



Implementing an Additive, College Access and Readiness Program for Latina/o High School Students in the U.S.

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In this article we draw on the experiences of a diverse group of 34 first-generation college students, collected over a year, who served as peer mentors to minority and Latina/o high school students enrolled in four Title I (low-income) high schools in the Southwest U.S. The article identifies the successes and challenges of implementing an additive, college access and readiness program that aimed to not only reduce their dropout rates but to increase the number of traditionally underserved minority and Latina/o high school students seeking a post-secondary education. Implications as well as suggestions for further research are provided.

Keywords: college access and readiness; Latina/o students; mentoring; successes and challenges; GO Centers

Increasing the number of culturally and linguistically diverse students in post-secondary education is imperative (Garcia, 2001). In the U.S., for example, Latina/os not only leave the system at higher rates than their mainstream/white counterparts (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009), but statistically they remain the most underachieving group in the nation (Kewal Ramani, Gilbertson, Fox, & Provasnik, 2007; U.S. Department of Labor, 2003). In fact, it is believed that 41% of this population do not have a high school diploma (Fry, 2010), and only 10% of Latina/os aged 24-64 will graduate from four-year institutions (Oseguera et al., 2009). In addition, it is predicted that Latina/os in the 18-24 year old range will be under-represented by 500,000 students in U.S. universities by the middle of the 21st Century (MacDonald, 2004).

While researchers have described the impact of college access and readiness programs for college-bound students (see e.g., Worthy, Hungerford-Kresser, & Hampton, 2009), little is known about programs catered to students who are not perceived by others as college-bound. In other words, these are students who (1) may have not taken college-level or advanced placement classes, (2) may have not considered a post-secondary

education as a viable alternative for a variety of reasons (e.g., finances, family circumstances or needs), and/or (3) may have misconceptions of what seeking a post-secondary education entails, among others. These students often lack the necessary access to information related to college as well as the guidance they need to pursue a post-secondary education.

In this article we describe the initial results of an ongoing qualitative investigation that identifies the successes and challenges of implementing an additive college access and readiness program—one which is aimed at preparing and increasing the number of culturally and linguistically minority high school non-college-bound students seeking a Post-Secondary Education (PSE), with a special emphasis on Latina/o high school students. The program exists at our university as part of the State of Texas' Closing the Gaps Initiative (2010), whose purpose is to increase the number of students seeking a PSE through providing mentoring and assistance to high school students and their families in university-manned offices called GO Centers. More specifically, in this study we draw on the experiences of a culturally and linguistically diverse group of 34 predominantly first-generation college students, collected

over a year, who served as mentors to over 3,600 predominantly Latina/o high school students (2,424 out of 3,600 students) at GO Centers in four Title I (low-income) high schools in the Southwest. As it will be shown later on, an analysis of this program demonstrates the potential effectiveness of additive frameworks in college readiness initiatives for Latina/o high school students, especially when first-generation and minority students themselves act as their mentors. The two research questions that guided this study were:

- (1) What are first-generation college students' perceptions of the successes of implementing a college access and readiness program for minority high school students?
- (2) What are first-generation college students' perceptions of the challenges faced in implementing a college access and readiness program for minority high school students?

Conceptual Framework

One avenue for increasing the numbers of college-ready secondary students is to facilitate college readiness initiatives within schools. These initiatives intend to provide a variety of scaffolds that these future post-secondary students will need to succeed. These programs vary on structure and funding but often begin with students as early as elementary school and continue through high school graduation. Beginning early is considered to be part of the quest towards creating a "Cradle to College" pathway for all learners (U.S. Department of Education, 2010); such a pathway aims to prepare students for college as early on as possible, by putting key individuals, like parents, at the center of the conversation. It is believed that by partnering with others and starting early students will be exposed to a college-going culture beyond that of the school, which will lead to students who are college-ready.

Definitions of college readiness and/or what being college-ready entails abound. One highly used definition is that of Conley (2010) who suggests that college-ready students are those who have the appropriate preparation needed to successfully complete coursework without any necessary institutional scaffolds (e.g., remediation). To this end, Conley (2010) describes four dimensions or areas that these students ought to master to successfully navigate in a post-secondary environment. These four key college readiness dimensions include being able to explicitly use strategies for doing college-level work, mastering the academic content needed in their coursework, exhibiting appropriate academic behaviors, and understanding the college's culture. However, most college readiness definitions, including Conley's, often fail to ignore the very unique experiences of first-generation college students – that is, the experiences of those students who are the first in their families to go to college, just like the mentors in this study. Moreover, as we and others have argued

(Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012; Pascarella et al., 2004), minority and first-generation college students have culturally specific struggles (Oseguera et al., 2009; Solorzano, Villalapando, & Oseguera, 2005) that may support or hinder their success in college such as being expected to tend for their siblings and having to live at home, among others.

As such, a variety of college access and readiness programs and initiatives are available nationwide. Two programs often touted are AVID and GEAR UP. Advancement Via Individual Determination, also known as AVID, aims to equip students with the skills they need to succeed in college and beyond (e.g., Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996); some of these include time management, test-taking and study skills. AVID and initiatives like it are remarkably successful at assisting first-generation college students in their admission to four year universities, in particular. According to AVID (n.d.), three out of four AVID graduates were accepted to four year colleges and universities in 2011-2012. In addition, program evaluation data they have collected have shown that AVID seniors complete four year college entrance requirements at a rate at least two times higher than their peers nationally. The comparative statistics gathered by AVID clearly show an improvement in access for AVID students, who are largely minority and first-generation college students.

However, more often than not, students who participate in initiatives like AVID are considered "college-bound" before they become a part of the program, or at least are considered college "able"—meaning teachers, counselors or other school staff find them to be college material but in need of some assistance and more rigorous coursework. Some of these college-bound students are those who have not only already made the decision to go to a community college or a four year university, but they have been preparing to go to college from early on (Conley, 2010, 2005). In other instances, they might choose to prepare for college later in their secondary careers, but they make that choice (considered "individual determination" in the AVID acronym) and then become a part of the program.

On the other hand, GEAR UP, which stands for "Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs" (Standing, Judkins, Keller, & Westat, 2008; Texas Center for Educational Research, 2012), aims to reach wider groups of students and prepare them to be college-bound. Services with GEAR UP grants start no later than seventh grade and continue through graduation. This cohort model serves an entire grade of students, without selecting a particular group of students like AVID. All students enrolled in the grade level cohort at a particular school receive services, and early research shows a positive impact on students successfully enrolling in PSE. The large scale studies are being released, and they are quick to cite data as preliminary, but positive

correlations are pointed out. It is important to remember that GEAR UP schools serve predominately low-income students, those who typically are far behind their peers in post-secondary applications and access (see e.g., Texas Center for Educational Research, 2012).

With programs like GEAR UP, students are exposed to college and career readiness from an early age, and an attempt is made to change the culture of a school through the saturation of the program in a particular grade level cohort. The program discussed in this manuscript, the GO Centers, is different from GEAR UP, simply because all students within a school containing a GO Center can participate. Any student who wants to receive services can, and the student can receive as much or as little help as he/she chooses.

AVID works to make sure their data is backed up from outside research agencies, and they are also quick to cite statistics that are collected from other research studies. Outside of the large reports, commissioned as part of the awarding of GEAR UP funds, there is little research on the GEAR UP program. Therefore, we would be remiss if we did not point out the fact that research on GEAR UP and AVID is gathered, collected and disseminated largely by the organizations themselves. There has been some outside research (more so on AVID because the GEAR UP project was longitudinal and is still so preliminary), but the work we mention comes predominately from these organizations.

A central tenant in the college access program we facilitate, much like AVID and GEAR UP, is its additive framework. Valenzuela (1999, p. 269) gave substance to the concept of “additive schooling.” She explained:

Most fundamentally, additive schooling is about equalizing opportunity... albeit through a bicultural process. In this world, students do not have to choose between being Mexican or American; they can be both. This pluralistic model of school builds on students’ bicultural experience—which all minority youth bring with them to school—to make them conversant, respectful, and fluent in as many dialects and languages as they can master. The perfect starting point is with those they already possess (or on the verge of already possessing).

While Valenzuela is talking exclusively about Mexican students in the above quotation, her definition of additive schooling is vital to providing quality education for minority students in general, many of them first-generation college students. In addition to the need to be bicultural in a literal sense—American and a home culture included—there is an additional challenge with acquiring academic literacies necessary for navigating a variety of post-secondary opportunities. As Hungerford-Kresser and Amaro-Jiménez (2012) have demonstrated, even when many of these students may have had the college

readiness skills deemed as needed to succeed in higher education, their transition from high school to a PSE can be confounded by culture-specific issues such as having to take care of siblings, living at home with parents, etc. Furthermore, for many of these students, additive schooling is not realized given that many of them are expected to assimilate to the norm, thus leaving their prior experiences, their culture and their languages behind.

As such, no matter how seemingly strong the initiative, whether it is catered to college-bound or non-college-bound students, ignoring the deficit-oriented perspectives that surround these students and their families (Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999) limits their opportunities to pursue a PSE. Examples of deficit perspectives about these students include, for instance, assuming that the latter group will struggle academically more than the former group, assuming that the latter group will not be able to take the “right” classes (e.g., AP or pre-AP courses), and assuming certain students do not need to have access to college-related information because they are not as prepared as their peers, among others. Unfortunately, these deficit perspectives are not only socially constructed, but often are reinforced by those who are the recipients of them (Hungerford-Kresser, 2010; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012; Valencia, 1997). Thus, as it will be shown later, an additive college access and readiness model thus positions these students, and the experiences they and their families bring with them, positively and as part of a redefined mainstream (Moll & González, 2004; Valenzuela, 1999), as opposed to what many Latina/o scholars refer to as “Whitestream” (Urrieta, 2009). As García and Ortiz (2006) point out, in an additive environment,

...educators reject interpretations of student failure that place the responsibility and blame on families and ... appreciates the funds of knowledge among all families, including those with limited resources...These efforts communicate to families that their language and culture are valued, their educational goals for their child are important, and educators are committed to working within the family’s cultural comfort zone. (p. 6)

We believe an additive framework of college access and readiness takes into account first-generation college students and their families’ experiences, perceptions and beliefs, and builds upon all these to create meaningful opportunities for all students to succeed despite other people’s perceptions of their potential, especially for those who have been labeled by their school as being non college-bound.

Methodology

In this study we employed a qualitative, interpretative approach using data collected from 34 first-generation, bilingual college students who participated in

a program that attempted to enact an additive framework towards college access and readiness. As it will be fully detailed next, we draw heavily on their written reflections/personal narratives (see Riessman, 1993), activity logs (e.g., tally of what activities took place at GO Centers) and artifacts to describe some of the successes and challenges experienced when participating in such program.

About the Program, Schools and Mentors

The College Access and Readiness Program described in this article is part of a statewide initiative that aims to increase the number of students seeking a PSE in Texas. The goal of the Closing the Gaps by 2015 Initiative (2010) is to “close educational gaps within Texas and between Texas and other leading states by focusing on the critical areas of participation, success, excellence, and research” (p. i). Increasing the number of Latina/os who not only complete high school but who pursue and complete a post-secondary degree are two critical areas. To do so, Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), including ours, have partnered with local schools to develop GO Centers. These GO Centers are dedicated spaces at high schools where college-level students act as mentors to high school students throughout the year. These spaces include a dedicated or shared classroom, an office space shared with the school’s counselors, and a computer lab, for example. Each GO Center is equipped with several computers, ample workspace and college-related information. A school counselor is designated as the point person or sponsor at each site. The IHE is responsible for manning or providing the personnel (i.e.,

mentors) for the GO Centers as well as for the ongoing training and preparation of the mentors. In keeping with an additive framework, all students, not only those who are considered college-bound by others (e.g., teachers, counselors), visited the GO Centers. Moreover, given that the majority of high school students who visited the GO Centers were not traditionally considered college-bound, the mentors also tutored them in specific subjects such as mathematics and physics to ensure that the students were prepared to successfully take college entrance exams (e.g., SAT) as well as state-mandated, end-of-the-year examinations.

As can be seen in Table 1, all four schools where the program was implemented in the 2009-2010 academic year were considered minority-majority schools; that is, these are schools in which minority groups account for most of the student population. In fact, in all four schools, Latina/os represented the largest group of minority students; at Johnson High School (pseudonym, the same is true of all other names used in the manuscript), Latinos had already become the majority population (see Table 2 for the number of Latina/o students served by classification at the GO Centers). Moreover, the percentage of “at-risk” as well as economically disadvantaged students at each of these sites was over 40%.

In the 2009-2010 academic year, the program had a total of 34 mentors (19 females, 15 males); 29 out of 34 mentors were Latina/os, three were Caucasian, two were African American and one was Asian. All but two of the mentors were first-generation college students. All but one of the mentors was bilingual (i.e., English-Spanish,

Table 1
Demographics of Students in High Schools Served by College Access/Readiness Program

GO Center (pseudonyms)	African American	Latina/o	White	Native American	Asian/Pacific Islander	At-Risk Population	Econ. Disadv.
Tomás HS	14.8%	35.5%	45.7%	0.4%	3.6%	56.5%	43.2%
Guadalupe HS	19.8%	30.9%	44.5%	0.4%	4.4%	54%	42.8%
Sabine HS	19.7%	29.3%	46.6%	0.4%	4.0%	58%	41.8%
Johnson HS	18.7%	49.8%	27.6%	0.4%	3.5%	48.1%	55.8%

Table 2
 Number of Latino High School Students Served per GO Center/School in 2009-2010 Year

GO Center (pseudonyms)	Freshman	Sophomore	Juniors	Seniors	Classification Not Indicated	Total # individual students served per year
El Paso HS	21	29	129	184	26	389
Guadalupe HS	9	47	187	299	39	581
Sabine HS	48	133	169	254	82	686
Johnson HS	*	315	201	207	45	768
* Freshman attend other campus						Total number of Latino students served: 2,424

English-Mandarin, English-French). The mentors were majoring in various disciplines (e.g., mathematics, engineering, nursing) and had different classifications (e.g., sophomore, junior). On average, these mentors worked at one of the four high schools GO Centers for 15 hours every week on average (mentors were not allowed to work more than 19 hours per week due to their student status); the mentors spent a total of 10,567 hours collectively working at their designed high school sites.

Mentors were assigned to a school site/GO Center at the beginning of the year and they remained at their assigned site for the duration of the academic year. Designating a site where to work was based on three aspects: the mentors' availability (e.g., class schedule), the GO Centers' hours of operation, and the mentors' familiarity and personal experience(s) with a specific school site (or not) prior to working for the program. Mentors who had attended one of the local partnering high schools themselves were given priority for placement at those sites as they were already familiar with not only school personnel and students, but with the school's culture. As it will be shown in our findings, doing so also allowed the program to explicitly integrate tenets of an additive framework as the high school students were able to clearly see that being considered college-bound is not (or should not) be predetermined by their socioeconomic status, ethnicity and/or others people's perceptions of these students' potential.

Data Collected

In this paper we draw on written reflections, activity logs, and artifacts collected from the 34 mentors who were part of the program in the 2009-2010 academic year. Each type of data collected is detailed below.

Written Reflections. To collect data for this study, participants were asked to candidly reflect on all the activities carried out at the GO Centers, the successes experienced, and the challenges they confronted on a daily and monthly basis as mentors. All written

reflections, which varied in length from one to two single-spaced pages each, were open-ended and were turned in at the end of every month. At the beginning of the year, mentors were asked to respond to the following prompt when writing their reflections: "How are things going at your GO Center – the good, the not so good and the ugly – and how can we make the program better?" As such, mentors chose what to write about and many did so candidly, which is exactly what we had aimed for. Throughout the year participants were also asked to reflect on the personal, academic and professional gains, if any, they felt they had experienced as a result of participating in the program.

Activity Logs. As part of the program, mentors/participants were asked to report the number of times (frequency) each of them took part in specific tasks at their GO Center site per day. Some of these tasks included providing assistance to the high school students on how to complete financial aid forms (e.g., FAFSA), how to locate and apply to various discipline-specific scholarships, and how to identify students' career interests, among others. These activity logs were used to determine also staffing needs (e.g., how many mentors were present at a given time) and overall student traffic (e.g., how many students visited on a given day). Two types of activity logs were used in the analyses: personal logs and GO Centers' logs. The former provided information about each individual mentor's work at their designated site. These data gave a snapshot of individual performance and tasks carried out while at the GO Center. The latter logs provided a glimpse into all activities carried out by all mentors as well as the overall traffic to the GO Centers; these logs were also critical in determining what types of activities were frequently being done at the campuses, such as the information depicted in Figure 1 of the tasks performed by the mentors at one of the GO Centers, Sabine's High School.

Artifacts. Data were also collected in the form

of artifacts the mentors produced throughout the year as well as items that were of relevance to the work the mentors conducted. Some of these artifacts included flyers and posters they created to advertise the program among the high school students, staff and faculty at each of the sites, thank-you notes the high school students had written for the mentors, and recommendation slips students, counselors and teachers wrote and deposited in a recommendation box at each site throughout the year. All the artifacts, which were converted into an electronic

format (especially those that were only originally in paper), were stored in a shared folder which all mentors and program personnel had access to. Doing so proved beneficial given that a flyer, for example, could be modified to suit the needs of more than one school.

Data Analyses

We used grounded theory and the constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to code all the data for this study. In the first round of analysis each one of us coded the collected data (reflections, logs and artifacts)

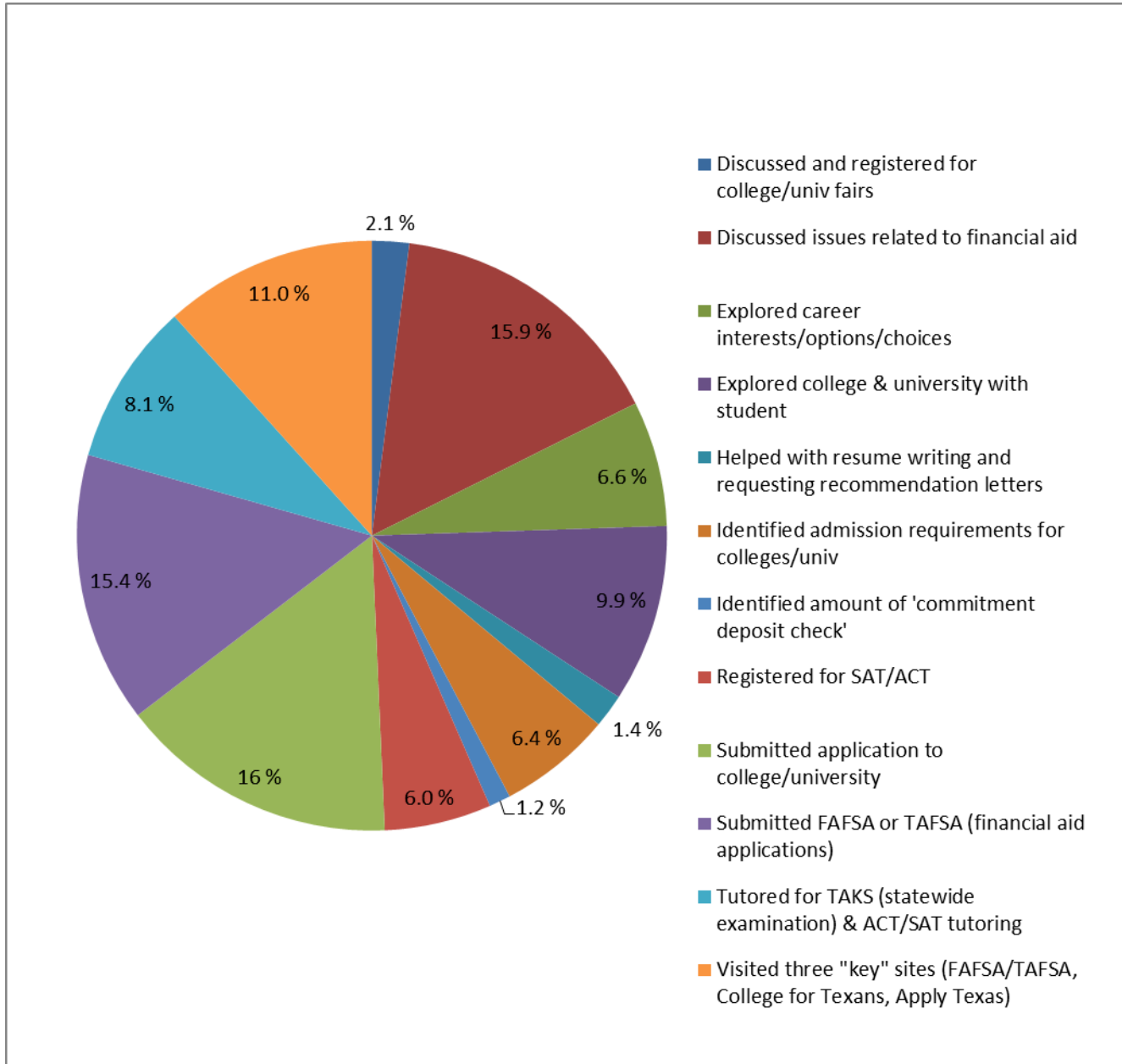


Figure 1. Percentage of Time Spent by Month on College-Related Activities at Sabine's GO Center.

separately and identified grand, emergent themes across the multiple sources of data we were analyzing. Some of these grand themes included challenges mentors faced at their GO Center, rewards that mentors were experiencing overall, and programmatic issues that had to be addressed as part of the program (e.g., lack of staffing at certain times). Once we both had come up with these grand themes independently, we began the process of identifying subthemes and patterns across our individual work (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the second round of analyses we thus discussed our salient themes and found similarities/differences in the coding, and agreed upon categorical descriptions for the main areas of foci for this paper; that is, we focused on the successes that the mentors reported experiencing and the challenges that faced as mentors at the four high schools.

Findings

Successes Experienced. Findings suggest the participants/mentors found the program to be highly successful at reaching its goal of continuing and oftentimes beginning the conversation about the possibility of pursuing a PSE among all students, especially among Latina/o students (Garcia, 2001). One of the two indicators the mentors used to judge the program's effectiveness was the number of unique college applications submitted by the high school students they worked with. These were numbers that were provided by the State and which the mentors had access to throughout the year. For instance, at Sabine High School, only 253 college applications were submitted by the Class of 2009. In the year when the program was first implemented (Class of 2010), however, the number of applications reached 349. Interestingly, even though the mentors were cognizant that an increased number of applications did not imply that more students had been admitted to community colleges or four year institutions, they felt that those numbers were an indication that they had been able to promote a college-going culture at the four high school campuses – the second indicator of their success.

Although working with students of all ethnic backgrounds as well as classifications (e.g., freshman, junior) was part of their duties as mentors, Latina/o students were one of their priorities given that these were the students who, according to school personnel, had the least access to this information outside the school and GO Center. One of the ways in which they were able to increase the number of Latina/o students served at the GO Centers was by creating surveys specific to their classification. As Ana wrote on her reflection for April, the survey for seniors:

...asked simple questions like, "Have you applied to college?" "Do you plan on attending college?" "If you have applied, have you been accepted?" "Have you done the FAFSA?" "Have you filled out scholarships?" "Do you need help with college related items?" Once

these surveys were handout out during classes and filled out, we went through them and pulled the ones marked who looked/asked for help and called them to the GO Center one by one and talked to them and had one-on-one conversations about their future.

Her reflection focuses on a common theme among the mentors. Even the seemingly most basic questions, stated in a simple survey, gave the mentors a starting place for working with these students. They were the impetus for the "one-on-one conversations about their future"—conversations many of these students had never had with anyone outside of their family.

While the surveys were deemed successful, creating a college-going culture at the schools was a challenge at first. Some students like Jaime, a freshman majoring in political science, indicated, "Some students don't even know what to expect when going to college, but after talking to use they see that college is actually a fun part of life; we motivate them to want to go to school more." We highlight Jaime's quotation because it is indicative of the challenges associated with being one of the first to talk with someone about college ("some students don't know what to expect..."), and the mentor's role ("we motivate them...").

Daphne (senior majoring in history) commented that in order to bridge that motivation gap, they had to begin by developing rapport with the students they served and by finding commonalities in their life experiences (Delgado Bernal, Aleman, & Garavito, 2009). This rapport, however, was something they considered had to be nurtured throughout the year, with both interested students and those who at first seemed uninterested in pursuing a PSE. As she stated,

The first few weeks were slow, in that we did not get all of the students to come to ask for help. We began spreading the word about who we are and why we are here by going to various classes, to kind of get a feel of what type of students will need us the most. Two weeks later, we had about 6-10 students on average daily seeking help. We built a relationship with the students so that they would feel more comfortable coming to us and talking about anything college related.

Daphne's comment is indicative of a challenge ("...we did not get all of the students to come and ask for help"), resulting in an ultimate success ("...6-10 students on average daily seeking help"). As Javier, a mentor majoring in anthropology, stated,

Being a mentor is to be a person that will try all to aid students in even the smallest question so that they can possibly achieve great things. Not only a mindless drone that can print off scholarships and hand it to people but to have a kind heart and an open ear so that you can hear

the cries of uncertainty and give them the answers they so desperately seek. To go not only above and beyond to better your team and center but to go settle down so that everyone can share in success of the center. Most importantly to think of others especially the high school students nobody has cared about, no matter who he/she are or what grade level he/she might be in over yourself and your needs a chance to a better future.

Mentors found that building rapport with all students, even for those whose “cries of uncertainty” could be heard from, were imperative to any sort of additive model for working with students. Likewise, understanding that the target population being served at the GO Centers were those who were not necessarily considered college-bound proved to be key in developing the college-going culture they all talked about, because they saw every student as college-able even in cases when the high school students themselves were unsure as to whether going to college was a possibility for them.

There were also high school students who knew they wanted to go to college, but had no idea what that desire entailed. Jim (junior in electrical engineering) and Tatiana (undecided major), experienced that first-hand with many of the students with whom they worked:

A lot of students come in and really want to go to college, but have no idea where to start. Making ourselves available to them and guiding them to the right path really helps them out. It's a great feeling when you help out an individual student and then they come back and grow a greater bond and really get to know their situation and really make a difference. (Jim)

Some of the teachers are realizing that we're open during the times they need us. Their classes come in and check out some colleges. Even the freshmen are starting to pick up what they want to do and all! So excited! More people to go to college! (Tatiana)

Some of the successes of the program are seemingly the most basic—taking the idea of college and making it more of a reality. This is what develops that “bond” Jim writes about. Tatiana's enthusiasm is indicative of the mentors' desire to help and to guide.

The majority of the mentors also spoke about the great potential of developing rapport and the trust needed with the students' families to provide the information they needed to support their children's efforts in going to college. For instance, Javier, a senior majoring in nursing, discussed the profound impact that working with the parents has had on him.

Knowing that the Hispanic community is still in need of help in various subjects - such as financial aid information, career choices,

computer skills, etc. - and knowing that I can assist them in some way just made me cheerful and I would love to help again anytime. I would even do this for free because I just know that there are people in need of help. But what also shocked me was that there are people who want to know more about higher education and have the passion to want their kids to succeed.

Javier, perhaps unknowingly, is discussing one of the most important elements of an additive college readiness program, the inclusion of the family and the value of the home culture of the students participating. We have found it equally important for the mentors to share these experiences, so there will be less “shock” about “people who want to know more about higher education and have the passion to want their kids to succeed.” Research indicates this is the norm, rather than an aberration (Delgado Bernal et al., 2009), and making sure the mentors hear, know, and share these stories goes a long way in making the program successful.

Additionally, mentors attributed part of the success of being able to create a college-going culture to being able to relate to the issues and challenges that the high school students served at the sites. The mentors' unique experiences allowed them to talk from their own experiences to motivate the high school students to stay in school, as many of them had even considered dropping out of school at one point. Some, for example, described how little they knew about financial aid and scholarships back in high school, and how this lack of knowledge had prevented them from attaining the kind of financial support they now know they needed; however, because of their experience as a mentor they are now able to share this information with the high school students who attend the GO Centers. As Miguel mentioned, “When I was in school, I had no idea what the FAFSA was, or how I could get money. I didn't know about the million different scholarships you can get... it was a very hard and stressful process” (reflection, October). In fact, as shown next, the mentors drew on these challenges that they had experienced as high school students to provide advice and support to those students being served. For instance, Juan, a nursing sophomore, commented:

Wow, it's crazy how I can see myself in each of these high school seniors as they all are scared, nervous and above all excited to graduate! I remember ...not caring much about what was going on. I almost didn't make it. I remember with the school year coming to an end, and just feeling there's nothing I can do about it! I now tell them, “you gotta be prepared for the ‘real world’ and cherish the rest of the moments you have... I wish I had done that in high school.”

The program is strengthened by the myriad life experiences represented. It is imperative that the mentors

are willing to share their stories, and when they do, they become powerful narratives for the secondary students in the program. In fact, some of the mentors also discussed how their own struggles as high school students had actually led them to be where they are today and how they were using these skills (in this specific case tutoring) now in their professional careers. As Mariana, who was an undecided major when she started working for the program, described,

I remember doing TAKS [required state-wide examination] in high school. And I especially remember the tough times it had on me and my teachers. I swore to myself I would never become a teacher, due to TAKS. But now, my major is Math Education ... What did I get myself into??!!! I love it. This is what [program] has done for me. LOL!

The students in the public schools still take this exam, and her past struggles culminating in a successful college career is a powerful example for the students she serves. Over and over again, we read reflections connecting past, present, and future educational experiences. Knowing these stories have been shared with secondary students is exciting and once again highlight the impact of integrating one's (in this case the mentors') lived experiences as part of an additive college access and readiness program.

As seen above, the mentors who worked for the program were able to find success in promoting a college-going culture at the sites where they worked. While many believe that starting a conversation with students about their futures was instrumental in their efforts to promote the idea that anyone, regardless of background or perceived potential, can be successful if they are determined to do so, others were able to rely on what they had gone through as high school students themselves to facilitate a college-going culture among all students involved. Doing both proved that enacting an additive framework that sees every student as college-material while facilitating and implementing explicit strategies (e.g., survey) to remove institutional barriers is needed. This is especially the case when, as it will be shown next, the barriers are not only put in place by school administrators (e.g., counselors) but by the students themselves.

Challenges Experienced

Mentors had no difficulty in pointing out the challenges they experienced. Some of these challenges included: (1) having consistent schedules at the GO Centers so the high school students would know which and when the mentors were expected to be there ("I just want people to stick to the program and come when they say they're gonna be here"), (2) being able to have access to concrete resources (e.g., copier) at the campuses to create materials they needed ("It really frustrates me when I need something and can't go and ask for it here and have

to go to the university to get 'em"), and (3) being seen as mentors rather than peers or other high school students ("It makes me mad when the teachers or counselors treat me as if I were another high schooler. I'm not. I'm a college student and they should treat me like one, a professional"). Even though the participants were appreciative of the support they had received from some staff members, especially those who were the designated liaisons at the school, they felt that the greatest challenge or frustration they experienced was the lack of support that was shown by school personnel and teachers at the four campuses. Interestingly, analyses suggest that they were confronted with multiple levels of resistance (Valenzuela, 1999).

One level of resistance stemmed from the teachers who had these high school students in their classrooms. According to the participants, there were two main reasons why some teachers did not feel that sending these students to the GO Centers was worthwhile: (1) these students were not college material and (2) having to spend time on making them get there (e.g., filling out a pass) was actually a waste of their own instructional time. Mentors felt that "they simply didn't care" (Derry, junior in architecture) and "those teachers really thought that these kids didn't have a chance. I was and still am upset about this, because I was one of those kids not long ago" (Marta, junior in education). In other words, the mentors felt that some of the schools were perpetrating a subtractive atmosphere (Valencia, 1997; Valenzuela, 1999). In light of this, the mentors were able to see the importance of the job they were doing. They made plans to help students. Interestingly, mentors spoke about the opportunities they had to create in order to attract those who would otherwise not frequent the GO Center. One of these opportunities involved setting aside tutoring time every day. Pablo, a senior in engineering, commented,

Many (students) now come for help in school work, while others come and talk to us. We have also made "new friends" who love to come to the GO Center. [Name of student] is one of these students. He's a freshman and a really bright young man; he loves to come after school and do his homework. I know that if this center was not here, he might not be doing educational things, as he told us.

Also, the mentors described how some of these challenges they confronted began to disappear as they shared with others what their roles at the schools were and as they also began to search for alternatives to give all the students an opportunity to visit the GO Centers. As Lina explained,

Because some of the teachers didn't want to let them come over, all the mentors here talked to [the principal] to see if he would allow us to sign the permission slips, even if it was just once a month. And yes, he agreed it was a

good thing as long as we had proof of what we had done during that time. So one of the great, phenomenal things, that have happen [sic] at the center is that now students come during lunch and request us to write a permission slip to get out of their elective classes and come the Go center to work on their college applications. It is nice to see how motivated they are on learning and looking forward towards a new chapter into their future, regardless of what the teacher has told them. (Lina, reflection, February)

The mentors were often proactive with administration at schools, like in the above reflection where Lina shares a conversation with a principal. The result was a “great phenomenal thing.” This highlights another important theme that ran through their reflections, taking a challenge and using it as a starting place for a successful change or suggestion in the program.

Other mentor-created, alternative plans for assisting the secondary students have included giving presentations to entire groups of students to reach more students at once, giving information about deadlines for scholarships while holding students to them, and having students complete key tasks during the morning announcements, which is normally “dead time” on campus. One of the mentors even recalled an instance when deadlines were looming and the students were not allowed to “get out of classes.” She wrote:

I worked this month helping students with proofing their essays by email because they weren’t allowed to get out of classes and we needed to get them ready to submit. Plus the deadlines for their scholarships were approaching, so we had to get them done. So, we communicated back and forth using [name of email software used by the district] to get their application ready and we submitted on time. (Teresa, reflection, March)

When there were face-to-face on campus barriers, the mentors used alternative resources, like email, to help students meet their goals and deadlines. This was a common theme in the data.

Interestingly, another level of resistance stemmed from the high school students themselves, as others had told them that they simply could not pursue a PSE (Hungerford-Kresser, 2010; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012; Valencia, 1997). It appeared, to many of the mentors, that the high school students had adopted the negative attitudes about the college-going potential, simply because they had not ever been considered college-bound by the authority figures at school. At the same time, many students were also facing societal barriers, and made many assumptions about their limitations in this country. Josef, a senior majoring in civil engineering, recalled the first time he had the

opportunity to work with John. According to Josef, John had expressed an interest in becoming an engineer yet he was nervous about seeking help and visiting the GO Center, as he explains below:

... as he rocked back and forth in his chair, as he rubbed the sweat off of his hands. He finally gained the courage to tell me what was on his mind as he scooted close to me and whispered in my ear, “The problem is, I’m an illegal alien.” He had been told he would never be able to go to college and would have to spend the rest of his life working small jobs... He felt he could never be the engineer he had always dreamt of being. I immediately comforted him and explained that America still wants to give every student the opportunity to do something great with their lives, how no child is left behind, and how even being an illegal immigrant he had scholarships available for him. The smile that he had on and the way his face lit up after I told him, it was just indescribable... Every day, I come in here, ready and waiting for another student... like John; finding out that everything they ever wanted is truly possible, and all they had to do was come into the Go Center to find out.

John “had been told” what he would never be able to do, and his status as an “illegal alien” (a problematic phrasing on its own), were enough to convince him that he was not going to be able to do what he wanted with his life. His mentor helped him begin asking different questions about his options for his future.

Breaking free from this resistance is an ongoing challenge. However, mentors understand how the path to a PSE can start by simply having a conversation - a frank conversation where mentors are able to listen to others and share their own successes and challenges while drawing on their own personal experiences as first-generation college students (Hungerford-Kresser, 2010; Hungerford-Kresser & Amaro-Jiménez, 2012; Valencia, 1997).

Discussion and Conclusion

It is clear that for any program, there are challenges (Mehan et al., 1996; Texas Center for Educational Research, 2012), and it is important to try and deal with them aggressively and proactively. While it is common for major college readiness programs to study their implementation activities and collect regular data, it is also important to point out both the challenges and successes. For us, this means we can make better programmatic decisions, but it also offers opportunities for other organizations and programs to do similar work, building on what we know works and implementing new strategies to help overcome the challenges. The successes and challenges of our program are hard to separate. Like the narratives of the mentors themselves, they are woven

together and it is difficult to extricate clean pieces. The mentors meet challenges on a daily basis. Thus, they are experiencing the challenges, but are a real part of any success, be it large or small. Even the fact that they feel capable of confronting the challenges that they face in the schools is in itself a success. It is this human element of the program that is the most difficult to analyze, but the most important to discuss.

The literature clearly demonstrates that increasing the number of Latina/o students in PSE is a significant goal, not only because the U.S. and other countries rely on a skilled workforce, but because it is predicted that the number of both Latina/o and minority students will continue to grow until they will become the majority in our schools (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Moreover, students, regardless of ethnicity, will need to possess a college degree (or similar experience) to be competitive and succeed in the future (U.S. Department of Labor, 2003). Thus, understanding the experiences of those who work with these students is vital, as these can help us understand what can be done to facilitate college access and readiness initiatives that can enable all learners, and not just those who are considered college-bound, succeed and pursue a PSE.

The mentors who work for programs like the one being reported here have the difficult, daily conversations with these students. Their reflections and narratives help us understand what the secondary students need. This kind of work is an important first step. There were daily challenges, including scheduling issues and the treatment of mentors by adults on campus, but despite the daily hindrances, mentors could see their roles facilitating change on campuses. In fact, mentors clearly referenced, across the board, an improvement in the college-going culture on these campuses, with a particular focus on the Latina/o and underserved students at the schools. When they described the “why,” it was the additive elements of the program that seemed to be the most effective. For example, including parents in the program and process was highlighted regularly by mentors. Our research certainly indicates that the program is not without its issues, but they are issues worth studying and pursuing. While it supports the work of Delgado Bernal et al. (2009), which demonstrated the positive effects of mentoring, it also expands the work by focusing on partnerships between first-generation college students and underrepresented first-generation minority secondary students. More studies that look at the possibilities among such partnerships are needed. Additive frameworks (Valencia, 1997; Valenzeula, 1999) have the potential to strengthen college readiness programs, and ultimately increase the numbers of Latina/os pursuing a PSE (Oseguera et al., 2009).

We also believe that examining the experiences of those who were considered not to be “college material” and are currently serving as mentors for those in high

schools could potentially lead us to better understanding how to increase others’ opportunities for a PSE in the U.S. and abroad. Likewise, working closely with teachers, counselors and administrators can give us an opportunity to listen to their needs, to identify the (mis)conceptions some of them may hold about the potential (or lack thereof) of their students, and the ways in which they can work together to give all students to opportunity to continue their studies beyond high school. Moreover, allowing for initiatives like the one described here to be implemented in schools can lead to not only an increase in the number of college applications submitted and potentially the number of students pursuing a PSE, but can lead to providing equal opportunities for all learners to accomplish the goals they have set for themselves. In fact, as was shown earlier, many of the students who were served at these GO Centers wanted to pursue a PSE, but they had been told at one point or another they were not college material. Though a program like the one discussed in the article was not available for them when they were in high school, these students were determined to succeed regardless of other people’s perceptions of their potential.

We believe that removing institutional and perception-related barriers and involving those who work with Latina/o and minority students on an on-going basis in initiatives like the one mentioned in this article can help ensure that developing a college-going culture is something that can be achieved from early on. In fact, having the frank conversations about students’ futures and careers ought to start before students begin high school, thus developing and promoting a college-going culture for all children, regardless of who they are and where they come from. Doing so will allow us to re-imagine the promise and potential of these students, the programs created to assist them, and educational research that works to disrupt the policies and politics often saturated with deficit perspectives.

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