a transfer student. I know, even though I did go to university campuses after high school, but for me, my identity is as a transfer student. And I love being an ambassador. And as a [Forward] Program Ambassador, I like to help other transfer students. Because I know the resources on campus. We will learn about them at the seminar. We know about the [Learning Center], the [Academic and Career Counseling Center] all these resources. For me, Forward has made everything better. (Anna, interview, August 25, 2018)

Anna was a bit unique in her transfer experience; she attended two different universities before failing out, which forced her to attend community college to improve her grades. At the other institutions, she felt like an outsider and that no one really cared about her. She did not develop strong friendships during her previous studies.

David also indicated that he felt that no one at his community college cared about him or his future. Like Anna, he attended multiple schools (two community colleges) and said that he never quite fit in at the schools. At the first community college, everyone had nice cars and few problems while he struggled to work and get to school. One unique aspect of California is that the CCC is a very plausible route from high school to the prestigious UC system. This fact attracts some students to the UC track (i.e., coursework to enter the UC system). These students may have higher SES or other privilege and enter community colleges in high income areas. David also felt that his instructors at the community college did not care about him as a first-generation Latinx student struggling to make it.

So I graduated high school, went straight into junior college within two months. Went to a junior college close by. It seemed like they didn't quite care about my education because I was being bounced around from counselor to counselor. I had two moments where I argued with a professor, both professors kicked me out of their classes and I wasn't allowed to go back to the class even though I was arguing the fact of how they were teaching only to some of the students. One of them thought, "Oh, well you sit in the back, so you obviously don't want to pay attention in class and what not." The other one, I was trying to show up on time to class, but I didn't have a car at that time. And so I had to resort to like walking to school or taking the bus if I can catch the bus on time. And one day, I showed up one minute late to class, and he closed the door on me, wouldn't let me take the exam. So he

automatically flunked me. Then it got to the point where I was just getting very fed up with school. I dropped out; then I just started jumping around from retail job to retail job.

(David, interview, September 4, 2018)

David said that his negative experiences in community colleges starkly contrasted what he experienced at WCSU. At WCSU, he made lots of friends and knew that his advisors and instructors really cared about him. He said that it was a totally different experience for him.

Just being on this campus [WCSU] is great. I was always like a very open-minded person and hearing what other people have to say and seeing the diversity of things, but going from [Community College] to [WCSU], where it's very diverse and there's a lot of discussions and hearing everyone's point of view, it's refreshing. So you being in with all these caring people and hearing the discussions, having the conversations, and not shying away from criticism or the obscure conversations, it was refreshing to have that. (David, interview, September 4, 2018)

A major strength of the Forward Program is that it meets the needs of different types of students. The three components (teaching, mentoring, and advising) appeal differently to the participants but all students agree that the program meets their personal needs and the needs of their classmates.

Obviously, they want us to graduate, but they also want us to experience university life that fits with us. They encourage us to reach out to different experiences, different clubs and all of that. But at the same time, in a way that it reaches what your definition of success is...If you want to just be completely professional and ignore your family life, then they can show you how to do that in a way but at the same time, if you don't want to do that, they're okay

with that. So I think that's what makes it successful, that it tailors it to the students and what their goals are. (Cindy, interview, August 26, 2018)

Students who completed the Forward Program expressed feeling a great connection to the institution (i.e., congruence with the university). I interviewed a group of the newest Forward cohort for a focus group meeting during the third week of classes as they transitioned into the university. These students did not mention the university as a whole; they focused on the Forward Program. One participant said that he joined the Forward Program to graduate and be a success. I asked him about his definition of success and he explained,

To me, success is not being stuck in the same place as where you are today mentally and to be motivated and wise. With [the Forward Program], I finally feel the program has some very common ideas, because I myself was obsessed back then; four years in high school, two years in community college. I'd see the lack of [successful] Latinos going up, especially for Latino men, going to college and being successful, the majority is always women. Why is the majority women, why? Because we're not motivated. That's why groups like [Forward] inspires; and throughout my time with [Forward] I see all the help of counselors for us, [the cohort system]so that way we can interact with each other, get to know more, get ourselves more opened up, and just for counselors helping us guide through what our major is going to be. And it's not about going right away to what you are intending to do, but a slow pace and moving forward not alone. (Focus group, interview, September 7, 2018)

This student experienced a real change while transitioning from the community college to the university. Making the adjustment can be daunting for any student. Many Forward Program students said that when they first arrived on campus, they noted that Latinx students had Latinx

advisors and professors. For most students, this was a contrast from the community college.

Another male student from a focus group described his experience.

Well, being a Latino it's hard to continue with education. And by seeing programs like this, they motivate you. Because if it wasn't for programs like this, Forward, well pretty much we would just be doing labor work. That's how we're always portrayed. And yeah you know, you want to put that face up and make your community stand out. (Focus group, interview, September 7, 2018)

WCSU prides itself on being non-elitist and made that part of the mission statement and branding of the institution (see Appendix D). Student interview data indicated that they overcame major hurdles to complete their undergraduate degrees and that WCSU offered a common value set they shared. Anna struggled to decide whether to attend WCSU or another CSU institution after graduation from community college. She did not get much assistance from her parents who only told her that she had to live at home. She could commute to several schools from her parents' house. WCSU was the closest, but she thought she should go to a larger school for the prestige of the name. She said that her "gut" was telling her that she really should go to WCSU and she finally decided after consulting with friends.

And one of my friends, my co-worker, he did go to [another CSU], and he said it took him forever to graduate. Because it was really hard to find classes, everything is super impacted. And I think another thing that changed my mentality to not go to [that CSU] was my Puente counselor told me that [CSU school] wasn't...What did she say? They weren't as friendly as...They're not very friendly in this, so you shouldn't go because of that. I don't feel like they're not really friendly to transfer students. Like they don't really cater to transfer students...I don't want to say they're not friendly to Latino students, but something

in that line. She said, Oh they don't do this. I guess her son was trying to go there. She was like, I'm telling him not to go there because they're not a "serving" campus. (Anna, interview, August 25, 2018)

In contrast, she said WCSU was "super friendly" to Latinx students. At first, Anna did not think that would matter to her, but she said it was great to be on a campus where she sees lots of students, faculty, and staff like her. She added that WCSU was friendly to everyone and that the diversity of the campus contributed to her love of the school. She said the campus makes everyone comfortable regardless of background: she added "Asian, Black, White, gay, straight, or transgendered. WCSU not only welcomes differences but celebrates them."

As a Hispanic-serving institution, Tinto's (1993) theory that students prosper at institutions they believe meet their needs and also share their values may be even more relevant. For a group of Latinx students, attending a campus with students, staff, and faculty like themselves may enhance their experiences. Special programs that help students engage with the institution align with Tinto's (1993) findings that students who engage and participate in the institutional programs feel more connected to the school. Many Latinx students in California struggle to graduate from community colleges for a variety of reasons. The Forward Program specifically addresses impediments to graduation by providing counseling and advising to navigate the system and offer emotional support.

Family and the Forward Program

A surprising theme in the data is that many participants felt they lacked encouragement from family members to complete a university degree but felt that the Forward Program provided that "family support." Many student participants were first-generation college students and felt that

their parents did not understand higher education or were unprepared to help their child in any concrete way. Students in the study indicated that the Forward Program creates a family atmosphere that empowers students. Family connections help some students navigate institutions; however, most Forward students indicated that their parents could not help them with higher education. Miguel, a Forward advisor, explained:

Something that comes into conversations a lot is that a lot of them feel that when they go home, they cannot really communicate about their experience in higher education. So they communicate with each other and the support that they are not able to get from home, they get it from here. And not because...and they're very clear that the support they're not getting from home it's not because of there's no support, they just don't know how. Parents don't go to higher education, or they don't understand the system. It's really difficult for them to connect at that level. But again, they have the support but they just don't know how to communicate as far as, "I have all this amount of homework, I have this payment that I have to do, I have to do this internship, I have to do all this stuff that prior to being here, it was not talked about at a community college, you have your GE's, you go to class, somehow it's not as demanding as they have it here." So they do connect in a lot of those conversations as far as how they're navigating and how they're learning about major requirements. They are thinking about opportunities after [WCSU], and how they are going to change their careers from working at Target or Starbucks into something that is really going to be a career, not just the job. (Miguel, August 28, 2018)

Many Forward participants feel they cannot communicate about college with their parents. Cindy said that her parents did not attend her high school graduation or her community college graduation because they were both in English. She believed her parents understood English but that language

was a barrier to their participation in higher education. She felt that there was a great divide in her family, especially her father, regarding her education. The Forward Program addressed the issue of language. Cindy mentioned that before orientation day at WCSU, she visited another nearby campus of a state university.

I don't know if it was because I wasn't reaching out but I felt like the environment [at the other school] wasn't as welcoming. I remember coming to Welcome Day here [at WCSU] and they had one session, one workshop in Spanish which was really cool because until then, my family hadn't understood any about going to college and I hadn't been able to bring them to anything. And seeing that the university had actually tried to reach out was really like great... That was really nice to see that they were trying to do that. (Cindy, interview, August 26, 2018)

Jennifer discovered the Forward Program during the Welcome Day orientation as well. Like Cindy, her parents never really participated in her education even though she really wanted them to. She was pleasantly surprised to learn that Forward had presentations in Spanish.

I wanted my family to come do it, take the tour. I'm like, "They're not going to understand," and I just happen to find it. I was like, "Okay." I sent the information, did the requirements. Then, they had Welcome Day with the outreach advisor who spoke Spanish. She was there, so she set up a booth, the Forward booth. I was talking to her. I was like, "You know what? Yes, I want to get into this. Let me get more involved in my culture, my language, be around people that would understand me better." (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

Participants reported that fellow classmates, staff, and faculty members in the Forward Program provided family-like support that was lacking from their own family members. Most

participants indicated that their family members encouraged them to attend school or were not opposed to attending school, but that working and financially contributing to the family were also important expectations. Many participants indicated that they felt an obligation to encourage other family members to attend college; one participant recruited her younger brother to attend WCSU and the Forward Program. She recommended that her friends and family attend community college and then enter the Forward Program.

My brother is in the class. He's in the new [Forward] cohort because he really needs a lot of guidance. So he is part of the [Forward] program now. And you know my cousins, they are going to apply here and do the [Forward] Program. I always recommend it to people who are going to apply here, transfer students. And I'm also [Forward's] ambassador. So I could just go on and on. (Anna, interview, August 25, 2018)

Throughout the interviews, the term family was frequently used. Students and staff would often say that the participants were family. They took care of one another and each other. Serge indicated that he felt this as soon as he arrived on campus. He moved from Southern California and had no local contacts.

I remember my roommate came here to stop by the office. We were going to go get groceries, but we don't know where to go. I remember Teresa, she was like, oh my husband and I can take you to the grocery store, or to Food Max. Just wait until I get off of work. So, she got off of work and picked us up at our apartment. She took us there. To be honest, that touched my heart. Being far away from home, I felt like I already had a family without them knowing me. I don't know. From then on, it was always smiles when I would come into the office. They would ask me how I'm doing. Miguel being the counselor, he would always stay up to date with me. (Serge, interview, August 27, 2018)

Marcia shared Serge's sentiment about the Forward Program right from the beginning. She spoke of how in her community college she really did not get to know her classmates or participate in any school activities, but with the Forward Program it completely changed her perspective on higher education.

It really was like a, it kind of was an eye opener, almost...Getting to know my Forward Program Family. Well, if I walked on campus, and I didn't know anybody else's story, I under because I relate to that before. But knowing everybody else's story, that I had in my cohort, made it that much more closer. You felt open and comfortable, if you were having a bad day. It'd be like, hey, guys I'm really struggling with either, homework or my job or lack of sleep, or some emotion that you had. You know? There's a lot of people that you had to support emotionally because, they were away from home, or they couldn't deal with a lot of this stuff. And you were, stronger than that other person. You had to be there for them. It's, literally, like an extended family, of brothers and sisters who actually know you can do this, you know? I'm not, my story's not as bad as yours, but I know you can do it. And it was like, cheerleaders, helping along. (Marcia, interview, August 27, 2018)

When describing the Forward Program, the term Family was repeated over and over.

David offered a description of the Forward Program.

It's a very upbeat program. Feels like family, very friendly, great administration, very friendly and approachable counselors. People that actually care about what you're doing in your classes and how you're doing as well as just getting along and getting to know people on the campus. . (David, interview, September 4, 2018)

When interviewees mentioned parents, they often mentioned finances. Some parents were unable to provide guidance regarding how to select which school to attend, except by cost or

location. They did not know how to help students adjust to university or college life. Major issues students reported included the increased volume of studying necessary at WCSU compared to high school and community college and participation in social and professional activities on campus. Some participants indicated that their parents were supportive in different ways. Jennifer indicated that her parents understood that her undocumented status prevented employment opportunities and paid for her studies at community college.

My parents always encouraged us. They've always helped. I mean my parents helped me a lot to pay for it because at that time, I couldn't work. They would pay for my tuition fees, my books. Anything for school-related, they've always been very supportive. My family is very... They're very strict towards me, but they do help me. They motivate me. They know. "Your education is your future, so if," like they said, "If you're not going to go to college, then you're going to work, but it's not going to be working out in McDonald's or anything. You're going to get a good job." I had either/or, and I'm like, "No. I'd rather go to college, get a better-paying job than working somewhere else." (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

In contrast, several participants indicated that they decided to go to college without family encouragement. They saw themselves as doing something that was different. There were few objections from the family; however, participants indicated that there was no strong support to do so and their families felt like there were other successful career or life options that did not require attending an institution of higher learning. For Juan, the decision to go to college was in contrast to his brothers' decisions.

So, growing up, I believe, I come from eight older brothers, I'm the ninth one. I feel like for me there was no obligation to go to school. The reason is because, though a lot of my

brothers didn't go to college, they are successful where they are in life right now, very successful. My deal was, you don't need to go to college to be successful. It's not for everybody. But, for me, I felt always obligated to go to college, as in the first one to make it a norm, as in like, "This is what we do, we get a higher education." So, I learned to assume that role. Growing up I was always more of the nerd. I didn't really have a lot of friends growing up. My brother was the sporting ones. A lot of my brothers were good at sports. I was the one that really didn't want to go out or anything. (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

Further in the interview, Juan admitted that his parents helped him financially but he always worked to help pay for his studies as well. His family was supportive of him being a student; however, he did not feel that his family thought higher education was essential for career success. Juan felt like an outsider in the family, different from his brothers. He said that he found strong encouragement from one of the male Forward Program advisors who encouraged him to go to graduate school after finishing at WCSU. Juan commented that the advisor had a family just like his and that he was like an older brother who had similar thoughts about education.

Several female participants indicated that their parents did not expect them to go to college because of their gender. One participant, Cindy, said her father encouraged her older brother to go to university but expected her to get married and start having children. She said that she was completely fine with this arrangement but then decided that she wanted to get a job and make her own money. She learned that her employment options would be better if she increased her education during a training program.

So higher education was never, as they put it, like a taboo, but I didn't consider it that big of a deal at all because...I mean, it just didn't interest me. And I think as I was going

through high school, I was like, I made up my mind, like you know. Yeah, it's something that I could do if I wanted to but I'm not interested so eh. And I wanted to get a job as soon as I graduated high school and they offered something that's called ROP Regional Occupational Program and I joined it for the medical careers. (Cindy, interview, August 26, 2018)

This vocational program introduced Cindy to the idea that she could get a job that paid good money. She indicated that, through this high school program, she decided to become a nurse. Cindy attended community college first to avoid burdening her family. Her older brother attended a more expensive University of California institution and he dropped out. She said that she did not want her family to pay for an expensive school and let the same thing happen to her, even though she indicated that she was a good student in high school. She admitted that she lacked confidence in her ability to attend higher education and did not receive much positive reinforcement for her education until she joined the Forward Program. In community college, she struggled to care for her nieces, as her family expected, while preparing for her own career. She commented that many of the friends she made in the Forward Program understood the type of family struggles she endured and that friendship in the Forward Program was the family that she needed to finish her college career and graduate. She admitted that, for the first time in her life, she considered graduate study but was afraid to admit this to her father.

Cindy's family situation was not unique. Jennifer said that her parents were very supportive of her studying for college but that many of her female Latinx friends received little encouragement from their families to pursue higher education.

Honestly, I want to say it goes back to our parents. Try to get our parents more involved in their education because regardless who cares how many generations ago, it's always put

into our mind, especially women. By the age of 25, you're supposed to be married, have a family and be a housewife. It's like, no. There's way more you can be doing with your life. You don't have to be married. You don't have to do this. It's like somehow; the education just has to also evolve with parents to let them know like, "You want more for your kids," because I've noticed in my small town, everybody's very close-minded over there. At 18, a lot of the girls are already pregnant, or they get married right off the bat. That's it, no education, no nothing more. They're like, "No, this is enough. This was enough for my family." It's like, no. (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

Like Cindy, Jennifer also dealt with fears of failure and chose to attend community college first because of the financial burden that tuition costs for a university education would put on her family. She had few job options because she was undocumented.

There was no financial aid for me. I didn't qualify for nothing, basically, so not really, because I knew my parents were going to have to pay for that. I was like, "Okay, that's way off-budget. I can't make my parents waste that much." Through JC, it was more affordable, but I knew it could take longer. That's the only difference. For me, JC was mostly an option but I knew, eventually, I'm transferring out. Hopefully, in my mind, it's less money I'm wasting. Luckily, through all that mentality I had, I graduated with no debt. That's a big bonus for me. Everything that I've had to pay out-of-pocket and everything, I've always saved that money for school. I'm very proud that I could say through my parents' help and everything and my money, I graduated with no debt. I'm like, "I'm debt-free, so that money is for me that I will make in the future." (Jennifer, interview, August 27, 2018)

Concerns over finances were common in all the student participant interviews. This relates to the theme of family; some students indicated that they had no financial support from parents.

During a classroom observation, I overheard a conversation between two students during the break that illustrated challenges some students experienced. One student told his classmate that his mother lost her job and he needed to learn how to cut his spending on food to \$20 per week. His classmate responded “that is not enough man, you need to budget more.” The student’s response was “man, I have no choice.”

Students who mentioned that their biggest challenge to university study was time management often experienced this due to working many hours to afford school or support their families. Within the CSU, food insecurity and homelessness is a real problem. Crutchfield and Maguire (2018) found that more than 40% of CSU students were food insecure and over 10% were homeless. These same issues exist among the Forward students.

And when it came to [a college in the Central Valley of California], I think money was my biggest problem. There were times when I went hungry. I would go to sleep hungry, because I didn’t have a car and I didn’t have money. I remember I maxed out my credit card, because I needed to buy food. (Anna, interview, August 25, 2018)

In response to the large number of students living in poverty and going hungry, the student government at WCSU created a food pantry for needy students and sponsored workshops about agencies to find student housing. Affordable housing is an issue for students and their whole family. Lack of affordable housing is a major problem especially in crowded urban areas where ever-increasing populations vie for extant housing. Schuermann (2018) explained:

...the current situation, however, is serious. The western world has never seen as many homeless people as today. Business interests and the right to housing are being played off each other. According to the rules of lawless capitalism, he who makes more money is going to win. The median rent in the San Francisco metropolitan area, for instance,

experienced an increase of more than 10 percent, as compared to the year 2000. Today, the average tenant in that urban area spends at least 42 percent of their income on rent. (p. 1)

As a result of the cost and shortage of housing, many California university students stay at home.

When students have the financial means to support their education, money and employment still play important roles in academic success. According one of the Forward staff members, most Forward students feel compelled to work.

I think a lot of the stereotypical kind of reasons fall into that though. We've heard feedback from students that males, in particular, saying, "I have to work. I have to support my family. My parents say I need a job." Even if they have a full financial aid package, and really don't have to work, they're getting pressure from home to do so because, "you're a man, you're supposed to get a job, and when you get out of high school, you're supposed to be working, contributing to the family." (Teresa, August 18, 2018)

Another Forward staff member commented that the transfer process is complicated but the biggest challenge is that many students come from community colleges where tuition is significantly cheaper. Tuition rates in the CSU are considerably cheaper than many state universities, but the difference is remarkable. The Fall 2018 tuition and fee rates for in-state full-time students at WCSU was \$3,492.00 per semester, compared to \$670 for full-time study for a semester at the community college in the same city. The closest UC institution would be the equivalent of \$6,715 per semester. According to a staff member, students struggle with costs.

I think financially the whole process, and not just for our students, but for the entire population is such a challenging process to understand even for us. As an adviser, there's always something new, there's always something surprising. As a new student, the cost is

considerably higher from what they were paying at a community college...I'm going to pay \$3000, \$6000 extra amount of money. In higher education, we are still towards the lower end of tuition, we think about our UCs, and all sorts of private institutions but \$3000 for a lot of my students is a lot of money. For some students it might not be it, \$3000 for one semester might be doable but for a lot of our students, it's a lot of money...We live in an area that is very expensive, food, housing, transportation. So making sure that they have their needs covered first and then they think about tuition. So financial aid is one of the large challenges. (Miguel, August 28, 2018)

Many Forward students were very critical of the office of financial aid on campus. Students praised WCSU for being supportive but criticized the financial aid office for being inefficient and heartless. Administrators recognized the criticism of the office and made a major change of personnel. However, at the first focus group meeting during the third week of school, two students indicated that they still had no idea if they would receive financial aid for the year and were very concerned. During a presentation of Forward Program students to the university community, all four presenters expressed dissatisfaction with the financial aid process and the lack of empathy for students in need. One student mentioned that she was told that she had financial aid but during the first week of class, she was told in the morning that the office made a mistake and that if she did not pay the university \$2,000 by the end of the day, they would cancel her registration. Another student explained that her parents kicked her out of her home for several months and leaving her to live in her car. Yet, the financial aid office continuously told her that her family made too much money for any assistance. Many participants did not want to get loans and were happy that they were able to study without going into debt.

When my brother decided to go to school, he got scholarships for his first year. But even after that, I think he still had to take out some loans and my parents were not able to help him out at all. So it was something that in the way I was brought up, debt is the worst thing that could ever happen to you. My dad has never bought a car [on credit.] You know those where you have to pay every time? Everything he's bought, he's bought in cash because you just don't owe people and so thinking that I was going to put myself in that situation was not very appealing to me. (Cindy, interview, August 26, 2018)

Money was the deciding factor to enter higher education through community college for all interviewees, but the low cost of community college education also contributed to them staying in school longer. Some participants spent over five years working on an associate's degree. Juan did not tell his parents about failing courses while in community college; he would just repeat them. Finally, he met with a counselor at his community college who told him to focus on fewer classes and improve his attendance. Juan had a pattern of signing up for many classes and stop attending due to boredom because it was "just like high school." He accepted extra hours of work at a small café so he would have an excuse for missing class. After meeting with an advisor, Juan was sitting in a class that he was repeating and he felt inspired.

Money, that's what also motivated me was, "Okay, you're using the little money that your parents had, and you just throw it away." You didn't even go to class. These teachers don't need to be here; you need them. They already graduated, they're trying to help you out, and I didn't want the help. So, it's like wasting mom's money, "Oh, I don't want it." So, that's what really also motivated me at home. (Juan, interview, August 26, 2018)

Finances clearly influenced many students in the Forward Program; however, the program helps students find on-campus jobs and other jobs that work well for students. The Forward

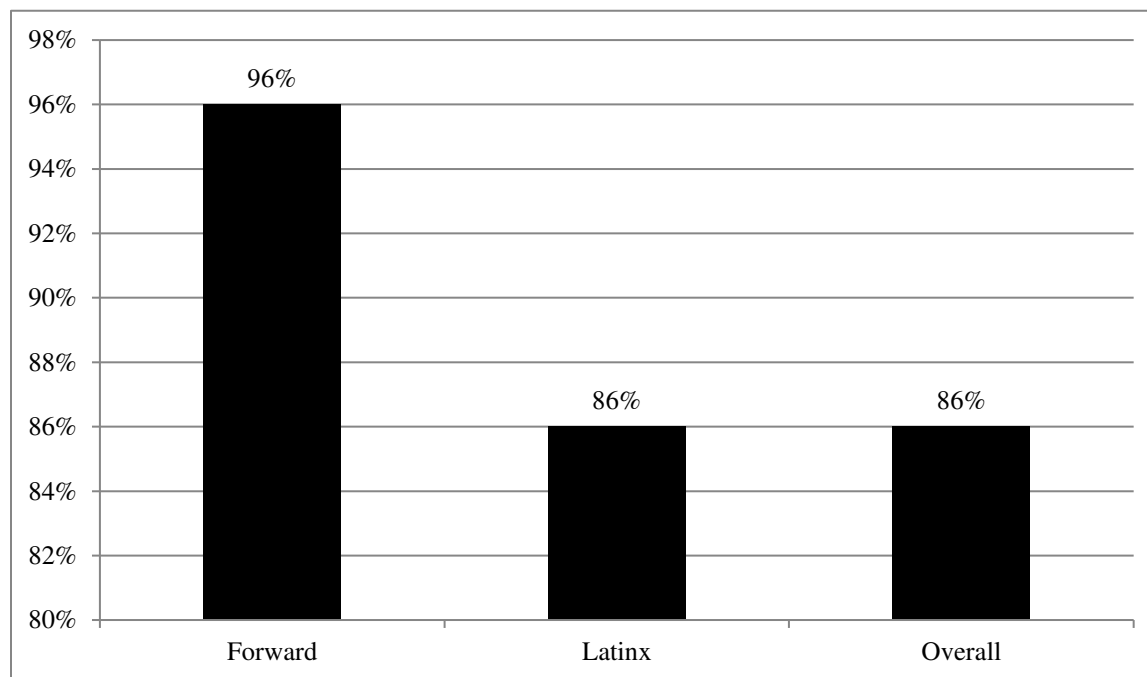
Program also helps participants negotiate the challenges of the financial aid office and other offices on campus such as housing, registrar, and cashier's office.

Program Data

According to memorandums and documents on the Forward Program, the main goal for the program was to help Latinx students graduate. According to WCSU Office of Institutional Research data, Forward Program participants are more likely to return after the first year of studies than the overall number of transfer students of all ethnicities and total Latinx transfer students.

Table 6 shows institutional data of first year retention rates.

Table 6 First-Year Retention Rates Cohorts 2013-2017



The data indicate that the Forward Program increases persistence rates of students. Forward Program development began in 2011 when Latinx transfer student graduation rates were lower than other students at WCSU (see Table 1). Since that time, the graduation rates of Latinx students

improved overall. Graduation rates for Forward Program participants are higher at year two, three, and four than all transfer students and all transfer Latinx students (see Tables 7 and 8).

Table 7 Two-, Three-, Four-, and Five-Year Graduation Rates (Cohorts 2013-2017)

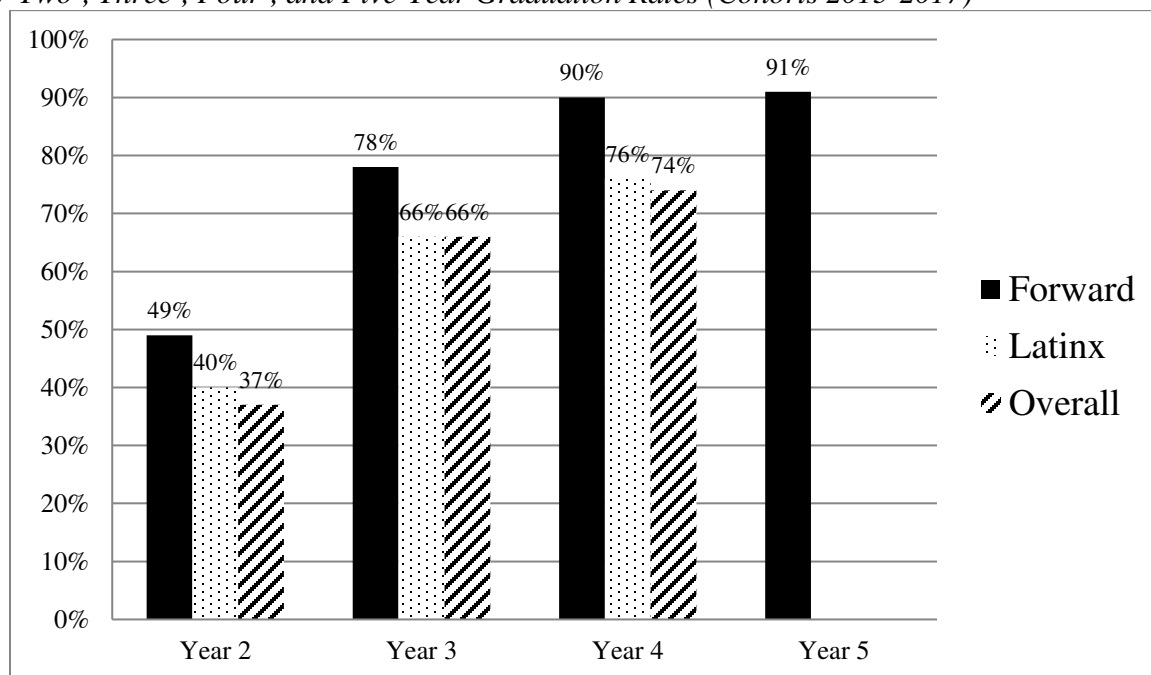
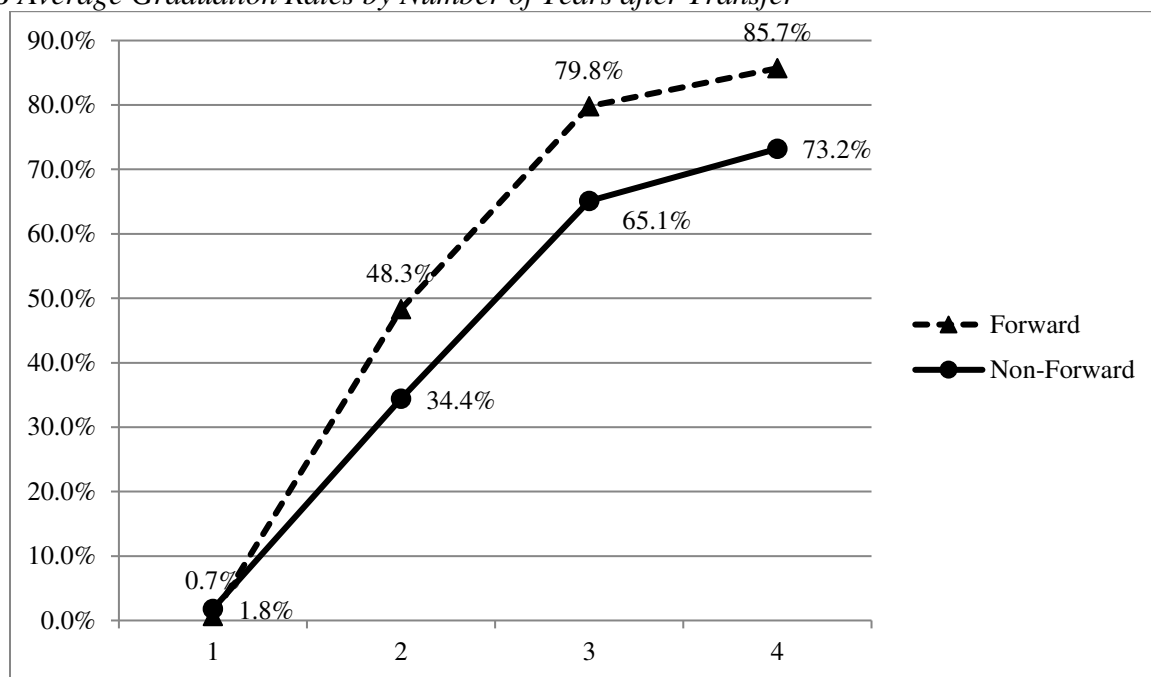


Table 8 Average Graduation Rates by Number of Years after Transfer

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

The purpose of this study was to determine how the Forward Program influenced the lives of a group of Latinx students who attended community college and transferred to WCSU. The Forward Program increased graduation rates for Latinx transfer students. This study goes beyond this statistic to consider more than academic impact. This chapter examines the following research question: In what ways does the Forward Program impact the lives of student participants?

The chapter begins with an interpretation of the data and implications of the findings. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research. To ensure the validity of the research, I collected multiple sources of data via interviews, focus groups, observations, archival records, and quantitative data reports. Data triangulation increases the construct validity of a case study (Yin, 2014). In addition to collection of data from multiple sources, I also examined the data through both Tinto's (1993) persistence theory and Yosso's (2005) community cultural wealth capital model to triangulate the data through two different theories.

Conclusions

From the beginning of the Forward Program, the explicit goal was to increase graduation rates for Latinx transfer students. Every interviewee and most participants from the focus groups indicated that graduation was the main reason they joined the Forward Program and that the program was the reason they graduated or were going to graduate on time. When I probed for additional information about how the Forward Program contributed to graduation, the answers varied. Some participants indicated that appropriate course selection was a challenge at community college and that the Forward Program's curriculum assured they met upper division general

education requirements without negotiating for wait-listed courses. Many student participants took unnecessary courses during their community college which were necessary for graduation of transfer to a four-year university.

All interviewees mentioned that academic counseling was helpful but to different degrees. Some interviewees indicated that the reason they took an excessive number of courses in community college was that they lacked academic advising or were unable to enroll in a required classes so they took other courses to meet full-time status and obtain financial aid. The Forward students were especially satisfied with the individual meetings with advisors/counselors who explained the complicated requirements for graduation and assisted them with navigating the registration process.

Within the CSU, students must complete many lower division and upper division general education classes and take certain *overlay* courses (i.e., courses about diversity, social justice, and sustainability). Students must also take general education courses that also meet American institution requirements (or classes that have been designated as explaining US history, culture, or politics) and English composition requirements; however, they can fulfill these requirements by taking courses in many different departments. These are only some of the complicated aspects of graduation requirements. Forward Program students noted that they had received clear guidance from advisors about courses that meet requirements; typical WCSU students navigate the general education requirements via written explanation and do not work with individual advisors.

For many participants, the sense of community or *familia* was the main factor that they felt contributed to their graduation goals. These students indicated that when they struggled with school and life issues in the past, they quit school or lost focus. In the Forward Program, they had the support of advisors, peer mentors (hermanxs), and fellow cohort classmates. All participants

mentioned the term *family* or *familia*, including faculty and staff. There was a strong support structure to assist students. Many students suffered great challenges during their college careers. Some themes they mentioned included hunger, homelessness, depression, discrimination, racism, and sexism. Another theme expressed by student participants was that their parents could not relate to their educational goals and that the Forward Program provided the support that their families could not provide. Many of these participants were female and indicated that their educational goals were welcomed by their parents but not truly valued because the expectation for them was to get married, have children, and take care of the household. There was also a male student who indicated his parents did not understand why he needed to go to college, because he already had a good job making decent money. I asked all student participants about *success* and they all indicated that success for them included graduating from the university. When I asked if Forward was a success, all participants said yes because the program leads to graduation.

Upon reflection on the data, what truly makes the Forward Program unique is that the participants indicated that everyone involved truly cared about them personally not only as students but as human beings. The Forward Program was developed from the very beginning by faculty and staff who wanted to make a difference in the lives of students. They even volunteered their time and efforts to start the program. The staff and faculty working with the Forward students express a genuine concern for the well-being of the students and this culture of care and nurturing has also carried over to their relationships among the student participants.

Tinto's Persistence Theory

One of the main tenants of the Tinto's (1993) work was that students who feel connected to their school are more likely to persist and graduate. Every student participant in this study

indicated that they had positive attachments to the Forward Program and all students who completed the Forward Program expressed positive sentiments to the university as a whole. Tinto (1993) described three distinct stages that college students experience on their path to graduation: separation, transition, and incorporation. Students who completed the program reported feeling completely integrated into the university and reached the level of incorporation Tinto (1993) described. For newer students, focus group time was short and they discussed few individual stories. It was difficult to determine whether these students experienced characteristics of Tinto's (1993) stages. No students reported feeling isolated by the program or institution, which indicated that students were unlikely to depart.

Students who participated in this study were students who persisted and some graduated. Their strong connection to WCSU aligns with persistence theory. Critics of Tinto often note that persistence theory applies more readily to traditional residential college experiences (Braxton et al., 2001; Braxton et al., 1997). Tinto (1993) included students of different backgrounds and concluded that, statistically, students of color are less likely to persist. According to Tinto (1993), students who experience incongruence with an institution are less likely to persist.

Yosso's Community Cultural Wealth Theory

I examined the Forward Program through the lens of community cultural wealth theory and noted the importance of social interaction and connectedness with the institution. Yosso (2005) assumed that all Latinx students enter higher education with different types of capital that are important and valuable; the capital that the students bring to the community is called the *community cultural wealth*. Latinx students and other students of color use this wealth of cultural

capital to develop and prosper. According to Yosso (2005), it is important to identify and appreciate the capital that students of color have to empower them and for them to persist.

Forward Program students receive permission to enroll in the program based on need. Students who struggled with grades in the past or overcame major challenges have priority. In this study, despite some very difficult hurdles, many participants maintained their hopes and dreams to move beyond their present circumstances. Many students perceived that adults in their past did not believe in their ambitions; however, each of them are on the path to a professional career or graduate school.

The Forward Program validates Latinx culture. All students in the program must take at least one Latino Studies course; however, other required Forward courses may address Latinx themes. When I asked student participants about the curriculum, they immediately mentioned the positive aspects of the one course in Latino Studies. They described learning more about their culture and gaining an appreciation for pre-Columbian history. One participant called the course a “cultural awakening” for him. According to Yosso (2005), storytelling of traditions is an example of linguistic capital.

In the Forward Program, staff members use and appreciate the Spanish language. If students or their parents would like to communicate in Spanish, it is fully acceptable; all advisors and staff members are completely bilingual. First-generation students in the study indicated that having Spanish language support in the program was the first time that their parents could participate in their education since arriving in the United States. Students bring linguistic capital to the program.

Bilingual access to the program involves their parents (i.e., familial capital) which was appreciated by several participants. Familiar support also can lead to greater persistence (Larrotta

& Yamamura, 2011). The term family was commonly referenced by all participants. Yosso defines family wealth capital as support given by actual family members and by non-blood connections that developed family-like bonds. The term family or familia was used by all participants. In fact, the term Forward Family was even used by many of the members instead of Forward Program. The participants indicated that many of the participants would study, socialize and sometimes work together. Even the term for the peer mentorship program was Hermanos/as program which means brothers or sisters in Spanish. Students would refer to their mentor as my brother. This term also extended to program staff members as some participants indicated that the Forward Program advisors were like a big brother or big sister for them. The students indicated that the program staff and peers not only provided information, but the emotional support they needed to succeed

Perhaps one of the most prevalent forms of Yosso's cultural wealth capital found in the data was the evidence of navigational capital. Forward students learn to navigate the institution through interactions with advisors and peers. Yosso goes on to describe that navigational capital for Latinx students includes the navigational through hostile and unfriendly environments. Through the research we can see how some student participants have had to navigate through challenges of a daunting financial aid office and also the complicated system of determining graduation requirements.

Another form of Yosso's wealth capital is aspirational, and clearly this was present in every single student participant that I interviewed. Despite hardships and challenges, all students expressed their desire to maintain their hopes and dreams of getting a bachelor's degree. They also expressed their gratitude for the Forward Program to share their vision for fulfilling this dream.

Implications

An examination of the findings revealed that students' participation in the Forward Program and connection with the university positively influence students' academic and personal lives validating that student participation does have a positive influence on increasing student persistence (Astin, 1985; J. Bean, 1980; J. P. Bean & Metzner, 1985; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 1975, 1993). At the same time, the students' attributes or capital that they brought with them into the program also assist in the transition to university studies (Garcia et al., 2012; Larrotta & Yamamura, 2011; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). The program data indicated that Forward Program participants have higher persistence rates, earn higher GPAs, and graduate sooner than similar non-Forward students. The qualitative data suggest reasons for this success. During interviews, student participants indicate that the Forward Program was a key contributor to their individual resilience and graduation. The student participants also indicated that they had a very strong positive attachment to the Forward Program and WCSU.

The Forward Program received national recognition, awards from professional organizations, and special recognition from the chancellor's office of the CSU. The program positively affected a select group of students within the program, as this study demonstrated. Despite the accolades, the Forward Program still struggles for funding to serve students. Demand for the program continues to increase as the number of Latinx transfer students at WCSU also increases.

During interviews and conversations with staff members in the Forward Program and the office that houses the Forward Program, funding emerged as the largest concern for the future of the program. The director of the Forward Program suggested that a program like Forward should expand to help freshman students. In 2017, WCSU offered another program for Latinx sophomore

students, another group that tends to depart prematurely. The founder of this program was one of the original founders of the Forward Program and has a reputation of acquiring grant money. Yet, she shared the concern for funding of programs for underserved students and suggested more resources come directly from the institution.

Another suggestion from staff members was to bring some Forward Program experiences to students throughout the university. For example, they could assign individual advisors to all students when they arrive rather than relying on students to navigate the system on their own. Another recommendation was to require students participate in workshops and seminars that guide them through university resources and study options.

Suggestions for Further Research

A major limitation of this case study was that I conducted data collection over a short time. The program has only existed for four years; so, further research of the outcomes for students in the future could provide a better understanding of how the program affects participants. Other transfer student programs recently began at WCSU for African-American students and Asian/Pacific Islander students. A comparative study of these programs, which have similar structures to Forward, may provide more comprehensive data regarding benefits of programs for students of color at minority-serving institutions.

This case study only included students who participated in the Forward Program; therefore, I recommend a comparative study of Latinx transfer students who do not join the Forward Program. I recommend a longitudinal study of student involvement and graduation rates. Data collection would be much easier because students are now required to sign up for campus activities online where the data is easier to track. Furthermore, when a student attends a workshop or event,

the university collects attendance information by swiping the student card. Students receive a survey about the event or workshop. Student organizations also keep electronic information about club members. This information is readily available and quantitative data would be easy to obtain by collecting student organizational records.

During this study, various participants mentioned the issue of gender and gender equality. This is one topic that I highly recommend for further research. Some female participants indicated that they felt has their education some female participants noted that they felt that they had to overcome cultural attributions about women's education conflicting with their roles as wife and mother. Several male participants indicated that there were not enough Latinx male role models to promote higher education prior to coming to school.

Summary

This case study of the Forward Program examines how an institution can positively impact the lives of a group of young students. Data from interviews, observations and document analysis all indicate that the program assists with student resilience and graduation. The research study also indicates that the students attributed their graduation or and their ability to graduation within two years to the Forward Program. This study further indicates that student participants felt that both the program and university supported their ambitions to persist, and graduate on time. Thus, this study validated Tinto's finding that congruence leads to greater student persistence or resilience.

Students in the study also entered with different strengths that contributed to the overall community or family in the Forward Program. Students felt that their cultural and social attributions were respected and their insights and fortitude were important aspects in classroom interchange and in interactions with peers, advisors, and faculty members. This finding is

supported by Yosso's community wealth theory which explains how these strengths assist Latinx students with completing their educational goals. Though many student participants experienced great difficulties in their academic journeys, the Forward Program helped them to realize the importance of these experiences in reframing themselves as persistent learners and goal achievers.

In conclusion, this study examined a program to address a persistent problem in public higher education in the state of California, abysmal graduation rates among Latinx students. While the study uncovered many challenges that a certain group of Latinx students had experienced, the research also indicated that many obstacles could be overcome with institutional support structures. Despite the obvious benefits of increased graduation rates, there is also the added benefit of students graduating in less time and reducing overall costs for them individually and for the institution. Without studies like this one, the overall effectiveness of such programs cannot be determined.

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APPEDICES

APPENDIX A

Sample Interview Questions

- How would you describe the Forward Program?
- Describe the process of how you found out about the program and how you joined.
- How would you describe West Coast State University? What would you say to someone like you who may want to come here?
- Describe some of your experiences of being a part of the program.
- What are some of your personal challenges with being a university student and have they been addressed by the Forward Program?

APPENDIX B
Application of Forward Program

NetID **Required**

First name **Required** Last name **Required**

Student email **Required** Preferred email **Required**

Phone **Required** Address **Required**

City State ZIP Code

What are your preferred pronouns? **Required**

Ethnicity **Required**

For multiple ethnicities, separate additional entries with a semicolon (;)

Languages spoken at home **Required**

For multiple languages, separate additional entries with a semicolon (;)

Academic Information

Major **Required**

For multiple majors, separate additional entries with a semicolon (;)

Minor

For multiple minors, separate additional entries with a semicolon (;)

Career goals **Required** *(give a short one-sentence answer)*

GPA **Required**

Community college graduated/transferring from **Required**

Have you ever participated in the Puente Program at your community college? **Required**

Yes No

Puente counselor **Required** (enter 'N/A' if not applicable)

Puente school **Required** (enter 'N/A' if not applicable)

Have you previously attended WCSU? **Required**

Yes No

Indicate last term attended at WCSU **Required**

Colleges and universities attended **Required**

For multiple colleges and universities, separate additional entries with a semicolon (;)

Do either of your parents have a college degree from a four-year university? **Required**

Yes No

Do you feel you may need resources based on your immigrant status? **Required**

(Scholarships for Undocumented Students, Peer Support, Community Referrals)

Yes No Decline to state

Will you be working while attending school? **Required**

Yes No Weekly hours worked **Required**

Have you completed and submitted the 2018-2019 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or California Dream Act Application? **Required**

Yes No Will not submit either application

Essay Questions & Recommender Information

Essay Questions

Instructions: Using Microsoft Word, respond to the following two questions. Your answers should be approximately 300 words each. There are no right or wrong answers. Please be honest and speak from your heart.

- What challenges have you faced and how have you overcome them?
- How can the Forward Program help you achieve success as you transition to WCSU?

Essay attachment **Required**

(empty field)

*Only *.pdf, *.doc, *.docx format(s) accepted. Other formats will not be considered.*

Recommender Information

Instructions: Please identify someone to complete your recommendation form, for example your counselor (Puente, EOPS, etc.), teacher, or someone familiar with your previous academic work or who can comment on your background, experience, capacity to succeed and motivation.

NOTE: One recommendation is required. Once you have submitted your complete application (application form and essay), recommender will receive an email within the next business day.

Recommender name **Required** Preferred contact email **Required**

Phone **Required** Position / Job title **Required**

For multiple positions or job titles, separate additional entries with a semicolon (;)

College / University / Organization **Required**

Statement of Commitment

Instructions: Please read and check the box next to each statement, then e-sign your name and date at the bottom of the page.

If selected to participate, I agree to make a full commitment to the Forward Program at WCSU. This commitment includes the following: **Required**

- Make a commitment to the Forward Program for the first academic year you are enrolled at WCSU
- Agree to be enrolled in two (2) required Forward upper-division GE courses for the Fall semester of your first year, and one (1) required Forward upper-division GE course for the Spring semester of your first year. All Forward GE courses will meet on Tuesdays and Thursdays
- Agree to be enrolled in one (1) Forward Transfer Success Seminar course each semester of your first year, which will meet on either Tuesday or Thursday
- I understand that I will be enrolled in seven (7) units of coursework with Forward Program in the Fall term, and five (5) units of coursework with Forward in the Spring term, only for my first year
- Schedule other classes around Forward commitment
- Attend all class sessions regularly
- Participate in all program-related activities (on- and off-campus)
- Meet with a Forward counselor at least two (2) times per semester
- Regularly meet with a Forward peer mentor

APPENDIX C**Initial Coding Scales****Tinto Stages**

separation	SEP
transition	TRAN
incorporation	INCORP

Incongruence	INCON
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Yosso' s Cultural Wealth Capital

Aspirational Capital	ASP
	CAP
Linguistic Capital	LING
	CAP
Familial Capital	FAM
	CAP
Social Capital	SOC
	CAP
Navigational Capital	NAV
	CAP
Resistance Capital	RES
	CAP

Possible Themes

Family	FAM
Financial	FINC

APPENDIX D

Brand Character Guidelines

People identify with an institution for both logical and emotional reasons. The logical side of the brain says, “This institution fulfills my needs.” The emotional side says, “I like this institution; being associated with it makes me feel good.”

Brand character refers to those attributes that trigger an emotional response and connection: not just “what” we are but “who” we are — our personality.

Here are some words that convey the [WCSU] character:

- Authentic
- Inclusive
- Inquisitive
- Real-World
- Approachable
- Tenacious
- Engaged
- Diverse
- Social
- Enthusiastic

[WCSU] is not:

- ~~Elite~~
- ~~Exclusive~~
- ~~Ivory Tower~~
- ~~Cloistered~~
- ~~Aloof~~
- ~~Theoretical~~
- ~~Brash~~
- ~~Laid Back~~
- ~~Status Conscious~~
- ~~Party School~~