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**FOSTERING SUCCESS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST-
GENERATION SCHOLARS PROGRAMS ON LATINX COLLEGE STUDENTS
THROUGHOUT THEIR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY**

by

Lori Salazar

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

June 2024

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TITLE OF DISSERTATION: FOSTERING SUCCESS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE
INFLUENCE OF FIRST-GENERATION SCHOLARS PROGRAMS ON LATINX COLLEGE
STUDENTS THROUGHOUT THEIR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of participation in first-generation scholars programs (FGSPs) on the educational journey of first-generation Latinx college students. The research question guiding this inquiry is: How does participation in FGSPs affect Latinx college students throughout their educational journey? Qualitative research methods were employed to address this question, including in-depth interviews with six Latinx first-generation college students who participated in FGSPs. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify patterns and themes within the data. The findings reveal that participation in FGSPs significantly contributes to Latinx students' academic success, retention, and educational experiences. Key themes emerging from the data included the role of financial assistance in alleviating barriers to education, the importance of mentorship and support networks, the impact of culturally responsive programming, and the long-term benefits of program participation beyond graduation. These findings provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of FGSPs in supporting Latinx college students and highlight areas for program improvement and expansion. The study concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research to further enhance support for Latinx first-generation college students in higher education.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Natalia. Niña, you can achieve your dreams no matter what. Thank you for being my little cheerleader and watching Mommy reach her dreams. I love you so much. - Dr. Mommy

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To anyone reading this, remember that you matter, and just keep swimming. If anyone tells you that you can't, YOU CAN!

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

Growing up as a first-generation Latina in a working-class San Jose home presented challenges and unique experiences. I grappled with the complexities associated with my multi-layered identity—a student of color, a person of color, and a female of color. Each identity—a student, a first-generation scholar, an individual navigating societal norms, and a female—came with unique challenges. As a graduate student, I have deeply reflected on my journey throughout higher education. I was in a diverse institution with many resources during my undergraduate career. Despite this diversity, a sense of belonging did not exist for me, and I experienced an uncomfortable detachment from the campus community. The harsh reality of academic probation was the catalyst that made me realize the importance of seeking assistance and leveraging the available resources.

I was fortunate to have an academic advisor who played a pivotal role in preventing my experience from becoming part of the disheartening statistics on Latinx student retention. This advisor recognized my potential and provided unwavering support during a particularly challenging personal period, marked by my parents' divorce and my brother's transition into his professional life. I was quietly dealing with significant mental health struggles, yet for the first time, someone seemed to understand. Guided by my advisor's support, I consciously decided to retake a semester's worth of classes and engage more actively on campus. That was the turning point—I had found my "home" at the university, where I experienced a long-awaited sense of belonging. I formed meaningful connections with the university staff and took advantage of mental health resources tailored for first-generation Latinas like me. My journey was undoubtedly taxing, but the unwavering support from my advisor and other educators was

instrumental in helping me reframe my college experience. Unfortunately, my story is not unusual for many first-generation Latinx students, who often face unique challenges and obstacles in higher education. Drawing from what we know about first-generation Latinx students' experiences, it becomes evident that access to supportive mentors and resources through first-generation scholars programs significantly affects their college experience and success.

Despite witnessing an unprecedented enrollment of first-generation Latinx students in colleges and universities, their graduation rates must be at least 15% (Pew Research Center, 2018). This number suggests that the path from college admission to graduation remains a challenging journey for many first-generation Latinx students, indicating a struggle for higher education institutions to sustain their progress (Bean, 1980; Cabrera et al., 1992; Strauss & Volkweign, 2004; Tinto, 1987). In response, specific colleges and universities—such as Santa Clara University, California State University-San Marcos, San Jose State University, UC Berkeley, Colorado State, and others—have taken proactive steps to create first-generation scholars programs. First-generation scholars programs are initiatives or support systems designed to assist students who are the first in their families to attend college. These programs aim to address the unique challenges and barriers faced by first-generation students and provide them with resources, guidance, and mentorship to succeed academically (Ward et al., 2012). The ultimate goal of first-generation scholars programs is to increase retention, graduation rates, and overall success among first-generation college students by addressing their specific needs and helping them overcome any barriers they may face in pursuing higher education (Ward et al., 2012). My study addresses these goals, the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on

Latinx students, and issues of retention for Latinx students using Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention and Validation Theory by Rendón (1994).

Statement of the Problem

The Latinx population in the United States is rising and is currently the most significant and fastest-growing ethnic group. In a profile of the U.S. Latino population, UCLA stated the following:

The U.S. Latino population reached 62.5 million in 2021, accounting for 19% of the U.S. population—up from 13% in 2000. Since then, Latinos have been the largest contributor to U.S. population growth, accounting for 54%. By 2060, the Latino population is projected to increase to 111.2 million, or 28% of the U.S. population. (Zong, 2022)

Despite this demographic reality, Latinx students remain among the lowest ethnic groups in terms of pursuing and completing higher education degrees (Batista et al., 2018). When it comes to pursuing advanced degrees, particularly doctoral degrees, the underrepresentation of Latinx students becomes even more apparent. Only 7% of all doctoral degree recipients are Latinx, with Latina students representing just 2.7% of all new doctors (Vasquez-Guignard, 2010).

Additionally, 45.3% of Hispanic or Latino graduates earn 12.2% bachelor's degrees; 12.3% of Hispanic or Latino graduates earn 8% of master's degrees (Bouchrika, 2023).

Although there has been a substantial rise in Latinx student enrollment in higher education institutions, such as a notable 203% increase between 1993 and 2003, Latinx students still face difficulties in obtaining four-year degrees, as highlighted in studies by Fry (2002), Krogstad (2015), and Salinas (2017). These studies present that only about half of first-generation students complete a bachelor's degree. They also highlighted that among Latinx ages 25 to 29, only 15% have a bachelor's degree or higher compared to 22% of African Americans,

41% of Whites, and 63% of Asians (Pew Research Center, 2016). A study by the Pew Research Center (2016) showed that although Latinx are enrolled at higher rates than other racial/ethnic groups, their retention rates and degree completion rates are much lower.

In addition, first-generation Latinx students, who are often the trailblazers in their families seeking higher education, experience the lowest rates of graduation compared to their first-generation peers from other racial backgrounds (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017). According to Ryan and Bauman (2016), Latinx students exhibit lower educational achievement rates across all levels, including secondary education and advanced postsecondary degrees, when compared to other racial groups. These findings underline the numerous challenges that many first-generation Latinx students encounter on their educational journey, often due to limited resources, lack of institutional support, and inadequate preparation for the demands of higher education (Ryan & Bauman, 2016).

Moreover, Latinx students frequently encounter microaggressions from their peers, staff, and professors, which further exacerbate their experiences of marginalization and hinder their sense of belonging in the academic environment (Sánchez-Connally, 2018). These subtle yet harmful acts of discrimination and bias can have a profound impact on Latinx students' self-esteem, academic performance, and overall well-being. Compounding the challenges Latinx students face is the stigma associated with seeking counseling or mental health support. Due to cultural norms and misconceptions, many Latinx students may feel reluctant to seek help for their mental health concerns, leading to their needs going unnoticed and unaddressed. This further underscores the need for culturally sensitive and inclusive support services that effectively address the unique challenges Latinx students face in higher education.

Latinx students rarely see themselves represented by their teachers and administrators (Redding, 2019). This lack of representation has significant implications for their educational experiences and opportunities. In their publication, *Si, Se Puede! Yes, We Can: Latinas in School*, Ginorio and Huston (2001) noted, “Latinas attending colleges and universities are not likely to encounter Latinas in the faculty.” According to Gay (2000), students can derive advantages when assigned to a teacher of their racial background, provided that both students and teachers share comparable perspectives on racial or ethnic identity. The potential for positive outcomes is heightened when these perspectives manifest as elevated expectations for student achievement, enhanced teaching methods, and more robust student-teacher connections.

This disparity in educational attainment points to systemic barriers and challenges faced by Latinx students that hinder their progress as well as their ability to reach their full potential. Hurtado et al. (2007) explored the key factors that affect the college transition of underrepresented minority students. The study found that concerns about college financing, negotiating family support and responsibilities, and navigating campus racial dynamics (perceived and behavioral) influence students’ adjustment and sense of belonging in the first year. These concerns and challenges were particularly evident among Latinx first-generation students and continue to require focused programming and resources.

Given these significant barriers and obstacles, it is evident that dedicated support and resources are crucial to empowering Latinx students to succeed in higher education and pursue advanced degrees. This includes fostering a diverse and inclusive faculty body that reflects the student population, implementing an inclusive curriculum that incorporates the voices and experiences of Latinx communities, and establishing support programs and services specifically tailored to the needs of Latinx students. By providing the necessary resources and opportunities,

we can help Latinx students overcome these challenges and ensure equal access to educational opportunities and pathways to success.

Purpose of the Study

This study showcases how participation in first-generation scholars programs affects Latinx college students throughout their educational journey. The impacts of these programs on Latinx students should be brought to the forefront of academic discourse. This is to justify the continued presence of these initiatives on college campuses and argue for their expansion in light of the growing first-generation Latinx population across the country. Limited research focuses on the retention of first-generation Latinx students, and even fewer studies have delved into the direct influences of first-generation scholars programs on this demographic. As someone who missed out on these programs during my own undergraduate studies—and as someone who now serves as an instructor for a FGSP—I can attest first-hand to the transformative benefits these programs offer. We need a concerted effort to fill these research gaps, illuminating the crucial role these programs play in shaping the academic journey and success of Latinx students.

Research Question

- 1) How does participation in first-generation scholars programs affect Latinx college students throughout their educational journey?

Significance of the Study

As Delbanco (2012) stated, “The knowledge of the past helps us to think critically about the present” (p. 33). From this perspective, acknowledging the history of higher education is essential for assessment, as it allows educators to think critically and analyze how we started, where we currently are, and where we need to go for higher education to remain impactful, valued, and successful. Altbach (1999) explained that universities contribute significantly to

society beyond teaching and offering degrees. Now more than ever, employers seek students' involvement beyond the classroom, internship experience, and their ability to apply knowledge to the "real world."

Upon thoroughly exploring the historical context of American higher education, coupled with (a) understanding the systemic, programmatic, and daily challenges students encounter and (b) drawing from my own journey in college, my study concentrated on how FGSPs influence Latinx students in higher education. In response to the increased Latinx population nationwide, we urgently need to strategically shift our national attention towards Latinx students. Although first-generation scholars programs aren't exclusively designed for Latinx students, these students constitute more than one-third of the beneficiaries of these initiatives (Roman, 2020). For instance, the New Jersey Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) was established in 1967, directly responding to the summer's racial unrest in Newark (OSHE, 2020). Civil rights protesters called for the increased admission of minority students in universities. This program set the stage for subsequent initiatives, and it is nationally recognized as a successful state-supported effort to widen higher education access for low-income, first-generation students who have exhibited dedication, motivation, and the potential to thrive in the state (OSHE, 2020).

This study provides a comprehensive report on the role and effectiveness of first-generation scholars programs for Latinx college students. The significance of collecting and evaluating comprehensive data in the successful implementation of any program cannot be overstated. However, the need for more data capturing and analysis about the experiences and outcomes of Latinx students presents a barrier to assessing the effectiveness of first-generation scholars programs (NASPA, 2021). This study addresses this gap through the collection of narratives and the presentation of its findings. Examining both short-term and long-term impacts

is crucial to ensuring that these programs continue to serve as practical tools for promoting college access and success among Latinx students, as emphasized in Pascarella's (2001) work.

Key Terms and Definitions

The following terms were utilized in this study, and their definitions are provided and referenced within this research:

- First-generation college student: This refers to a student whose parents did not obtain a degree from a four-year university and have limited or no postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).
- First-generation scholars programs (FGSPs): These programs are specifically designed for first-generation college students to support their transition into higher education. FGSPs often target first-year students to help them navigate the challenges they may encounter during their college journey. FGSP and FGSPs are used as acronyms.
- Latinx: This term encompasses individuals born in, raised in, or descended from Latin American countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Cuba, and Puerto Rico (Cerdá-Lizarraga, 2015). The term "Latinx" is used as a gender-inclusive alternative to "Latino" and "Latina" (Scharron del Rio & Aja, 2020). "Latinx" and "Hispanic" are occasionally employed interchangeably, contingent upon the reference source.
- Retention: Maintaining enrollment at the university over each consecutive year (Cabrera et al., 2013).
- Sense of belonging: This concept is linked to academic motivation, success, and persistence. It refers to the degree to which an individual feels valued, accepted, and needed by others (Vaccaro & Newman, 2016). It plays a crucial role in students' overall well-being and academic engagement.

This study ensures that readers comprehensively understand the critical concepts under investigation by providing explicit definitions and references for these terms. These definitions establish a shared understanding and lay the foundation for the research analysis and discussions.

Theoretical Framework

In my research, I utilized the Model of Student Retention proposed by Vincent Tinto (1993) and Validation Theory by Laura I. Rendón (1994). Vincent Tinto's framework provides a comprehensive view of student retention by considering the multifaceted environmental conditions of students in college. As per Tinto's model, a student's decision to leave college is often the result of a complex influence between individual characteristics and the extent of their academic, social, and environmental integration within their educational institution. According to Tinto's model, four types of personal experiences influence students to withdraw from postsecondary education: adjustment struggles; academic difficulty; incongruence with the institution's culture; and feelings of isolation.

Tinto's (1993) model pays special attention to students from minority backgrounds and delves into potential reasons they might decide to leave their university studies prematurely. With this theoretical underpinning, I explored the role of first-generation scholars programs in helping Latinx students navigate the academic, social, and environmental challenges in their college journey. More specifically, I examined if participation in these programs promotes better retention of Latinx students by facilitating their integration into the institution and making them feel more supported and engaged. This study showcases that for first-generation Latinx students, their participation in FGSPs positively impacts their retention while providing many short and long-term benefits.

It is essential to address that Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention has faced critiques that argue that its simplicity oversimplifies the many factors affecting attrition, particularly by focusing on academic and social integration and neglecting diverse student challenges (Baird, 2000). It also overlooks external influences like economic pressures and family obligations. The model's cross-cultural applicability and fit in different institutions are questioned, especially for non-traditional and underrepresented students (Baird, 2000). These critiques were considered when using Tinto's model in diverse educational contexts. This is why a second theoretical framework is paired in this study with an assets-based lens, Validation Theory.

The second theoretical framework I utilized is Laura Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory. Validation Theory holds particular significance for first-generation Latinx students and those enrolled in first-generation scholars programs. These students often face unique challenges and barriers when entering higher education, making validation principles even more crucial for their success. For first-generation Latinx students who might be navigating the unfamiliar terrain of college without the guidance of family members who have previously attended higher education institutions, the concept of validation addresses their specific needs (Rendón, 1994). The proactive and supportive approach advocated by Validation Theory aligns with the reality that these students might not have the same access to information or resources as their peers from more privileged backgrounds. By actively reaching out to these students, though, educators can bridge the gap and offer assistance, encouragement, and support essential for their academic and personal growth. As the theory emphasizes, affirming their existing knowledge and potential for success can counter feelings of imposter syndrome and empower these students to believe in their capabilities as learners (Rendón, 1994). This can be particularly crucial in building their

confidence and motivation to excel, enhancing their likelihood of persisting in college despite the challenges they may encounter.

Validation Theory resonates deeply with students enrolled in first-generation scholars programs. These programs are designed to provide targeted support for first-generation students, recognizing their unique needs and challenges. The theory's emphasis on the continuous and ongoing nature of validation aligns with the structure of such programs, which typically offer sustained support throughout a student's college journey (Rendón, 1994). These programs validate students' experiences and backgrounds by providing proactive assistance and fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth. The theory outlines that academic validation is particularly relevant within these programs (Rendón, 1994). Integrating diverse perspectives into the curriculum and recognizing the value of students' existing knowledge can reinforce the idea that these students' contributions are vital and valued within the academic community.

The utilization of Vincent Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention and Laura Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory provides a powerful analytical approach to delve into the multifaceted realm of student retention, with a specific focus on the experiences of Latinx students participating in first-generation scholars programs. Tinto's model underscores the intricate interplay between individual attributes and institutional environments in influencing students' decisions to continue their educational journeys. Through the lens of Validation Theory, these programs intentionally affirm nontraditional students' unique identities and potential, providing them with the support and tools necessary for academic success.

By examining the role of these programs through the lenses of both Tinto and Rendón, this research highlighted how participation in first-generation scholars programs can address the specific challenges Latinx students face on their college journeys. Tinto's (1993) model

identifies the key factors influencing retention, and when applied to Latinx students, it underscores the significance of factors such as academic integration, social engagement, and cultural unity. In parallel, Validation Theory's emphasis on intentional validation and affirmation resonates strongly with the goals of first-generation scholars programs, which aim to create a supportive environment that acknowledges and empowers the unique experiences of Latinx students.

Through my research, I illuminated how first-generation scholars programs can positively impact Latinx student retention rates by enhancing academic and social integration, providing mentorship, and offering tailored support services. By embracing the principles of Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention and Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory, institutions can create an inclusive educational environment that acknowledges the challenges Latinx students face and actively nurtures their growth, leading to improved retention rates and better long-term outcomes.

Organization of the Study

This study comprises five chapters that comprehensively analyze the effects of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. Chapter One serves as an introduction, outlining the study's research question, purpose, and significance. Chapter Two reviews relevant literature to establish a foundation for the analysis and theoretical framework. Chapter Three describes the methodology, including research design and data collection methods. Chapter Four presents the findings, analyzing the collected data and identifying key themes. Chapter Five concludes the study by interpreting the findings, connecting them to the existing literature, and providing stakeholder recommendations. This organizational structure ensures a comprehensive topic exploration, yielding meaningful insights for the field.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Background of Latinx Students

Latinx students are the largest and fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in higher education in the United States. The Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) produced the 2023 Higher Education and HSIs Facts and presented the following data:

Hispanic enrollment in higher education is expected to exceed 4.0 million students by 2026, surpassing the growth rate of any other racial-ethnic group—by over 10%. The percentage of STEM degrees conferred to Hispanic students rose from 9.2% to 15.2% between 2009 and 2020. (HACU, 2023)

Despite the growth in their enrollment, they continue to face significant barriers to success. Demographically, Latinx students are generally young and culturally diverse, with a high percentage being first-generation college students. A study by Redford and Hoyer (2018) found that approximately 36% of Latinx students in higher education were under 25, and over 50% were first-generation college students. Latinx students are also disproportionately low-income, with around 50% coming from families with an annual income of less than \$50,000, according to the College Board (2016). Thus, while the enrollment numbers of Latinx students in higher education institutions are promising, their unique demographic attributes—coupled with systemic socio-economic challenges—underscore the need for tailored strategies and interventions to ensure their success and break the cycle of educational disparity.

Luna (2013) stated that Latinx students are also more likely to work while attending college, which can impact their ability to persist and graduate. They also face challenges related to language, cultural differences, and lack of support from their families and communities (Luna, 2013). Academic under-preparation, financial stress, familial obligations, and institutional

marginalization can all impact the experiences of Latinx students in higher education (Torres et al., 2006). Familial support is an essential factor in understanding the experiences of Latinx college students. According to Torres (2004) and Torres et al. (2006), most Latinx students receive parental support to pursue a college education. Yet when asked if their parents understand what their life is like in college, most students say “no.” This lack of understanding from parents creates a unique situation for Latinx college students, who must balance cultural expectations at home with those in the college environment (Torres, 2004; Torres et al., 2006). Conclusively, addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Latinx students—which include academic preparation, financial burdens, familial obligations, institutional marginalization, and the difficult balancing act between cultural expectations and the college environment—is critical in enhancing their college experience, promoting their persistence, and ultimately, fostering their successful graduation.

Sub-populations of Latinx Students

The Latinx community, with its diverse cultural, socioeconomic, and linguistic backgrounds, presents a variety of experiences and challenges when it comes to higher education, particularly for those enrolled in first-generation scholars programs. Given this diversity, research focusing on specific sub-populations within the Latinx community is critically needed (Delgado & Gasman, 2016). Such research can highlight disparities in college access, success rates, academic performance, and resource access among different Latinx groups and provide insights on ensuring equal college success opportunities for all.

By concentrating on specific sub-populations, researchers can develop tailored interventions and support services suited to the unique needs of different Latinx groups. Research can reveal distinct challenges and barriers faced by various Latinx sub-groups and

guide the development of practical solutions. For example, Latinx students from low-income backgrounds may require additional aid in college application navigation and financial assistance access, while English language-learning Latinx students might need additional support for language skill enhancement and academic performance (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2015).

This focused research not only assists in addressing disparities and devising tailored interventions but also enriches our understanding of diverse experiences within the Latinx community. The knowledge garnered can inform policy and practices to better support these students and their success in college. Hence, it is paramount to prioritize and invest in research targeting specific Latinx subpopulations, ensuring that all Latinx students have equal opportunities to succeed in higher education.

Barriers and Challenges Faced by Latinx Students

Latinx students in higher education face many obstacles, including financial constraints, language difficulties, cultural differences, and lack of support, which can negatively impact their persistence and graduation rates (Covarrubias, 2021). Moreover, these barriers are often magnified for low-income, first-generation Latinx students who are navigating the cultural norms of institutions still primarily reflecting dominant groups such as White, upper middle-class, and continuing-generation individuals. The overlooked cultural values of these students often force them into a dilemma between supporting their families and excelling academically, underscoring the need for an investment in their families and themselves to foster a diverse workforce and future leadership (Covarrubias, 2021). Therefore, recognizing and addressing these unique hurdles that Latinx students confront in higher education is essential to bridge the opportunity gap and pave the way for their academic success and future leadership roles, thereby enriching the societal fabric with diversity and inclusivity.

Studies reveal that Latinx first-generation college students typically exhibit lower levels of self-confidence and academic expectations and often have lower GPAs during their first semester (Douglas & Attewell, 2014; Gershenfeld et al., 2016; Haktanir et al., 2018; Unverferth et al., 2012). Racism and discrimination add to these challenges, affecting their academic success and well-being (Sims et al., 2020). Sims et al. (2020) found violence exposure and a sense of belonging to be significantly associated with psychological distress in Latina undergraduate students, emphasizing the importance of addressing cultural erasure and investing in further research on the impact of belongingness.

Critical Support for Latinx Students

Promoting educational equity demands an intricate understanding of the needs of all students, including the rapidly growing Latinx community in the United States. As this demographic rapidly evolves, evaluating the effectiveness of programs specifically designed to support them becomes increasingly imperative, ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources (Loveland, 2018). By 2025, Latinos are projected to constitute approximately one-fifth of all U.S. college students. Their success is significant for them and the country's competitiveness in the global economy. The gaps in programmatic planning and execution can be addressed effectively through the contributions of first-generation scholars programs, thereby promoting equity and rectifying disparities in academic achievement within the community (Costello et al., 2018; Davis, 2010; Yao & Kang, 2017).

Improving the academic outcomes of Latinx students, a demographic historically subjected to educational challenges, is crucial to fostering equity. Hagedorn and Villalpando (2012) revealed the positive influence of support programs for first-generation college students, particularly those from underrepresented minority groups, on their academic outcomes. These

support programs encompass various services, including mentoring, tutoring, academic advising, financial assistance, and leadership and career development programs. They provide invaluable insights into practical strategies for enhancing educational outcomes, allowing for the continuous refinement of programs and policies, leading to better outcomes for Latinx students (Hagedorn & Villalpando, 2012). Therefore, educational institutions need to invest in these programs and create supportive learning environments that cater to the unique needs of Latinx students, thus enhancing their academic success and working towards the overarching goal of educational equity.

Culturally responsive education plays an integral role in advancing equity for Latinx students. Research indicates that incorporating culturally relevant content and teaching methodologies can enhance academic outcomes, engagement, and motivation (Muñiz, 2019). Therefore, educators and researchers must focus on programs incorporating culturally responsive education to bolster academic outcomes for Latinx students. Simultaneously, ineffective or harmful programs should be replaced with more effective strategies, guaranteeing optimal support for Latinx students and promoting educational equity.

Cultural competency is also critical in promoting equity for Latinx students. Culturally responsive practices and teaching strategies can help educators build a more inclusive learning environment that resonates better with Latinx students. Crespo and Johnson (2013) pointed out that bilingual education and language support services can enhance the academic success and overall educational outcomes of Latinx students. By acknowledging the significance of language and culture in education, we can develop an educational system that respects and supports the diverse backgrounds of all students. Furthermore, integrating cultural competency into education goes beyond promoting academic achievement. It nurtures a sense of belonging and validation

for Latinx students, engages them actively in their educational journey, and contributes to shaping a more inclusive and empathetic society (Crespo & Johnson, 2013).

Understanding the impact of various programs on Latinx students is paramount to advancing educational equity and ensuring all students can realize their full potential. By fostering equity, appreciating diversity, improving outcomes, and informing policy, we can collaboratively create an inclusive and equitable educational system that promotes the success of all students, including those from the Latinx community. As Michelle Gonzalez, an expert in the field, succinctly puts it, “As the fastest-growing population in America, it is imperative that institutions have a strategy for recruiting, enrolling, retaining, and graduating Latinx students—all four steps are imperative for every institution” (Loveland, 2018). The academic access of Latinx students in higher education cannot be compromised, as their success is vital for the country’s future workforce and civil society.

Background for First-Generation Scholars Programs

I worked hard to make this journey to college even though it seemed improbable for so many years . . . I glanced around the room, expecting students to complain or moan like in high school, but no one did. They must all be really smart and know what they are doing, I thought, sliding into my seat.

– Jimenez (2008)

In the book *Reaching Out* by Francisco Jimenez (2008), he tells his story of adjusting to college at Santa Clara University as a first-generation Latinx student while pursuing a better life for his parents and siblings. This narrative is what many first-generation students desire and aspire to achieve when attending college while facing many challenges throughout their college experience.

The Department of Education defines first-generation college students in three different ways: no parent in the household has a bachelor's degree, parents in the household have no education after high school, and parents in the household have no degree after high school (Sharpe, 2017). In addition to how first-generation college students are defined, they face many assumptions. An important assumption is that their parent(s) have little to no experience navigating the academic, financial, and cultural barriers to higher education. An additional assumption is that they are "low-income" or "underprivileged" (Roman, 2020), which is not always the case for first-generation college students.

First-generation college students, particularly those of Latinx heritage, face distinct challenges in their academic journeys, which can potentially hamper their educational success and overall college experience (Davis, 2010). Latinx first-generation students have been found to exhibit higher rates of dropout, take longer to graduate, and generally derive less benefit from their college education compared to their counterparts who have college-educated parents (Costello et al., 2018; Davis, 2010; Yao & Kang 2017). Furthermore, these students often grapple with feelings of low self-confidence and isolation, reflecting the difficulties they encounter in navigating the unfamiliar terrains of higher education (Costello et al., 2018; Davis, 2010; Yao & Kang, 2017). With this perspective, it is crucial for higher education institutions to adequately address the specific needs of Latinx first-generation students and cultivate an inclusive, welcoming environment on campus. This is where first-generation scholars programs play an indispensable role. Tailored to support students who are pioneers in their families to pursue a college education, these programs aim to provide the necessary resources and assistance needed to surmount the unique challenges faced by these students (Baeten et al., 2013; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Wang et al., 2012). Another important finding from research on first-generation

scholars programs is the positive impact they have on the self-esteem and confidence of Latinx students. These programs help to “foster a sense of belonging and connection to the college community” (Teranishi et al., 2015) which can be especially important for students who may feel isolated or disconnected from the larger student body. By building a supportive network of peers, academic advisors, and mentors, these programs help to promote the mental and emotional well-being of Latinx students, increasing their chances of success.

Types of First-Generation Scholars Programs

First-generation scholars programs (FGSPs) in higher education are pivotal in assisting students who are the first in their families to attend college. These programs strive to provide the resources and support necessary for these students to overcome hurdles and excel academically and professionally. Key components include mentorship, academic support, leadership, career development, and fostering community among peers (Foubert & Urbanski, 2006; Martinez, 2003; Torres et al., 2006). The effectiveness of these programs is underscored by evidence demonstrating increased student GPA, good academic standing, success in other courses, and retention rates compared to non-enrolled peers (Baeten et al., 2013; Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Wang et al., 2012).

Integral to these programs is the mentorship component, where students receive guidance and support from paired faculty, staff, or alums throughout their academic journey. As Phillips and DeLeon found in their case study for Latinx Students, a formalized mentoring process can demonstrate a visible, genuine commitment to equity and inclusion (Phillips & DeLeon, 2022). Similarly, academic support programs—providing resources like tutoring, study groups, and academic advising—are another essential pillar of these scholar programs. This support also extends to financial aid and scholarships, particularly for first-generation Latinx students,

thereby mitigating financial barriers that often deter low-income students from pursuing higher education (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). Such financial aid can significantly impact low-income students' access, persistence, and completion. Overall, first-generation scholars programs have positively impacted Latinx students' financial stability. Studies have found that these programs can help to “reduce the financial burden on students, allowing them to focus more fully on their academic pursuits” (Dávila & Mora, 2007). By reducing the need to work while in college, these programs can help to ensure that students can fully engage in the college experience and achieve their academic goals.

Leadership and career development programs also form a significant part of first-generation scholars programs. They empower students to cultivate leadership skills and prepare for future careers. These programs also emphasize community-building initiatives, which are essential in creating a supportive and inclusive environment for first-generation Latinx students. They can alleviate feelings of isolation or disconnect from the institution by fostering a sense of belonging. Haycock et al. (2010) found that students who feel connected to their college community are “likelier to persist and graduate.” Specifically for Latinx students, who may not feel socially and culturally welcomed, creating a sense of belonging on campus is vital. Colleges should collaborate with organizations with access to college-bound Latinx students to provide meaningful and enriching experiences, encouraging them to take on active and visible roles within the campus and their communities and thus transcending merely hosting cultural events on campus (Loveland, 2018). Hence, mentorship, leadership, and career development programs, along with community-building initiatives, not only equip first-generation Latinx students with essential skills and connections but also cultivate a sense of belonging, fostering resilience and

amplifying their voices within the campus community, thereby paving the way for their academic success and future endeavors.

Outcomes for First-Generation Scholars Programs

FGSPs are pivotal for first-generation Latinx students in enhancing academic success and addressing disparities in higher education. Factors such as a supportive environment, cultural relevance, access to resources, financial support, community collaboration, mentorship, rigorous curriculum, and student involvement significantly influence the effectiveness of these programs. Supportive environments, bolstered by mentorship, peer support groups, and academic advising services, may be crucial for the educational success of first-generation Latinx students, facilitating the development of a sense of community (Takimoto et al., 2021). Furthermore, first-generation scholars programs must provide the four outcomes of academics: personal and social outcomes, leadership, and civic engagement.

Academic Outcomes

The effects of first-generation scholars programs on academic performance and achievement for Latinx students could be transformative. According to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU, 2020), first-generation students are more likely to face challenges such as cultural and language barriers, financial constraints, and limited access to academic support, which can hinder their success in higher education. However, first-generation scholars programs can provide the support and resources necessary for these students to overcome these challenges and succeed.

One of the most notable benefits of these programs is improved retention and graduation rates. The Center for Community College Student Engagement (2017) found that Latinx students enrolled in first-year experience programs were more likely to persist in their studies and

graduate than those who did not participate. This is partly due to the support and resources provided by the programs, such as tutoring, mentorship, and other forms of academic support. These resources help students stay on track and achieve their goals. Additionally, Latinx students enrolled in first-generation scholars programs often have higher GPAs compared to their peers who are not enrolled (Piatt, 2019), and according to the University of California, Irvine (n.d.), students enrolled in the school's first-generation student program had a higher average GPA compared to first-generation students who were not enrolled. This is likely due to the increased access to academic support and resources provided by the programs. These resources help students overcome their academic challenges and achieve tremendous academic success.

First-generation programs may also help prepare Latinx students for college by providing college readiness workshops, advising, and other resources. Additionally, these programs offer opportunities for career development through internships, job shadowing, and other experiential learning opportunities. According to a study conducted by Haycock et al. (2010), first-generation student programs provide career development opportunities to help students gain the skills and experience needed to succeed in the workforce. Additionally, research shows participating in first-generation scholars programs fosters a sense of community among this population of students. In a study conducted by Sinn (2016), participating in a first-generation student program increased students' sense of belonging and community on campus. These programs can and may have the same impact on Latinx first-generation students, especially considering prior research that depicts Latinx students' challenges in developing a sense of belonging and community on their campuses (Sinn, 2016).

In conclusion, first-generation scholars programs can have a significant impact on the academic performance and achievement of Latinx students. By providing resources, support, and

opportunities for personal and career growth, these programs help students overcome their challenges in higher education. The benefits of these programs include improved retention and graduation rates, higher GPAs, college readiness, career development, a sense of community, and improved confidence and self-esteem. By addressing the specific needs of Latinx students, first-generation scholars programs provide a pathway to success and help level the playing field in higher education.

Personal and Social Outcomes

The effects of enrolling in first-generation scholars programs on a Latinx student's sense of belonging and cultural identity may be complex and varied. Such programs can provide a supportive community for students who may feel isolated as first-generation college students or as members of an underrepresented minority group. They also offer opportunities for students to connect with students from similar backgrounds and develop a sense of belonging based on shared experiences and challenges. This suggests that first-generation scholars programs could positively promote a sense of belonging among Latinx students. The study by Lefebvre et al. (2018) stated that "students' engagement with their racial or ethnic identity is an important component of their sense of belonging on campus."

Additionally, the cultural expectations and norms of the program may not align with the cultural values and beliefs of the student, which can further contribute to feelings of disconnection. In their study in the *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, Pérez and Ceja (2010) stated, "A sense of cultural conflict may result from the dissonance between students' cultural values and the values espoused by the college environment." Ultimately, the effects on a Latinx student's sense of belonging and cultural identity depended on several factors, including the structure and focus of the program, the student's personal experiences and background, and the

level of support and connection they feel with their peers and with the broader university community. To maximize the positive effects of first-generation scholars programs, it is important to prioritize creating inclusive and culturally responsive environments that foster a sense of belonging and support students in maintaining their cultural identity.

Leadership and Civic Engagement Outcomes

Enrolling in FGSPs may positively impact Latinx students' leadership and civic engagement skills. According to a study by the Jack Kent Cooke Foundation (2021), "first-generation college students who participate in [FGSPs] report higher levels of leadership, civic-mindedness, and community engagement compared to their non-participating peers."

Furthermore, the study found that first-generation scholars programs often provide students with leadership training, mentorship, and opportunities for community service and civic engagement, which can enhance their skills and understanding of social and political issues affecting their communities.

Another study by Tingley (2016) found that first-generation students who participated in leadership programs had higher levels of leadership self-efficacy and felt more connected to their university community. This connection can be essential for first-generation Latinx students, who may feel isolated and disconnected from their peers on campus. In addition, participating in first-generation scholars programs could provide Latinx students with a supportive network of peers and mentors who share similar goals and values. This can foster a sense of belonging and shared purpose, inspiring students to continue their leadership and civic engagement beyond the program. However, the effectiveness of these programs can vary depending on factors such as the specific design of the program, the level of support and engagement provided by program staff, and the student's motivations and interests. Therefore, it is essential to provide students

with meaningful opportunities to engage in leadership and civic activities and to support them in developing the skills and knowledge needed to be influential leaders and engaged citizens.

Impacts of FGSPs for Latinx Students

FGSGs are believed to play an instrumental role in fostering both the academic and personal well-being of Latinx students (Grace-Odeleye & Santiago, 2019). These programs create a nurturing and inclusive community, helping to counteract feelings of isolation and alienation commonly experienced by first-generation students. Providing robust resources and guidance enables students to navigate higher education challenges more effectively, paving the way for more robust academic and social networks (Takimoto et al., 2021). These initiatives serve individual students and stimulate economic growth by promoting access to enhanced career prospects.

However, it is important to acknowledge that these programs alone are not enough to completely eradicate the educational equity gap. They need to be integrated into a larger, comprehensive strategy to dismantle systemic barriers and create an environment that fosters the success of all students. Mentorship, family, and community support are vital in driving college persistence, making such programs invaluable for fostering an inclusive and equitable educational experience (Roman, 2020).

A notable example illustrating the potential impact of comprehensive programs is the Diversity Scholars Program at the University of Texas, Dallas. This program's design is based on research emphasizing networking, faculty engagement, academic enrichment, and skills development for students of color at predominantly white campuses. Its primary objective is to enhance graduation rates and foster contributions to social justice (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Perez, 2018; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 1996). Despite systemic barriers, the

upward trend in Latinx students' enrollment and persistence in higher education reflects the urgent need to address the obstacles that impede their academic success.

Statistics indicate the stark reality of Latinx students graduating at a rate of only 56%, which is lower than their white and Asian peers (Chen & Simone, 2016). Given this context, the essential role of first-generation scholars programs comes into sharp focus. Studies conducted by Cahalan et al. (2019) and Wibrowski et al. (2017) suggested that participants enrolled in first-generation scholars programs may secure higher graduation rates due to dedicated support services, academic assistance, and student counseling. Wibrowski et al. also explored how these programs might significantly influence a student's self-regulation and motivation. This finding aligns with other research that highlights the positive impact of these initiatives on Latinx students' academic performance (Ishitani & Snider, 2013), implying that these programs potentially contribute to their academic success, retention, and sense of belonging to the university.

Furthermore, it is speculated that these programs might be crucial in addressing the financial barriers that Latinx students face in accessing higher education. According to Aud et al. (2010), more than 27% of Latinx students attending a four-year university come from poverty. This financial barrier for first-generation Latinx students potentially contributes to their retention rates being lower than their middle- and upper-class counterparts, likely due to their association with working-class families and the lack of financial education (Soria, 2013; Strayhorn, 2011). Whitley et al. (2019) provided evidence suggesting that adequate financial support provided by these programs could lead to increased enrollment and persistence rates. It is believed that this financial assistance, often in the form of scholarships and grants, plays a crucial role in overcoming financial hurdles for students from low-income backgrounds, potentially resulting in

a significant boost in Latinx student enrollment rates (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Carter & Wilson, 2014; Perez, 2018).

Beyond providing financial and academic aid, these programs offer critical resources, such as tutoring, academic advising, and cultural understanding. The availability of these resources could potentially boost Latinx students' self-confidence, enhance their academic performance, and encourage persistence in their studies (O'Neill, 2005; Phillips & Deleon, 2022). Moreover, it is believed that these resources might encompass teaching essential habits—such as study skills, exam preparedness, and academic writing—which could lead to improved GPA, retention, and graduation rates compared to their peers who are not enrolled in a first-generation program (Wibrowski et al., 2017). In addition, these programs are thought to offer leadership and career development opportunities, potentially laying the groundwork for success beyond graduation. First-generation scholars programs are suggested to play a vital role in addressing Latinx students' challenges in higher education. These initiatives are believed to contribute significantly to narrowing the achievement gap and empowering Latinx students by providing academic, financial, and socio-cultural support. Their far-reaching impact accentuates the importance of ensuring access to higher education within the Latinx community.

Gaps in Existing Literature

The limited research on the topic and the population substantially hinders the understanding and evaluation of first-generation scholars programs for Latinx students. These limitations encompass an absence of long-term studies, a narrow concentration on academic outcomes, a lack of participant diversity, and insufficient consideration of cultural and linguistic factors (Torres et al., 2019). The present study addresses several limitations in the existing research on first-generation scholars programs for Latinx students. One of the main limitations is

the lack of long-term studies, which have been largely absent in the literature. By adopting a long-term approach, this study tracked the experiences and outcomes of first-generation Latinx students, providing a more comprehensive understanding of these programs' short-term and long-term impacts on student retention and success. This perspective allowed me to examine the effectiveness of the programs in supporting them throughout their college journey and career.

Furthermore, this study went beyond the narrow focus on academic outcomes that has been common in previous research. While academic success is essential, this research takes a more holistic approach by exploring a range of outcomes, including emotional well-being, sense of belonging, cultural identity, career development, and civic engagement. By considering these various dimensions of the student experience, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. Additionally, this study strived to include a diverse participant sample, addressing the limitation of limited participant diversity in previous research. Ensuring the representation of various socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural identities within the Latinx community is essential.

Research predominantly features short-term evaluations, which, without long-term studies, leave us wanting to understand the long-term impact of these programs on students. Such a limited approach hinders determining these programs' effectiveness in supporting students through their entire educational trajectory (Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 2013). A significant obstacle in research arises from the overemphasis on academic outcomes, such as enrollment and graduation rates. This focus often overlooks students' broader experiences and outcomes, neglecting integral aspects of student life such as a sense of belonging, cultural identity, and civic engagement. The narrow focus thus paints an incomplete picture of the effectiveness of

first-generation scholars programs, underscoring the importance of considering the more holistic experience of Latinx students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005).

Compounding these issues, many studies exhibit limited diversity within their participant base, potentially constraining the applicability of findings to the broader Latinx student population. Davis (2010) aptly warned against generalizing that all first-generation students are low-income and emphasized the significance of personal relationships in the college experience. This highlights the need for a broader representation of study participants to foster a comprehensive understanding of Latinx student experiences and the impact of first-generation scholars programs. Moreover, insufficient attention to cultural and linguistic experiences poses another limitation. Often, research needs to consider the integral role of cultural and linguistic experiences in Latinx students' academic and personal success. Overlooking these aspects can result in a restricted understanding of Latinx students' unique challenges, as well as unfulfilled potential for first-generation scholars programs to address these challenges (Torres & Forest-Bank, 2019).

A more holistic and culturally responsive approach is necessary to navigate these research limitations. Researchers should conduct long-term studies that extend beyond graduation, gather data on outcomes that stretch beyond academics, and ensure representative diversity within the student populations studied. This comprehensive approach can provide a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of first-generation scholars programs for Latinx students and highlight areas for improvement (Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 2013; Torres et al., 2019). Understanding the effectiveness of first-generation scholars programs for Latinx students necessitates addressing the limitations in current research, including the scarcity of long-term studies, the narrow focus on academic outcomes, the lack of diversity among study participants,

and the insufficient attention paid to cultural and linguistic factors (Solorzano & Yosso, 2005; Torres et al., 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's Model of Student Retention

First-generation Latinx college students face unique challenges that often result in higher dropout rates compared to their peers with college-educated parents. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the factors contributing to student retention and success, researchers often turn to Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention. This influential theoretical framework provides a valuable lens through which to examine the complexities of student persistence in higher education.

Tinto's (1993) model comprises three main components: integration, commitment, and attrition. Integration refers to the extent to which a student becomes connected and engaged with the academic and social aspects of the college environment. It encompasses active coursework participation, educational support services utilization, and engagement in various campus activities. A high level of integration is associated with positive outcomes, such as academic success and a sense of belonging to the college community. On the other hand, commitment refers to a student's identification with and commitment to the goals and values of the college or university. This model aspect encompasses academic commitment, reflecting a student's dedication to their educational pursuits and a sense of belonging to the institutional community. A solid commitment to the institution is linked to increased academic persistence and satisfaction with the college experience. Lastly, the attrition component of Tinto's model refers to the decision-making process that leads students to leave college prematurely. It considers individual characteristics and environmental factors, including financial constraints, family support, and the

overall college experience. Understanding why students leave higher education can help identify areas where additional support and intervention are needed to enhance student retention.

In the context of studying the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students, Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention proves invaluable. By examining how these programs facilitate academic and social integration, foster commitment to the educational institution, and address Latinx students' unique challenges, researchers can gain insights into how they contribute to students' persistence and success. Utilizing Tinto's model in this study can help assess how first-generation scholars programs effectively address Latinx students' multifaceted obstacles, enhance their integration and commitment, and ultimately promote their retention and success in higher education. This exploration into the effectiveness of support services and the factors influencing student retention provided valuable information for policymakers, educators, and program developers seeking to improve outcomes for first-generation Latinx college students. The model also acknowledges that distinct demographic groups, such as Latinx students from low-income households, adult learners, and transfer students, face unique challenges that necessitate customized interventions and policies (Demetriou & Scmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

This viewpoint coincides with the discussion on retaining first-generation Latinx students, highlighting why Latinx students constitute the most significant demographic dropping out from colleges and universities. It accentuates the importance of enrolling Latinx students in first-generation scholars programs to bolster their retention. Therefore, evaluating the impact of these programs on Latinx student retention is paramount. One of the key findings from research on first-generation scholars programs is the improvement in college outcomes for Latinx students. Many studies have shown that these programs lead to "increased enrollment in four-

year colleges, higher retention and graduation rates, and improved academic performance” (Hurtado et al., 2011; Núñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 2013). This is mainly due to the enhanced support services offered through the programs, such as academic advising, tutoring, and mentoring. These services help students overcome their educational and social challenges in college, increasing their chances of success.

Additionally, comprehending the broader benefits that these programs contribute to students’ overall college experience and post-college success is crucial. Tinto’s student retention theory aligns with the narrative on first-generation Latinx retention and the importance of first-generation scholars programs. The model helped us understand why Latinx students drop out and identify critical resources to assist them with retention.

Laura I. Rendón’s Validation Theory

Introduced by Laura I. Rendón in 1994, Validation Theory has gained traction among scholars and practitioners concerned with the experiences of low-income, first-generation, and adult students returning to college (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Validation Theory emphasizes intentional and proactive affirmation of students by various individuals, including faculty, peers, family members, and academic staff. This affirmation aims to acknowledge students as knowledge creators and valuable members of the college community and foster their personal development and social adjustment (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011).

Nontraditional students, often labeled as such due to factors like being the first in their families to attend college or returning to education after a hiatus, commonly attend affordable community colleges and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs), such as Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011). Unlike “traditional” students from families with college-going histories who are typically more

confident about pursuing higher education, nontraditional students face unique challenges. They must weigh the benefits of attending college against the immediate need to work and supplement family income. Past experiences of invalidation in earlier educational settings might also lead them to doubt their suitability for college.

Nontraditional students frequently lack role models and guidance within their communities, making it challenging to navigate college-related processes like admissions, financial aid applications, and program selection (Rendón-Linares & Muñoz, 2011). They often lack awareness of available opportunities and resources due to their unfamiliarity with the right questions to ask. In this context, institutional validation becomes crucial for their college success. Validation Theory is especially relevant to nontraditional students attending community colleges and Minority-Serving Institutions, as it addresses their unique challenges and seeks to provide the support and affirmation necessary for their academic achievement (Rendón, 1994, 2000; Solorzano & Yosso, 2000).

Validation Theory is significant for first-generation Latinx students and those enrolled in first-generation scholars programs. It addresses their specific challenges, provides the necessary support to navigate higher education, and fosters a sense of self-worth, confidence, and belonging (Rendón, 1994). By actively reaching out to these students and affirming their potential, educators and programs can create an environment that empowers them to succeed academically and personally.

Summary

The literature review highlights first-generation Latinx students' challenges and how they affect their academic growth and retention. First-generation scholars programs must be provided for Latinx students enrolled at their institutions. However, it also means that supporting first-

generation scholars programs must be at the forefront of administration support and funding, especially as our first-generation Latinx population continues to increase in the United States. This study aimed to learn and expand on the literature on how first-generation scholars programs impact Latinx students, both short-term and long-term, and how these programs contribute to their retention. Increased capacities and access to first-generation programs can lead to more Latinx students enrolling and succeeding in college.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH POSITIONALITY

In this chapter, I describe and justify the research methodology and discuss positionality. As indicated earlier, this study aimed to explore the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students and understand how these programs contribute to their sense of belonging. The following research question guides this investigation:

- 1) How does participation in first-generation scholars programs affect Latinx college students throughout their educational journey?

In the subsequent sections, I define the qualitative methodologies to address this research question and elaborate on the rationale behind this choice.

Methodological Approach

I chose and conducted a narrative inquiry using a qualitative methodological approach and semi-structured interviews for my research. Narrative inquiry, as a research methodology, can amplify the voices of those who have been marginalized, silenced, or excluded (Daiute, 2014). This approach, which combines closed- and open-ended questions, enables a comprehensive exploration of the experiences and perspectives of Latinx students in these programs (Adams, 2015). The narrative interviews allowed me to understand the lived experiences of the individuals and how they interpret and define these experiences. A qualitative study is well-suited for investigating complex social phenomena, such as the experiences of marginalized groups like first-generation Latinx students.

As stated above, this research contributed to a deeper understanding of the impact of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. Through semi-structured interviews, the study results captured diverse perspectives and gained insights into Latinx students' unique challenges and their achievements within these programs (Peters & Halcomb, 2015). The

findings of this research have the potential to inform the development of more effective support systems and interventions that promote the educational attainment and success of Latinx students.

Beyond the scope of this particular research project, this research contributes to the broader knowledge about engaging alums in university-based research. Conducting one-on-one interviews was essential to revealing the importance of first-generation scholars programs, helping illustrate the successes of these initiatives, and advocating for increased funding. Sharing these narratives is critical, especially when universities face potential enrollment cliffs, demographic shifts, increased competition, and funding challenges. We must ensure that crucial programs, such as first-generation scholars programs that significantly benefit student populations, particularly our growing Latinx students, are seen as a priority.

Research Site and Context

As a private four-year university, the research site emphasizes academic excellence, ethical leadership, and social justice. Located in a central location, this was an ideal research site for conducting interviews with Latinx alums enrolled in FGSPs to examine the impacts of FGSPs and how they contribute to their sense of belonging. The university's commitment to providing a transformative education resonates deeply with its alumni and thrives on a vibrant campus life that enriches the student experience. The university fosters a strong sense of community, encouraging students to engage actively in extracurricular activities, clubs, and organizations.

When conducting interviews with alums via Zoom, the platform provided a convenient and accessible medium for communication, eliminating geographical barriers and allowing for seamless interaction regardless of participants' locations. Using Zoom facilitated scheduling flexibility, accommodating participants' busy schedules and ensuring that the interviews could

be conducted at mutually convenient times. Overall, leveraging Zoom for the interviews not only streamlined the process but also ensured inclusivity and efficiency in data collection, ultimately contributing to the research's success.

Participants and Recruitment Plan

As a dedicated researcher, I have developed a deep understanding of the importance of participant recruitment for the success of any research. In this section, I have outlined the comprehensive strategy I designed for engaging first-generation Latinx alums in my dissertation study, a project exploring the impacts of FGSPs on Latinx students. The core of my recruitment plan leveraged the strength of alum connections and the enduring emotional bonds they often maintain with their alma mater. I collaborated with the first-generation scholars' office to obtain a list of potential alum participants for the study.

This FGSP caters to first-generation college students and focuses on academic success, community engagement, and vocational exploration. It is available to first-year and transfer students, aiming to provide ongoing support throughout their college journey. This FGSP program focused on three main areas: Transition to College, Thrive at College, and Transition to Career. Transition to College includes FGSP Week, a week-long orientation for new students to adjust to campus life and learn about resources. Course seminars introduce campus facilities and leadership. Thrive at College offers peer mentoring, regular meetings with current first-gen scholars, and group activities. Support continues via advising, leadership roles, and financial aid. Last, Transition to Career prepares students for post-graduation with courses, visits, and exploration. Throughout these areas, the resource of Alumni Engagement allows graduates to mentor students and join alumni events.

For this research, I conducted a study with six participants. This number was thoughtfully chosen to allow for an in-depth exploration of each participant's experiences, ultimately leading to the generation of rich, qualitative data. This data contributed significantly to comprehensively understanding my research subject. For eligibility, I focused on three areas: (a) they graduated from the college; (b) they were enrolled and participated in the first-generation scholars program within the last four years; and (c) they identified as Latinx.

I used an email invitation (Appendix A) to reach out to potential participants. This initial communication served multiple objectives: introducing me to the alumni, inviting them to participate in the research, and providing a digital flyer detailing the study (Appendix B). In the email, I established my credibility by sharing my status as a doctoral candidate and my identity as a first-generation Latina. My shared identity with potential participants, as part of the university community and as a member of the demographic group this study focuses on, helped foster a sense of trust and rapport. With my identity as a first-generation Latinx educator, I connected with the participants on a deeper level. It was important in this study to gain the trust and provide a community to gain the best insight for this research. The email also offered a brief overview of my dissertation, emphasizing its investigation into the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. This information helped participants understand the study's significance and potential societal impact, encouraging their involvement. Once this email was sent, I worked with the participants to schedule their interviews and also provided the interview questions before the interview to help prepare them for our conversation.

Designed to be personal, convenient, flexible, and transparent, my recruitment strategy effectively engaged first-generation Latinx alums in this study. Demonstrating the tangible impacts of these programs is instrumental in emphasizing their significance. Universities can

provide compelling evidence of their effectiveness by highlighting the success stories and academic advancements of Latinx students who have benefited from these programs. This evidence is crucial for internal evaluations and external communications to stakeholders, potentially attracting increased funding for these programs. As the Latinx population grows, universities pursuing HSI designation will find their commitment to Latinx students under scrutiny. The sustained funding and expansion of these support programs thus become integral, influencing the university's reputation, eligibility for HSI status, and contribution to the broader goal of educational equity.

Data Collection

The use of semi-structured interviews as a qualitative methodological approach was well-suited for this research on the impact of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. This approach allowed for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, providing valuable insights to inform policy and practice in supporting Latinx students' educational journeys. This study utilized both the narrative interview and a semi-structured interview—as opposed to a standard interview—to collect rich and detailed stories, which allowed the interviewees to share their experiences and perspectives in a cohesive narrative format versus a more structured one without emphasizing the narrative element. Furthermore, the flexibility of this approach allowed for adaptation to participants' unique experiences, fostering a personalized and interactive exchange (Miles & Gilbert, 2005).

Researchers can conduct narrative interviews with first-generation Latinx students to document their experiences in higher education. Narrative inquiry is a methodology social scientists employ to document and understand the layers and complexities of an individual's lived experiences, using stories as the data (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012). Conducting these

narrative interviews can provide an in-depth understanding of the interviewee's experiences, emotions, and perspectives. These interviews can also provide rich, humanizing data, contextual knowledge, empowerment, validation, and flexibility and adaptability for the researcher, depending on the interviewee's responses. By capturing these narratives, researchers can uncover first-generation Latinx students' challenges and opportunities. Employing semi-structured interviews in this study gained an in-depth understanding of Latinx students' challenges in FGSPs and their strategies to navigate and succeed in higher education. This method provides a flexible framework that maintains consistency while allowing participants to share their unique stories and insights.

The use of semi-structured interviews as a qualitative methodological approach is well-suited for this research on the impact of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. This approach allows for a comprehensive exploration of participants' experiences and perspectives, providing valuable insights that can inform policy and practice in supporting Latinx students' educational journeys. This study's decision to employ semi-structured interviews ensured consistency across interviews, facilitating a smoother comparison and analysis of the collected data. At the same time, the inherent flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed for the adaptation of questions and deep dives into specific areas of interest, enabling a thorough exploration of the research subject (Adams, 2015). This approach has earned wide recognition in research on Latinx students and first-generation scholars programs. Prior studies have effectively utilized this method to explore the experiences of Latinx students within similar contexts, revealing invaluable, context-specific insights (Adams, 2015). Compelling interviews can yield a wealth of insights, shedding light on the unique challenges and successes that Latinx students encounter within these programs.

Tinto's (1993) Model of Student Retention and Laura Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory guided my research. By leveraging these models, I formulated interview questions that delved into the fundamental elements of integration, commitment, and attrition, all pertinent to comprehend the potential impact of first-generation scholars programs on the retention of Latinx students. In constructing these interview inquiries, I explored how FGSPs foster academic and social integration among Latinx students. During the interview, I inquired about their engagement level in coursework, utilization of available academic support services, and participation in on-campus activities. In addition, I evaluated their sense of belonging within the college community and gauged their dedication to their educational aspirations and principles.

The six interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom. For each participant who had confirmed their participation, I then emailed them to schedule an interview via Calendly, which synced with my Google Calendar availability. A Zoom link was provided upon confirmation of their interview date and time. Then, one day prior to each interview session, I reminded each participant and emailed them the interview questions. Before each session, I charged my laptop to take notes and recorded the session. Once the interviews were completed, I transcribed each interview using Zoom transcripts and Google Docs. After transcribing the interviews, I placed all recordings and notes on my password-locked laptop and folder.

Data Analysis

In my research, I utilized Tinto's (1993) model and Rendón's (1994) theory as a guiding framework to assess the multifaceted factors that may influence their decision to persist or withdraw from higher education. To analyze the data collected through interviews, I wrote memos after each interview to capture my immediate thoughts and reflections, providing a foundation for further analysis. Using a systematic approach and a coding program, I reduced the

data and organized critical themes, facilitating the identification of patterns and connections in the interviews. By coding the data based on themes and transitioning them into keywords, I ensured a focused analysis highlighting the significant impacts Latinx students experienced in first-generation scholars programs.

During the data analysis, I identified codes that may arise during the deductive coding process. These codes encompassed various aspects of the program's influence on Latinx students' experiences. Examples of codes included "Financial Support," "Mentorship," "Academic Resources," and "Sense of Belonging." Each code represented a significant aspect of the program's impact, such as the financial assistance provided, mentors offering guidance, the availability of academic resources, and the feelings of connection and inclusion within the program and educational community.

By employing systematic coding, I identified patterns and connections that illuminated how FGSPs contributed to Latinx students' sense of belonging and overall success. Throughout the analysis, I maintained objectivity and avoided personal biases, ensuring the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings and incorporating strategies like triangulation, member checking, and seeking peer review and feedback to enhance the rigor of my analysis further. Additionally, I engaged in reflexivity, acknowledging and reflecting on my biases and meticulously documenting the analysis process. By adhering to these practices, this study contributes valuable insights into the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. It informs efforts to promote their retention and success in higher education.

In summary, the synthesis of Tinto's (1993) model and Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory results in a comprehensive framework that thoroughly examines the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of Latinx students' engagement in first-generation scholars programs.

Through a simultaneous analysis of integration, commitment, attrition, and validation, this study provides a holistic and thorough assessment of the impact of these initiatives on the retention and achievement of Latinx students in higher education.

Ethical Procedures

Although the data collected did not identify the specific university or name the participants, it was essential to protect the rights of the participants and their data. This study adhered to the guidelines set forth by the university and the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I obtained consent from each participant before collecting any data from the interviews. I also reminded participants that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Furthermore, I established confidentiality to create a safe and trusting environment, encouraging participants to share their experiences freely.

Since the data was coded, no names were revealed, ensuring limited accessibility to data and protecting the participants' identities. The university access remained anonymous, and I kept the data in a password-protected laptop with a secure, password-protected folder. After the study was completed and approved, I intend to delete all data after two years to ensure continued data protection. This approach demonstrates a commitment to safeguarding the participants and their information while maintaining ethical standards throughout the study.

Positionality

As a Latina first-generation researcher and first-generation instructor, I possess a unique perspective that integrates my personal experiences with academic knowledge. My positionality, shaped by my journey as a Latinx community member and a first-generation scholar, enables me to deeply comprehend the challenges and opportunities encountered by first-generation Latinx students in higher education.

My collegiate journey was marked by significant obstacles, offering me first-hand insight into the difficulties of finding a sense of belonging and the vital role of supportive programs. The complexity of navigating an unfamiliar academic environment, often exacerbated by pressures unique to first-generation students, is a challenge I understand intimately. Through this research, I sought to illuminate the crucial importance of supportive programs in enhancing the persistence of Latinx first-generation students in higher education. I demonstrated how these tailored initiatives can meet unique needs, provide essential assistance, and significantly contribute to the success and persistence of these students. This exploration validates the value of such programs and underscores the need for their continued development and implementation in higher education institutions.

These research findings not only augment existing academic literature but also demonstrate the importance of supportive programs for first-generation students. In the next two chapters, I showcase the positive outcomes these programs generate for individual students and the broader educational landscape. I aimed to advocate for the FGSP's sustainability and expansion by highlighting the success stories of these initiatives. Given the projected increase in the Latinx population, there is an urgent need for accessible and inclusive higher education opportunities. As the number of Latinx students grows, so does the urgency to address their unique challenges.

Through my research, I endeavor to deepen our understanding of these challenges and the importance of expanding first-generation scholars programs to support this burgeoning student population. By spotlighting the significance and the need for the sustainability and expansion of these programs, I hope to influence policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders to invest in initiatives that empower and uplift first-generation Latinx students. It is crucial to

envision a future where all Latinx students have equitable access to quality education and the necessary support to thrive academically and professionally.

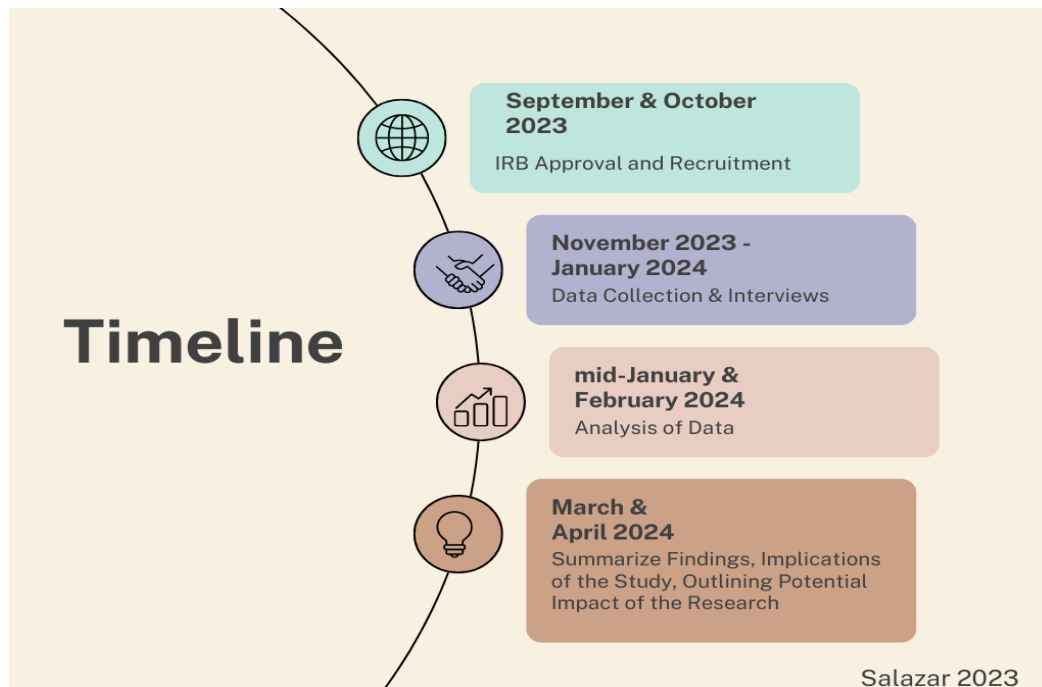
As a first-generation program scholar seminar instructor, I have had the privilege of directly supporting and mentoring first-generation Latinx students. I have witnessed the substantial value of first-generation scholars programs through the transformative experiences of my students. I have seen first-year Latinx students emerge from their shells, fostering a sense of belonging and community within our classroom. For instance, one initially reserved and shy student began the fall quarter. Over time, I observed her grow and forge connections with her classmates. I guided her toward on-campus resources, encouraging her to apply for leadership roles and join campus clubs. By the end of her first year, she worked as an orientation leader, held a position in a student organization, and received the New Student of the Year award. Witnessing her growth underscored the profound value and impact these programs can have on students' college journeys. In another case, I noticed a student consistently absent from class and submitting assignments late despite active participation. I arranged a one-on-one meeting with him and directed him to relevant resources. He was struggling with imposter syndrome and was hesitant to seek help. I reassured him about the importance of attending office hours and utilizing the support offered by the first-generation scholars program. In the following weeks, he reached out to express his gratitude, sharing that my empathetic approach had significantly improved his school motivation and helped him overcome feelings of impostorship.

These experiences have emphasized the profound impact of careful guidance, attention, and supportive programs on students' academic and personal development, particularly for first-generation Latinx students. As a Latina first-generation researcher and seminar instructor, I am driven by a sincere passion for supporting and empowering first-generation Latinx students.

Timeline

This research study began during the fall of 2023. The initial phase of this project involved the critical step of recruitment, which started in September 2023 after receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once all necessary permissions were in place, I transitioned into the core of my research—the data collection phase. This phase was conducted in November 2023 and extended until early January 2024. With the conclusion of data collection, the subsequent phase—the analysis of this data—began mid-January 2023 after completing my data collection. This step involved an in-depth interpretation and coding of the data collected, providing the basis for the final segment of this study. The summary of my research study was completed by April 2024. I focused on writing my findings, discussing the study’s implications, and outlining the potential impact of the research.

Figure 1. Timeline.



Limitations

Acknowledging the study's inherent limitations is imperative. These limitations delineate the boundaries within which the findings can be interpreted and emphasize areas for future research and programmatic development. This section summarizes several fundamental limitations inherent in qualitative research, ranging from sample size constraints to possible biases in data collection, thereby contextualizing the findings within the broader landscape of research on FGSP and Latinx student success.

The qualitative study included interviews with a relatively small sample size of six Latinx first-generation college graduates. While these participants provided valuable insights into their experiences with FGSP, the small sample size may limit the findings of a broader population of Latinx first-generation college students. The experiences and perspectives of these six participants may only partially represent the diversity of experiences within this demographic.

In addition, the qualitative data collected through interviews in this study relies on participants' self-reporting. Participants' recollections of past events or experiences may be influenced by factors such as the passage of time and individual differences in memory retrieval, potentially affecting the accuracy and completeness of the data. Moreover, participants may have been inclined to emphasize positive experiences with FGSP while downplaying or omitting any negative aspects or challenges they faced to highlight the importance of the FGSPs. These limitations impacted this present study because it was limited by their graduation year and sample size, and it was solely focused on an interview for the research. Although it provided a deeper dive into the personal experiences and allowed the study to connect with the participants, an extension to this study could be conducted by either expanding the graduation date (including pre-COVID graduates) or adding another step to the research such as a pre-survey to the

interview or a group interview following the individual to allow other participants to connect and dig deeper into each other's experiences.

The study's narrow focus on Latinx first-generation college students enrolled at a specific four-year university potentially restricts the generalizability of its findings. This particular institution's unique program structures, resources, and student demographics may not accurately represent the diverse landscape of higher education institutions nationwide. Variations in programmatic support systems, cultural contexts, and institutional climates across different universities can significantly influence the experiences and outcomes of Latinx first-generation college students. For example, institutions with alternative program structures or differing levels of resources may offer distinct support mechanisms or face unique challenges in meeting the needs of this student population. Moreover, cultural contexts within universities, including prevailing attitudes towards diversity, equity, and inclusion, can shape students' sense of belonging and academic experiences. Therefore, while the study provides valuable insights into the experiences of Latinx first-generation college students at a specific institution, caution should be exercised when extending these findings to broader contexts. Ultimately, further research encompassing diverse institutional settings is warranted to deepen our understanding of this population's experiences in higher education.

CHAPTER FOUR: QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

The qualitative case study examines the influence of FGSPs on Latinx college students throughout their college journey. The first three chapters of this study offer an introduction to the challenges many first-generation Latinx students face and the unique barriers they encounter. By listening to the participants' experiences, this research gathered valuable information about their experiences as Latinx first-generation college students.

The research question that guided this study was:

RQ1: How does participation in first-generation scholars programs affect Latinx college students throughout their educational journey?

Demographic Data

The research question and the findings are the foundation of this study. This study aimed to benefit school administrators, higher education faculty, and staff to understand better why FGSPs are vital to Latinx college students and how enrolling in an FGSP affected their educational journey. The qualitative study included interviews with six Latinx first-generation college graduates. Five females and one male participated in this study. The participants graduated between 2020 and 2022. Below are each participant's major, minor (if applicable), graduation year, and on-campus involvements (in addition to being part of the FGSP).

Table 1

Demographic Data: Participant Pseudonym, Major, Minor (if applicable), graduation year, and campus involvements

Participant	Sex	Major	Minor	Graduation Year	On-Campus Involvements
Ale	Female	Child Studies & Ethnic Studies	N/A	2022	First-gen Peer Educator; Co-Chair for Latinx Student Union (LSU), Research Assistant & Honors Student
Blanca	Female	Bioengineering	N/A	2022	Resident Assistant & Club Board Member
Carlos	Male	Neuroscience	N/A	2022	First-gen Peer Mentor, Student Specialist, and board member of LSU
Daniela	Female	Ethnic Studies & Psychology	N/A	2021	Resident Assistant, Chair for Cultural Club, National Board Intern, and held multiple Board Member roles for Greek Sorority
Eliza	Female	Communication & Spanish	N/A	2020	Resident Assistant, Board Member for Greek Sorority, Tutor at Tutoring Center, Held multiple Board Member Roles for LSU, Tutoring Center, Poetry Editor, & Club President
Feli	Female	Political Science & Psychology	Urban Education & Creative Writing	2022	Student Government, Cultural Club Member, & held Research roles in majors

Emergent Themes

By listening to and analyzing their experiences, I gathered valuable information about the impact of FGSPs on Latinx first-generation college students. With supporting evidence, including quotations and feedback from each participant, I analyzed and explored themes gathered from the data . This section delves into the analysis of five themes from the data collected. The results of this analysis are based on the experiences of six first-generation Latinx students enrolled at a four-year university. Four major themes emerged from the data collected

on the responses of the participants' lived experiences during their four years at the university. The themes included (a) financial impact, (b) access to resources, (c) community and inclusion, and (d) retention and long-term effects.

Table 2

List of Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Financial Impact	Grants and Scholarships
Peer and Staff Support	
Community & Inclusion	Sense of Belonging Latinx Culture & Imposter Syndrome
Retention & Long-term Effects	

Financial Impact

During the interviews, participants discussed the pivotal role of financial assistance in the form of grants and scholarships, a benefit accessed through enrollment in an FGSP, in facilitating their academic success and retention within the university. All six participants cited the availability of grants and scholarships, either directly provided by their FGSP or accessible due to their affiliation with the program, aided in their college success. Enrollment in an FGSP opens avenues to various grants and scholarships, many precisely for first-generation students or those enrolled in FGSP initiatives. Moreover, the FGSP administers its grants and scholarships, catering to the specific needs of its participants. Notably, micro-grants are available to address urgent needs, offering emergency funding or one-time financial assistance. Additionally, scholarships provided by donors explicitly earmarked for the FGSP provide avenues for students interested in study abroad programs, immersion experiences, or summer schooling opportunities.

Grants and Scholarships

Participants' narratives demonstrated the diverse ways in which first-generation programs alleviate financial barriers and empower Latinx students to navigate challenges throughout their academic pursuits. Ale's fourth year was a critical period marked by financial hardships due to their family's financial situation changing. They stated:

Especially senior year was a really hard year for me in terms of finances, so I feel like I took the most advantage of the staff on FGSP. And I am beyond grateful because, without that, I feel like I wouldn't have had the money to finish college and be able to graduate, which I was so far through my college journey to just be able to not finish due to my financial hardships. One of the FGSP staff members played a significant role in finding funding for me. She supported me, and she had my back.

Ale sets the tone for understanding the pivotal role of the FGSP during the difficult times their students face. Her engagement with FGSP staff during these hardships and challenges becomes evident as they express their profound gratitude for the support that enabled them to finish their education. The FGSP's access to funds for first-generation college students via micro-grants and donors shows that this funding is crucial to continue to support the students throughout their educational journey.

Blanca's experience in a challenging physics class illustrates the academic resilience demanded in rigorous programs like engineering. She stated:

A physics class I was enrolled in was notorious for being very difficult. When I took that class, I was not doing well. And I completely bombed the first midterm. And I'm like, Okay, you know what? I'm just gonna drop the class. And I hoped to take it over the summer when I can focus on it. I already had so much on my plate as an engineering

student. If I wanted to be involved in clubs and other areas on campus, I needed to drop the class to give myself the opportunity. It was tough for me to balance and actually focus on my classes and give them a hundred percent of my time. So, I decided to drop that class. I explained my situation to my FGSP staff, who gave me a grant to cover the class over the summer. I'm very grateful that the FGSP provided funding for my summer course. It got that financial burden off my back so that I could focus on my studies and involvements.

Blanca's decision to drop the class and take it during the summer while having support from FGSP's grant opportunity highlights how financial assistance alleviates academic burdens and facilitates a more enriching campus life, allowing for participation in clubs and social activities. It also shows how this financial assistance supports the students in their course load and success.

Blanca's second narrative highlights the proactive advocacy required to seek additional financial aid as a first-generation student and reach out to FGSP for support. They stated:

When I received my financial aid package, it wasn't enough to live on campus, which I really wanted, especially for my first year, to get that college experience first-hand.

During the summer, I reached out to an FGSP staff member who supported me in advocating for myself and gave me the courage to reach out to the university to see if they had any other open scholarships. I emailed the financial aid office explaining my financial situation and how crucial it was for me to live on campus as a student of color and a first-generation student. They got back and gave me a scholarship that covered all four years of housing.

Her FGSP staff members' advice and support—which had encouraged students to advocate for themselves—led to an extended university scholarship covering all four years. In addition, it

highlights the additional grants and scholarships that can be provided to our Latinx first-generation college students.

Carlos' experience demonstrates the program's adaptability in supporting initiatives like research projects and experiential learning, showcasing the holistic impact of financial aid. They stated:

Whenever I needed financial support, I knew I could reach out to the FGSP staff to ask for assistance. I reached out to the staff and asked for financing for a research project and for a trip to gain clinical hours for my major. I could count on FGSP to fund those opportunities. I felt like I never missed out on opportunities because I had their support through the microgrants and scholarships.

Carlos' experience shows they felt supported in their college endeavors. They did not feel limited to taking opportunities because they felt supported by FGSP, which could provide financial support to assist them in attending these programs. This financial support also shows that FGSP advocated for their students to get this funding to support their students.

Daniela's experience during the pandemic underscores the unforeseen challenges that Latinx students faced. They stated:

The first-gen program also provided me with grant money when needed. When the pandemic happened, my computer could not use Zoom, my camera wasn't working, or the software was too old to use Zoom. I emailed FGSP that I need[ed] a new laptop because mine can't support Zoom. A new laptop costs \$1,400, and I can't afford that. And they gave me the money. If it were not for FGSP, I would not know what to do about studying during the pandemic.

FGSP's swift response to their need for a new laptop highlights the program's adaptability and commitment to overcoming technological barriers, ensuring that students can continue their studies seamlessly.

Eliza's experience with FGSP's funding opportunities for an immersion trip speaks to the program's role in enabling alternative experiences for students who may not pursue traditional study abroad opportunities. They shared:

I received financial assistance from FGSP to help cover the cost of the immersion trip. I went on the immersion trip during the summer between my sophomore and junior years. For many students, especially first-generation students, we are encouraged to study abroad. Unfortunately, if I wanted to work as a Resident Assistant, I could not study abroad because my absence from the university could cause "my spot" not to be guaranteed when coming back that following winter quarter. Unfortunately, studying abroad was just something I couldn't pursue, but I am thankful that FGSP fully funded my immersion trip, providing me with cultural immersion and experience. If it weren't for their financial support, I wouldn't have been able to experience anything abroad.

Eliza's experience is another prime example of how FGSP microgrants and scholarships enhance students' experiences.

The narratives collectively illuminate the pivotal role of grants and financial aid in facilitating first-generation Latinx college students' academic and extracurricular journeys. These findings underscore the multifaceted impact, from alleviating financial burdens and enabling campus life to supporting diverse opportunities and overcoming unforeseen challenges.

Peer and Staff Support

The diverse support systems offered by FGSP emphasize the instrumental role of mentors, peer groups, instructors, and program directors, as highlighted by all participants who emphasized the positive impact of the peer and staff support system provided by FGSP. Students enrolled in FGSP are assigned a professional staff member, peer mentor, and a first-year instructor. Their professional staff member remains assigned to them throughout their time enrolled at the university and in the FGSP program. In contrast, peer mentors are assigned to them in groups with other FGSP students. Their first-year instructor is also assigned to them for their first and second quarter at the university and remains connected to them throughout their educational journey. During FGSP Week, students meet their peer mentor and assigned staff member, kickstarting their college journey.

FGSP Week includes presentations about on-campus resources, tours, team-building activities, and community building. For first-generation Latinx students, this period is crucial, as it establishes early support networks and familiarity with campus. It informs students about resources like academic support, financial aid, and counseling. Campus tours ease anxiety about navigating the campus. Team-building fosters a sense of community, which is vital for their success. FGSP Week lays the foundation for a supportive environment, offering connections with peers sharing similar backgrounds. It serves as a bridge to college life, providing access to support networks and resources from the start.

Ale reflected on the FGSP mentorship program, highlighting its role in connecting them with their peers in similar majors and creating a community:

During FGSP Week, you get put into Peer Mentor Groups. My Peer Mentor group was all engineering and STEM students, so freshman year, we had a lot of classes together. I

think that FGSP specifically did this and put us in the same courses at the same time to connect us. It gave me that initial push and set me up for the rest of my time at college. I feel like this initiative helped me lean on my classmates.

Ale continued:

Throughout the first year, with the Peer Mentor you are assigned, you get to do an activity every quarter. I feel like that pulled me slowly out of my shell of just being in my dorm room. Later on, your mentor also explains different resources, such as the multicultural center, where you can find your community.

Ale's experiences illustrate the importance of peer support and being part of a community within FGSP based on their major. In addition, intentionally grouping students in the same classes during the first year facilitated academic collaboration throughout college.

Blanca highlighted the significant impact of their mentor on their professional development within the FGSP program: "My mentor helped me with my professional development and assisted me with the different requirements for our FGSP class, such as how to interview, creating our LinkedIn, providing opportunities for group activities, etc." In this example, Blanca shared that their mentor's experiences were crucial to their professional development, and they felt supported throughout the different requirements. They also shared the support they had received from professional staff:

I always felt like the FGSP Director was always there to listen to me. No matter what I had going on, and I know this is true for me and my fellow FGSP peers, I would set up one-on-one meetings with the FGSP Director, who I know was so busy, but they still made time for me.

Blanca's experiences show how crucial peer and staff support is in the success of our Latinx first-generation students and their experiences and success at their university.

Daniela's narrative delved into the emotional support provided by FGSP staff. They shared:

There are FGSP advisors that I went and cried to when I felt like I couldn't do college, it's too hard, all these things, and FGSP advisors were there to support me. They said, "You can do it 'cause you are doing it!" They reminded me that I was already doing the work. I'm already breaking glass ceilings because I'm even here in the first place. And so the FGSP advisors were my greatest support network in college.

Daniela's experience showcased that advisors serve as a pillar of strength during challenging moments, offering encouragement and reinforcing the achievements of first-generation students.

The quotes collectively illuminate the critical role of resources offered by first-generation scholars programs, mainly focusing on mentorship, peer support, academic guidance, and emotional well-being. These findings underscore the comprehensive and multifaceted support systems that contribute to the success and well-being of Latinx college students throughout their educational journey. Tinto (2010) outlined expectations, support, feedback, and involvement as essential conditions for student success. He described the significance of faculty and institutions in articulating expectations to students and providing clear guidance on what is required for success (Ballard, 2021). Students can cultivate self-efficacy in a supportive and enriched environment, paving the way for future accomplishments (Tomasko et al., 2016). According to the participants' accounts, fostering a supportive environment through peer interactions and guidance from FGSP staff/advisors is necessary for attaining academic excellence and a sense of fulfillment.

Community and Inclusion

This section delves into the impact of first-generation scholars programs on fostering a sense of community, promoting inclusion, and addressing challenges related to identity, diversity, and imposter syndrome. Through the participants' perspectives, we uncover these programs' transformative role in creating supportive environments for Latinx first-generation college students.

Sense of Belonging

Throughout the six interviews, the theme of a sense of belonging surfaced prominently among first-generation Latinx college students. Participants articulated diverse elements contributing to this sense of belonging. Stayhorn's (2012) conceptualization of belonging within the college context encompasses perceived social support, a sense of connectedness, feeling valued, respected, and essential to the campus community.

Carlos articulated the importance of FGSP in providing a sense of community and belonging on campus. They stated:

FGSP gave me a community that I could go to on campus and made me feel like I belonged on campus because other people were like me. I could run into someone in FGSP, or I could go to a study space for FGSP people.

Carlos' experience reflects the program's success in creating a supportive environment that helps students feel connected and valued. Daniela emphasizes the significance of finding people who share similar experiences within the FGSP program, particularly those who look like them. Daniela mentioned, "And I felt a lot of that cultural shock, but FGSP always told me you have a community. You have a support system." Daniela's reference to FGSP as a support system showcases the community created in FGSP.

Latinx Culture

FGSP is a vital link for first-generation Latinx students to connect with others in their cultural community. At the university the participants attended, Latinx students were 90% of the FGSP student demographic. Within the FGSP community, students find a space where their cultural backgrounds are celebrated and embraced. Through shared experiences and identities, FGSP fosters a sense of belonging and connection to their Latinx heritage. Being surrounded by peers with similar cultural backgrounds creates a supportive environment where students feel understood and accepted.

Ale highlighted the positive impact of being part of a Latinx community within FGSP: So, being a Latinx student within this first-generation scholarship program was beneficial. FGSP helped me because the majority of the students within the program were Latinx students. So it was nice to be like, oh, you went through the same thing. You come from a similar background, and I can joke around in Spanish. Also, FGSP week cushioned being Latinx at a PWI. That first week was just FGSP students with nobody else on campus. I assumed it was going to be the same going into it. It helped ease into being Latinx at a PWI.

FGSP created a supportive environment for Latinx students and helped ease the transition into the institution with students from similar backgrounds to create a community. FGSP Week has also shown that it is a crucial period for Latinx students to connect and build relationships, which can assist with their transition to the university.

Blanca's narrative underscores the transformative role of FGSP in helping her discover their identity and embrace their Latinx culture. Blanca stated, "In FGSP, I feel like it is mainly Latinx students that helped me feel comfortable and see myself with my peers. Which was very

helpful for me in being myself and finding the support I needed.” According to Blanca, the program supports self-discovery, awareness of social injustice, and forming a supportive community among Latinx students. Blanca’s assertion that FGSP mainly comprises Latinx students emphasizes the program’s impact on creating a space where students can authentically be themselves.

Similarly, Feli stated:

I was very supported in FGSP, and I found a good group of other Latinx students. I lived in a first-year building during my first year, and the facilitator was also Latinx. I feel like I had a good support group and found that early on. I think this played a role in my identity. I found so many commonalities in the FGSP space.

Feli explained that FGSP gave her the community and provided a safe space to engage with people who looked like them and had experiences similar to theirs.

Imposter Syndrome

Imposter syndrome often accompanies the journey of first-generation Latinx students, stemming from feelings of inadequacy and uncertainty about their academic abilities, compounded by the novelty of being the first in their family to attend college. Within this demographic, navigating academic challenges and cultural transitions simultaneously exacerbates imposter syndrome. Despite their achievements, students may need clarification on their belongingness in educational settings and their capacity to meet expectations. However, FGSP provides a supportive environment that mitigates these feelings. By connecting students with peers with similar backgrounds and experiences, FGSP validates their identities and fosters confidence in their capabilities. As students forge relationships within the FGSP community, they gain resilience and self-assurance, empowering them to overcome imposter syndrome and

thrive academically. Participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of seeing people who resemble them and connecting with their cultural identities.

Blanca and Daniela acknowledged the everyday experience of imposter syndrome among Latinx first-generation students. Daniela recounted how FGSP guided them to grow and advocate for themselves despite initial shyness and self-doubt:

FGSP forced me to grow up and advocate for myself. Coming in as a first-year student, I was timid. I didn't talk to people. I was intimidated by staff and faculty, especially faculty.

I was forced to believe in myself even when I was hesitant to believe in myself in the first place. Other first-generation students and I experience a lot of imposter syndrome—wondering if this university was right for me. Am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?

Do I belong here? And especially when I started.

Daniela's experience is similar to that of many students. It also demonstrates the continued support and guidance from FGSP while navigating their imposter syndrome. Peer mentors connect with the students about their experiences with imposter syndrome. At the same time, professional staff members support and guide them through the transition to college and throughout their journey.

Blanca's advice encourages first-generation Latinx students to embrace their background, seek help, and overcome imposter syndrome in the academic environment. They emphasized the importance of sharing experiences with family, taking pride in achievements, utilizing resources like FGSP, and seeking support when needed. By acknowledging the challenges of imposter syndrome, Blanca reassured students of their resilience and the value of finding mentors and

advocating for themselves. This guidance underscores the significance of personal identity and resilience in navigating the college experience. Blanca recounted her message to new students:

Make the most out of your college experience. Being a child of immigrants, your parents/family might not know, but share that with them. Be proud of where you are. Take advantage of the resources that are given to you, like FGSP. It's okay to ask for help. It's okay to have imposter syndrome; you know now that you can keep going. There are people that you can look up to and find mentors. Advocate for yourself. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Blanca's advice encourages embracing one's background, seeking help, and overcoming imposter syndrome by acknowledging the value of one's presence in the academic environment.

These experiences and narratives underscore the significant impact of FGSPs in fostering a sense of community, promoting inclusion, and addressing challenges related to identity, diversity, and imposter syndrome among Latinx college students. Through participants' narratives, we uncovered the transformative role of FGSP in creating supportive environments that help students feel connected and valued. FGSP is a vital link for first-generation Latinx students to connect with their cultural community, fostering a sense of belonging and connection to their Latinx heritage. Additionally, the program offers crucial support in navigating imposter syndrome, empowering students to overcome self-doubt and thrive academically. Participants' experiences highlight the importance of FGSP in providing ongoing guidance and support throughout their college journey, emphasizing the program's instrumental role in facilitating academic success and personal growth. As students embrace their identities, build relationships, and seek help when needed, FGSP continues to serve as a beacon of support, empowering first-generation Latinx students to achieve their goals and realize their potential in higher education.

Retention and Long-term Impacts

In this section of Chapter 4, I delve into the critical aspects of retention and the long-term impacts of FGSPs on Latinx college students. Retention, the ability of students to persist and complete their degrees, is a crucial indicator of success in higher education, particularly for first-generation students. FGSPs play a pivotal role in supporting retention by offering tailored resources and support systems to address the unique challenges first-generation Latinx students face. Moreover, participation in FGSP has lasting effects extending far beyond the college years, shaping participants' trajectories in their personal and professional lives. Building upon the insights provided in the previous sections, this section explores how FGSP contributes to retention rates and examines the enduring impact of these programs on participants' post-graduate experiences. Through participant narratives and long-term perspectives, we understand the transformative role of FGSP in fostering retention and empowering first-generation Latinx college students throughout their educational journey and beyond.

Retention

FGSPs are critical in retaining and ensuring first-generation college students' academic success and well-being. Retention is essential for first-generation Latinx students to complete their degrees and achieve their educational goals. The comprehensive support systems offered by FGSPs address our first-generation Latinx students' multifaceted challenges, increasing their likelihood of persisting and completing their degrees. Beyond providing mentorship, academic support, financial aid, and a sense of community, FGSPs also offer specialized resources tailored to first-generation students, such as first-year instructors who guide students through available resources during their initial quarters. These instructors play a pivotal role in helping students

navigate the complexities of college life, ensuring they are aware of and have access to the support services they need to succeed.

Additionally, FGSP Week, which precedes the start of classes, serves as a crucial orientation period for first-generation students, offering presentations on campus resources, informative tours, team-building activities, and opportunities to acclimate to campus life. Blanca stated, “And I think that was the best decision I made in terms of going to this university. Going through FGSP Week. That’s where I met my first friends, and they’re still my friends to this day.” This week-long transition period is particularly significant for first-generation Latinx students, providing them with early access to support networks, resources, and a sense of belonging that sets the stage for their success throughout their college journey. Thus, the combined efforts of FGSPs, first-year instructors, peer mentors, professional staff, and FGSP Week contribute significantly to retention by equipping first-generation students with the necessary support and resources to navigate college life successfully.

Ale attributed their graduation to the profound impact of FGSP on their college experience. The statement, “I feel like without FGSP, I don’t think I would have graduated,” underscores the pivotal role of the program in providing essential support that contributed to their academic success and overall college journey. Ale’s testimony vividly illustrates the transformative impact of FGSP on the educational journey of first-generation Latinx college students. Their statement that they would not have graduated without the support of FGSP underscores the pivotal role of the program in providing essential resources, mentorship, and community for students navigating the challenges of higher education. Ale’s experience is a powerful reminder of the profound difference that dedicated support systems like FGSP can

make in empowering students to overcome obstacles, achieve their academic goals, and ultimately thrive in their college journey.

Daniela adamantly believed they would only have graduated from the university with FGSP. They stated, “I firmly believe I would not have graduated from the university without FGSP. FGSP was instrumental in my success and my being able to continue college.” Their acknowledgment of FGSP as instrumental in their success highlights the program’s crucial role in supporting and guiding first-generation Latinx students, ultimately contributing to their academic achievements. Blanca expressed FGSP as their favorite part of the university and credits the program as why she graduated. They stated, “FGSP is my favorite part of the university, and it’s why I graduated. I remember the hard times of all-nighters, and I wouldn’t be here without the encouragement and support from FGSP.” The encouragement and support from FGSP played a pivotal role during challenging times, including all-nighters, demonstrating the program’s instrumental role in providing the necessary resources and motivation for academic persistence.

These narratives collectively emphasize the profound impact of first-generation scholars programs on the retention and academic success of Latinx college students. FGSP were critical in providing these students with essential support, encouragement, and resources that contributed significantly to students’ ability to overcome challenges and persist in their educational journey. Participants emphasized that FGSP was their primary motivation and driving force behind their graduation. They highlighted that they graduated with the resources and support provided by FGSP. These powerful statements vividly illustrate the importance and impact of the staff, programs, and resources that FGSP offers in helping students achieve their academic goals.

Long-term Impacts

The long-term impacts of FGSP for Latinx students are multifaceted and extend far beyond their college years. Daniela reflected on the enduring effects of the lessons learned through FGSP, indicating that she continues to think about and teach these lessons to their students:

I take what I learned through FGSP and share it with first-year students. I share the lessons that FGSP taught me that were beyond impactful, and I still use them today as a professional. I teach these lessons and resources to my students, which were provided to me by FGSP and helped me.

These impacts speak to the lasting influence of the program, not only during the college years but also in shaping the perspectives and practices of participants beyond their academic journey. Eliza highlights FGSP as a testament to their preparedness, information, and education from the beginning of their college journey. Eliza stated, “It is a testament to how prepared, informed, and educated I was from the beginning, thanks to FGSP. The kind of exposure they give to first-generation students and how this preparedness impacts me now as a professional.” The exposure provided by FGSP becomes crucial in empowering first-generation students, ensuring they enter the academic environment well-informed and equipped for success in their role now as professionals.

Eliza emphasized the ongoing support available for alumni from FGSP professional staff members: “I definitely think the support is there if you need it for Alumni. The FGSP Director does a great job posting job opportunities and connecting with Alumni through LinkedIn.” Eliza’s acknowledgment of the continuous support provided by FGSP professional staff members for alums highlights the program’s enduring commitment to its graduates’ success

beyond their college years. By actively posting job opportunities and fostering connections through platforms like LinkedIn, FGSP demonstrates its dedication to maintaining a supportive network for alums as they navigate their professional paths. This emphasis on long-term support underscores FGSP's effectiveness in fostering a sense of community during students' college experiences and its role in facilitating ongoing professional growth and networking opportunities for alums. It speaks to the larger theme of FGSP's holistic approach to supporting first-generation Latinx students, ensuring their success extends beyond graduation and into their professional lives.

These additional findings underscore the multifaceted impact of FGSP, highlighting its significance for first-generation Latinx college students both during and after their college journey. FGSP facilitates academic success, equips students with essential skills and resources during their college years, and imparts enduring lessons and practical skills to benefit them in their post-graduate lives. Participation in these programs enhances students' confidence, resilience, and self-efficacy, enabling them to navigate career and personal challenges. Furthermore, the supportive communities fostered by FGSP often lead to long-lasting relationships and professional networks, offering opportunities for employment, mentorship, and further educational pursuits.

Participant Advice

The participants offered advice to currently enrolled first-generation Latinx students. Carlos emphasized the importance of staying busy and taking on challenges in the first two years of college, leading to valuable learning experiences. Ale shared her advice:

Do not close yourself off. Take in everything that's being shared within the FGSP resources; that's definitely something you will utilize throughout your college experience

and after college. Enjoy FGSP Week. Take advantage of all the social activities, like the movies or the picnics, with your FGSP peers. Take advantage of the academic ones as well.

Ale encouraged students to remain open and engaged, both academically and socially, and to make the most of resources like FGSP week and networking opportunities.

Daniela highlighted the importance of community, reminding students of the support available within the FGSP community and the significance of being proud of their achievements as first-generation and Latinx individuals. They stated:

Never forget your FGSP community. Amid the chaos, your FGSP community will always be there for you. We're all here for you. Our community is hundreds strong. And we will always show up for each other. Never forget that you've already broken glass ceilings. Being a first-generation student is breaking a glass ceiling. It is fighting back against systems of oppression. Higher ed. never wanted us here in the first place, and we are here. We are loud, and we are proud to be first-gen. And proud to be Latinx. Never forget that you are breaking glass ceilings for yourself and those who come after you—just like the ones who came before you broke glass ceilings for you. Also, always remember your community. Never forget that you are strong and you're doing the damn thing, no matter how tough the quarter system gets. No matter how homesick you may get, no matter how much imposter syndrome you may feel at certain points in the quarter, you are doing the damn thing. And I am proud of you.

This advice emphasizes the importance of being proactive, engaged, and supported throughout college. First-generation Latinx college students need to hear this advice as it provides motivation and support throughout their college journey.

Summary

This study examined the multifaceted impact of FGSPs on Latinx college students throughout their educational journey. Research participants' narratives unraveled these programs' transformative role in creating supportive environments for Latinx college students, fostering a sense of community, promoting inclusion, and addressing challenges related to identity, diversity, and imposter syndrome. Participants emphasized the importance of FGSP in providing a sense of belonging and community on campus, highlighting the supportive spaces and resources offered by the program. The narratives also shed light on the program's role in easing the transition into a predominantly white institution (PWI) and facilitating cultural connections among Latinx students. Furthermore, participants discussed the emotional support provided by FGSP staff and mentors, underscoring the program's commitment to addressing the holistic needs of students beyond academic guidance.

Additionally, this research explored the significant impact of FGSP on the retention and academic success of Latinx college students. Participants attributed their graduation and academic achievements to the program's essential support, encouragement, and resources. FGSP emerged as a critical factor in empowering first-generation Latinx students to navigate challenges and persist in their educational journey. Moreover, participants reflected on the enduring influence of FGSP beyond their college years, highlighting the lasting impact of the program's lessons and support in shaping their perspectives and practices in post-graduate life.

Overall, the narratives collectively illuminated the transformative role of FGSP in fostering a sense of community, promoting inclusion, addressing challenges related to identity and imposter syndrome, and supporting academic success and retention among Latinx college students. The findings underscored the holistic support provided by FGSP, emphasizing its

significance in empowering first-generation Latinx students throughout their educational journey and beyond.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this chapter, the focus shifts to the qualitative results of this study, centered on examining the influence of FGSPs on Latinx college students throughout their educational journey. Expanding on the groundwork laid in the preceding chapters, where the challenges faced by first-generation Latinx students were explored and the research question guiding this study was introduced, this chapter offers a comprehensive analysis of the experiences shared by the six first-generation Latinx college graduates interviewed. Through the in-depth interviews, valuable insights were gathered into the impact of FGSP participation on various aspects of their college experiences. From financial assistance to peer support networks, the narratives provided by the participants shed light on the multifaceted role of FGSPs in supporting first-generation Latinx students. By exploring emerging themes such as financial impact and retention, this chapter offers an understanding of how FGSPs contribute to the academic success and holistic development of Latinx first-generation college students.

Review of Findings

The findings of this study highlights the significant impacts of FGSPs on Latinx college students, aligning closely with Vincent Tinto's (1993) Retention Theory and Laura Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory. This research builds upon existing research by explicitly focusing on Latinx first-generation college students, a demographic often overlooked in higher education literature (Batista et al., 2018). By centering the experiences of Latinx students within FGSPs, this study addresses a critical gap in the literature, shedding light on this population's unique challenges and support needs. Through in-depth interviews and a thorough analysis of the participants' narratives, this study offers four key takeaways. The four key takeaways are (a)

how FGSPs alleviate financial barriers, (b) the impact of peer and staff networks, (c) the long-term and retention impacts, and (d) the cultural significance of FGSPs for Latinx students.

Takeaway #1: Financial Impacts

This study contributes to an analysis of financial barriers and how they are connected to first-generation Latinx experiences and their retention. The first key takeaway from this study is the financial impact of FGSPs. Financial support provided by FGSP emerges as a crucial factor in promoting academic persistence, aligning with Vincent Tinto's (1993) Retention Theory and Validation Theory by Laura Rendón (1994). As per Tinto's theory, financial barriers are among the key obstacles to student retention, emphasizing the importance of resource availability. The specific FGSP studied for this research provided micro-grants and scholarships, effectively addressing these barriers, thus validating students' financial concerns and enabling them to remain engaged in their academic pursuits. In the study by Hurtado et al. (2007), the concerns of college financing were among the primary factors that affected the college transition of underrepresented minority students, including Latinx students.

This study adds to the current research as it offers a valuable opportunity to contextualize its findings within the existing literature on retention practices for Latinx and first-generation students. By highlighting the pivotal role of FGSPs in alleviating financial burdens and supporting academic persistence among Latinx first-generation college students. This study also contributes to prior literature by emphasizing the importance of financial assistance in promoting student retention and success (Chapa & De La Rosa, 2015). Moreover, this study adds depth to this body of literature by specifically focusing on the experiences of Latinx students within FGSPs, a demographic often underrepresented in retention research. By shedding light on how FGSPs validate the unique challenges faced by first-generation Latinx students and contribute to

their academic success and retention, this study proves the effectiveness of targeted interventions tailored to the needs of this population. A study by Hagedorn and Villalpando (2012) demonstrated the beneficial impact of support initiatives for first-generation college students, especially those from underrepresented minority groups, on their academic achievements. Thus, this study complements existing literature on retention practices by providing empirical evidence of the positive impact of FGSPs on Latinx first-generation college students' educational trajectories.

Takeaway #2: Peer & Staff Networks

The second key takeaway from this study is peer and staff support. This study further explored these support systems within FGSPs and how these programs play a pivotal role in fostering a sense of belonging. This aligns with prior literature and showcases that it is evident that dedicated support is crucial to empowering first-generation Latinx students to succeed in higher education and pursue advanced degrees (Vasquez-Guignard, 2010). Participants in this study emphasized the positive impact of the peer and staff support systems provided by their FGSP. They explained that their peer and staff mentors pulled them out of their shells, helped them with their professional development, empathized with them in times of need, provided them spaces to foster community, and guided them throughout their college journey. One of the participants stated, "FGSP advisors were there to support me. They would remind me that I am doing it (college) and that I was succeeding." This present study revealed that FGSP staff played a vital role in the student's college journey. By creating an encouraging atmosphere, strengthened by mentorship and peer support networks, FGSPs foster a sense of belonging within the community and support the academic achievements of Latinx students who are the first in their families to pursue higher education (Takimoto et al., 2021).

In addition, this research also aligned with Tinto's and Rendón's theories. Tinto (1993) emphasized the importance of social integration and support networks in facilitating student persistence, while Rendón's (1994) Validation Theory underscores the validation of students' social and emotional needs. Here, these participants demonstrated that the mentorship, guidance, and emotional support provided by peers and staff members within FGSP provided a supportive environment where first-generation Latinx students felt valued, understood, and motivated to persist despite numerous challenges, thus validating their social and emotional experiences. FGSP contributed to students' social integration by fostering a sense of belonging, enhancing their commitment to their academic journey, and ultimately supporting their retention.

Takeaway #3: Long-term & Retention Impacts

The third key takeaway is the long-term and retention impacts of FGSPs. This research found that the retention and long-term impacts of first-generation Latinx students enrolled in FGSPs significantly contribute to the existing literature on student success and retention in higher education. By highlighting the essential role of FGSPs in supporting Latinx students' academic journeys, this study adds empirical evidence to the literature that underscores the importance of targeted support programs for underrepresented student populations (Hurtado et al. 2007). Specifically, the testimonies of participants, such as Daniela's acknowledgment of FGSP's instrumental role in their graduation, provide concrete examples of how these programs positively impact students' educational trajectories. Additionally, the study's emphasis on the comprehensive support systems offered by FGSPs, including first-year instructors, peer mentors, and resources, aligns with previous research that identifies mentorship, academic support, and community engagement as critical factors in promoting student retention and persistence.

Moreover, this study highlights the enduring effects of FGSP participation, including the acquisition of crucial skills, networks, and resources that extend well beyond graduation. This study agreed with research conducted by Haycock et al. (2010), who demonstrated that tailored programs for first-generation students offer career development opportunities essential for their success in the workforce. This observation is bolstered by theoretical frameworks proposed by scholars such as Tinto and Rendón, further affirming the efficacy of FGSPs in promoting student success and persistence in higher education. In sum, this pivotal finding strengthens the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of the substantial and lasting impacts of FGSPs on the academic trajectories and long-term achievements of Latinx first-generation college students.

Takeaway #4: Cultural Significance

This study significantly contributes and provides new insight into our understanding of student persistence in higher education, particularly among Latinx students, by shedding light on the cultural significance of FGSPs. By examining the experiences of Latinx students within these programs, we gain valuable insights into how targeted interventions like FGSPs can effectively support their success and retention and contribute to several bodies of literature. This study's findings build upon the work of scholars such as Delgado and Gasman (2016), who emphasized the need for research focusing on specific sub-populations within the Latinx community. Additionally, this study extends the research on the effectiveness of FGSPs by validating the unique experiences and needs of Latinx students, echoing the calls for culturally sensitive support mechanisms made by Núñez and Cuccaro-Alamin (2013) and Torres et al. (2019).

Future Research

Future research in FGSPs for Latinx college students should address four critical areas of study to advance understanding and support this population further. Potential avenues for future

research are (a) comparative studies, (b) program evaluation and improvement, (c) exploration of additional factors and identities of first-generation Latinx students, (d) post graduate studies, and (e) consideration of the timeframe for future research.

Comparative Studies

Expanding research efforts to conduct comparative studies across diverse institutions would provide invaluable insights into the effectiveness of different models and components of FGSPs among first-generation Latinx college students. This research was conducted at one university in a private school setting; therefore, for the next step in research, it would be beneficial to conduct multiple studies at various universities to provide a more in-depth analysis of these programs nationwide on first-generation Latinx students. This is especially important with the rise of the Latinx population in the United States. Despite this demographic reality, research has shown that Latinx students remain among the lowest ethnic groups in terms of pursuing and completing higher education degrees (Batista et al., 2018). Therefore, exploring outcomes across many institutions with differing program structures and resources can shed light on the contextual factors contributing to program effectiveness and expanding support for first-generation Latinx students. Through these comparative analyses, researchers can identify best practices within FGSP initiatives and expand on current programming structures. This potential research can lead to additional questions such as, “What are the key institutional factors influencing the effectiveness of first-generation scholars programs (FGSPs) in supporting Latinx college students across diverse higher education institutions?” The research could explore how factors such as institutional culture, student demographics, and campus support services interact with FGSPs to influence student success and retention. By identifying best practices and contextual factors contributing to program effectiveness, this research can inform the

development and implementation of more targeted and equitable support interventions for first-generation Latinx college students.

Program Evaluation and Improvement

This study's findings underline the importance of conducting rigorous program evaluations of FGSPs to assess their effectiveness in supporting Latinx first-generation college students. By revealing the significant impact of FGSP participation on students' academic success and retention, this study contributes to the growing body of literature emphasizing the need for comprehensive evaluations of educational interventions (Perna & Jones, 2013). Employing mixed-methods approaches, such as surveys, interviews, and quantitative analyses, allowed researchers to gather comprehensive data on various aspects of FGSPs, including program outcomes, student experiences, and areas for improvement (Cabrera et al., 1993; Hurtado et al., 2007). Through these evaluations, researchers can identify the strengths and areas of growth of FGSPs, providing valuable insights for program enhancement and further contributing to the literature on effective support programs for underrepresented student populations. This evaluation process is crucial for continuously improving FGSPs and promoting equity and success for first-generation Latinx students. A potential future research question could be, "How do the specific components and implementation strategies of first-generation scholars programs (FGSPs) contribute to the academic success and retention of Latinx first-generation college students?" The research could explore how variations in program design and implementation across different institutions impact outcomes for Latinx students.

Furthermore, rigorous program evaluations are essential for assessing the effectiveness of FGSPs in supporting Latinx first-generation college students. By employing mixed-methods approaches, researchers can gather comprehensive data on program outcomes, student

experiences, and areas for improvement. This evaluation process continuously enhances FGSPs, ultimately promoting more significant equity and success for first-generation Latinx higher-education students. Through comparative studies and program evaluations, future research can inform the development and refinement of FGSP initiatives, ultimately empowering Latinx students to thrive academically and achieve their educational goals.

Post-Graduate Studies

The transition from college to postgraduate studies or careers presents unique challenges for first-generation students, as they navigate unfamiliar environments and systems without the same level of familial or institutional support as their peers. Future research could explore the long-term impacts of first-gen student experiences beyond college, focusing on how these experiences shape career trajectories, professional networks, and overall success in the workforce. Understanding the specific barriers and opportunities that first-gen students encounter in their postgraduate lives can inform the development of targeted interventions and support programs to facilitate their transition and enhance their career outcomes.

Additionally, future research could investigate the role of mentorship, networking, and professional development opportunities in supporting first-gen students as they navigate the complexities of the job market and establish themselves in their chosen fields. By examining the factors that contribute to postgraduate success among first-gen students, researchers can identify best practices and strategies for institutions, employers, and policymakers to better support this population and promote greater equity and inclusion in the workforce. Ultimately, by continuing to explore the long-term impacts of the first-gen experience and identifying areas for improvement, we can work towards creating more supportive and inclusive environments for all students, both during and after their college years.

Additional Factors

While this study extensively explored the influence of FGSPs on Latinx college students, it is essential to acknowledge that various other factors could also shape students' experiences and outcomes. These factors include socioeconomic status and family support structures, which can be explored in future research. Socioeconomic status can significantly impact students' access to resources, including financial support, which may complement or intersect with the assistance provided by FGSP. Family support systems, including familial expectations and responsibilities, can influence students' ability to fully engage in academic activities and take advantage of FGSP offerings (Delgado & Gasman, 2016). Given this diversity, there is a critical need for research that targets specific sub-groups within the Latinx community (Delgado & Gasman, 2016). To effectively conduct comparative studies and evaluations of programs supporting Latinx first-generation college students, researchers must focus on understanding specific aspects of their experiences within these programs. By delving into these sub-groups, researchers can gain insights into the factors that influence the effectiveness of these programs and inform more meaningful comparative studies and evaluations, ultimately enhancing support for Latinx first-generation college students in higher education settings.

Furthermore, incorporating these broader contextual factors into future research endeavors is imperative, as this study's findings highlight the intricate interaction between FGSP participation and various external influences on Latinx college students' experiences and outcomes. While this study's research sheds light on the positive impact of FGSPs, it also underlines the complexity of factors shaping students' educational trajectories. The experiences shared by participants in this study indicate that socioeconomic status, family support structures, and other contextual variables may influence FGSP effectiveness. Therefore, further research can

explore how these factors intersect with FGSP participation and impact students' holistic support needs. By explicitly connecting this study's findings to the need to investigate these broader contextual factors, future research can deepen our understanding of FGSP effectiveness and inform more targeted support interventions for Latinx college students.

Study's Time Frame

In addition, this study's time frame, which concentrated on participants who graduated between 2020 and 2022, offers valuable insights into the immediate impacts of FGSPs on Latinx college students' experiences and outcomes. However, it is essential to recognize that this timeframe may limit exploring long-term impacts or the evolution of FGSP effectiveness over time. The experiences recounted by participants during this specific period may only provide a snapshot of their journey within FGSP, potentially overlooking changes or developments in programmatic structures, resources, or support mechanisms before or after their graduation and post-COVID-19. Consequently, this study's findings only partially capture the enduring effects of FGSP participation or how students' perceptions and experiences may evolve beyond the immediate post-graduation period. Thus, future research questions can be developed to consider employing the long-term impacts and sustainability of FGSP initiatives in supporting Latinx college students' academic success and persistence, as well as the long-term impacts of COVID-19. This methodology could offer a more profound insight into the efficacy of first-generation scholars programs for Latinx students, identifying opportunities for enhancement (Torres et al., 2019).

Addressing these topics in future research endeavors can significantly enhance our understanding of the effectiveness and impact of FGSPs on Latinx first-generation college students. Ultimately, these methodological refinements and additional research questions can

yield more robust and nuanced insights into the complexities of FGSP effectiveness and its implications for Latinx first-generation college students, thereby informing the development of more targeted and equitable support interventions in higher education settings.

Implications for Practice

The research findings of FGSP for Latinx college students have multifaceted implications and extend to various stakeholders, including higher education institutions, faculty, staff, students, and FGSP administrators. This research highlights practical implications for these stakeholders, identifying specific areas for program support, faculty and staff training, and student empowerment and advocacy. These findings offer actionable recommendations to support Latinx first-generation college students more effectively.

Enhanced Program Support

This research underlines the essential role that FGSPs play in strengthening the educational trajectories of Latinx first-generation college students. By shedding light on the significant impacts of FGSP participation, higher education institutions gain valuable insights into the critical areas where support is most needed. Armed with this knowledge, institutions can strategically enhance and broaden their FGSP initiatives to better meet the diverse needs of Latinx students. One actionable step is to allocate additional funding towards financial aid resources within FGSPs, ensuring that students have the financial support necessary to alleviate economic barriers and sustain their academic pursuits. In this study, it was clear that the financial impacts of FGSPs were significant and should be expanded to continue to support students.

Additionally, expanding mentorship programs within FGSPs can provide students with valuable guidance, support, and networking opportunities essential for navigating the complexities of higher education and contributing to their sense of belonging. The participants

unanimously believed that the mentorship programs in their FGSP were invaluable and a critical resource that should be continued and expanded. FGSP was, ultimately, their central support system and fostered a community, creating a sense of belonging. By strengthening and expanding FGSP initiatives in these critical areas, higher education institutions can increase Latinx students' academic persistence and success, fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational environment.

First-generation programs can have a profound impact on students' academic success and overall well-being by providing tailored support and resources that address their unique needs and challenges. To effectively serve first-generation students, it is essential to understand and address their specific struggles and aspirations. Drawing on participants' advice, these programs can play a crucial role in addressing issues like imposter syndrome by fostering a sense of belonging and providing mentorship opportunities. First-gen servingness involves creating an inclusive environment where first-generation students feel supported and valued, regardless of their background. This could include initiatives to address imposter syndrome through workshops, counseling services, and peer support groups, as well as efforts to increase representation and diversity across campus.

In the transition to the workplace, first-gen students may face additional challenges, such as navigating unfamiliar professional environments and overcoming barriers related to their socioeconomic background. Real conversations about what the workplace will look like as a first-gen, POC professional are essential, highlighting the importance of networking, mentorship, and accessing resources through campus partners and career centers. Campus partners must be first-gen serving, meaning they actively prioritize the needs of first-generation students and provide tailored support to help them succeed academically and professionally. This could

involve collaborating with employers to create inclusive recruitment practices, offering career development workshops specifically for first-gen students, and providing mentorship programs that connect students with alumni and industry professionals who share similar backgrounds and experiences. Through these efforts, universities can soften the blow of the lack of diversity outside of first-gen programming and empower first-gen students to thrive both on campus and in their future careers

Additionally, while participants in the study emphasized the significance of faculty connections, there were certain aspects missing from their experiences. One area that emerged was the need for continued support and mentorship as alumni. Even after graduation, first-generation students continue to navigate challenges unique to their backgrounds, and maintaining connections with faculty members could provide valuable ongoing support. Future research could explore how alumni support networks can be strengthened to better serve the needs of first-generation graduates, ensuring their continued success beyond college.

Moreover, participants expressed a desire for more programming tailored to the needs of first-generation students. While existing programs like FGSPs offer valuable resources and support, there is room for growth and expansion to address evolving challenges faced by first-generation students. This could include specialized workshops, networking events, or alumni panels aimed at providing ongoing guidance and mentorship. Amplifying these experiences requires a concerted effort to enhance existing programs and develop new initiatives that cater specifically to the needs of first-generation college students.

Lastly, participants emphasized the importance of advising students to take advantage of available programming and assignments. Encouraging students to actively engage with resources and opportunities can help them maximize their college experience and overcome challenges

more effectively. Faculty members can play a pivotal role in promoting these initiatives and providing guidance to students as they navigate their academic journey. By amplifying the importance of participating in programming and assignments, faculty can empower first-generation students to make the most out of their college experience and achieve their academic goals.

Institutional Advocacy

Institutional advocacy for first-generation Latinx students involves advocating for increased funding allocations specifically designated for FGSPs, recognizing these programs' pivotal role in fostering academic persistence and success among Latinx students. For the university I studied, which was a private university, this can be accomplished at the institutional level by increasing the FGSP budget allocations, reaching out to donors to expand their financial support, and reaching out to potential new donors for their financial support and community. Additionally, university administrators can create policies that aim to reduce financial barriers, such as expanding access to need-based financial aid and scholarships tailored to the needs of first-generation Latinx students.

Faculty and Staff Training

Faculty and staff in higher education play a crucial role in nurturing a supportive and inclusive academic environment for Latinx first-generation college students. To enhance their ability to support this student population effectively, faculty and staff can benefit from training programs designed to increase cultural competency and awareness of the unique challenges Latinx first-generation college students face. Implementing culturally responsive practices and teaching strategies can aid educators in creating a more inclusive learning atmosphere that better connects with Latinx students. Crespo and Johnson (2013) asserted that incorporating bilingual

education and providing language support services can improve the academic achievements and overall educational results of Latinx students.

In this study, the need for training programs to increase cultural competency among faculty and staff was reflected in the experiences shared by participants. Many participants highlighted the need for culturally responsive practices and inclusivity challenges within the academic environment. For example, some participants expressed feelings of isolation or disconnection due to a lack of understanding from faculty and staff, who were not part of FGSP, regarding their cultural backgrounds and unique challenges as first-generation students. These experiences underscored the importance of implementing culturally responsive practices and teaching strategies to create a more inclusive learning atmosphere. While this study did not directly address the effectiveness of training programs, the experiences shared by participants highlighted the need for such initiatives to better support Latinx first-generation college students in higher education settings.

These training programs can provide faculty and staff with valuable insights into the cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives of Latinx students, helping them better understand the factors that may impact these students' academic success and well-being. By increasing their awareness of Latinx first-generation college students' challenges and barriers, faculty and staff can develop more empathetic and culturally responsive approaches to teaching, advising, and mentoring. Cultural competency for professionals engaging with first-generation Latinx students involves a nuanced understanding of their unique cultural backgrounds, experiences, and needs. Professionals should strive to create inclusive environments that recognize and respect the diversity within the Latinx community, acknowledging factors such as language barriers, immigration status, and socio-economic challenges. This requires sensitivity

to cultural nuances, an awareness of systemic inequalities, and a commitment to dismantling barriers to educational success.

Supporting first-generation Latinx students within this context necessitates proactive efforts to provide tailored resources and support systems. Professionals should prioritize culturally responsive practices, including offering mentorship opportunities, academic assistance, and access to culturally relevant programming. By actively engaging with students and understanding their individual circumstances, professionals can foster trust, build meaningful relationships, and empower students to navigate the challenges they may encounter on their academic journey. Through continuous education and reflection on cultural competency, professionals can create environments where first-generation Latinx students feel validated, supported, and empowered to achieve their goals.

Student Empowerment and Advocacy

Latinx first-generation college students can leverage the research findings to advocate for themselves and their peers within higher education institutions. With evidence from the research highlighting the critical role of FGSP in supporting their academic persistence and success, students can effectively advocate for increased resources and greater institutional support to address their unique needs and challenges. By sharing their experiences and insights with university administrators and stakeholders, students can raise awareness about the importance of FGSP initiatives and their positive impact on Latinx student retention and graduation rates. Additionally, students can use the research findings to advocate for specific institutional changes, such as expanding financial aid opportunities, expanding current FGSPs, and fostering a more inclusive campus culture.

Furthermore, this research's findings underline the critical importance of FGSPs in supporting Latinx college students throughout their educational journey. These findings offer actionable recommendations to enhance support mechanisms and promote equitable access to higher education for Latinx first-generation college students. By strategically improving FGSP initiatives, institutions can better address the diverse needs of first-generation Latinx students, allocate additional funding towards financial aid resources, expand mentorship programs, and provide culturally relevant resources and services.

Summary

The strengths of this research are multifaceted, contributing to a thorough examination of the experiences and impacts of FGSPs on Latinx college students. First, the qualitative depth achieved through in-depth interviews provides a rich and nuanced understanding of participants' perspectives. Second, including participants with diverse backgrounds, majors, and graduation years enhanced the breadth and richness of the data, ensuring a comprehensive exploration of the subject matter. Additionally, the thematic analysis approach employed in this research allowed for identifying and exploring key themes emerging from the data, providing a structured framework for understanding the multifaceted effects of FGSP participation. Furthermore, incorporating participant narratives added authenticity and credibility to the findings, allowing readers to gain insights directly impacted by FGSPs. Lastly, the practical implications for practice identified in this research offer actionable recommendations for various stakeholders, including higher education institutions, faculty, staff, and students. Collectively, these strengths contribute to a robust and holistic understanding of FGSPs' role in supporting Latinx college students and provide valuable insights for enhancing support and promoting success within this population.

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APPENDIX A: SAMPLE OUTREACH EMAIL

Sample Email

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Study on First-Generation Latinx Scholars

Programs

Email:

Dear Alumnus,

I hope this message finds you well. I am Lori Salazar, a doctoral candidate at Santa Clara University and a proud first-generation Latina. I am currently conducting a study exploring the impacts of first-generation scholars programs on Latinx students. I would be honored if you could participate as an Alumnus.

My connection to this research is not just academic; as a first-generation student, I understand our unique challenges and opportunities. I aim to highlight these experiences and elucidate how scholars programs can help shape the future of Latinx students and beyond.

As a Latinx Alumnus, your insights and experiences are invaluable to this research. I am aiming to interview a maximum of ten alums, with each interview anticipated to take approximately 60 minutes of your time. I plan to conduct these interviews on campus to rekindle your connection with our beloved university. However, I fully understand if you are not in a position to return to campus due to geographical constraints or health concerns. In such cases, I am more than willing to conduct the interview virtually at a time most convenient for you.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I am deeply committed to this project, and your participation could significantly contribute to the success of this research. Please fill out this Google Form if you are interested! Also, feel free to reply to this email lsalazar@scu.edu or Dr Ofoegbu at eofogbu@scu.edu if you have questions or concerns

Thank you for considering this request. I look forward to your participation and learning from your unique experiences.

Warm regards,

Lori Salazar
Doctoral Candidate
Santa Clara University

APPENDIX B: ADVERTISEMENT FOR RECRUITMENT

Call for Study Participants

FIRST-GEN ALUMNI

This study is about how participation in first-generation scholar programs affects Latinx students before and after college graduation.

About the Study:

- Approximately 60 minutes
- Anonymous Responses

Participant Requirements:

- Undergraduate Alumni
- First-generation program Alumni
- Graduated within 5 years

Santa Clara University, School of Education and Counseling
Psychology

Contact Info: Lori Salazar, lsalazar@scu.edu, SCU Doctoral
Candidate

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Ofoegbu, eofogbu@scu.edu

APPENDIX C: INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Researcher: Thank you for agreeing to participate in our research study. The purpose of this study is to learn about how participation in first-generation scholars programs affects Latinx students before and after college graduation. By agreeing to participate in this study, you are agreeing to complete today's interview. Before I proceed, are there any questions about the study, your participation, and/or the consent form?

The interview questions today are very open-ended. I want you to share with me only what you are comfortable sharing. You do not need to talk about anything that you are not comfortable talking about.

This interview may last up to one hour and is being recorded just so that I have an accurate record of what you said. No one will ever have access to the raw audio file outside of the research team. All of your comments today will be confidential and will only be used for our research project.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

College Experience and Identity

1. Tell me about yourself and your college experience.
2. If you were to use three words to describe your college experience, what would they be?
3. How do you think being a first-generation student shaped your experience?
4. Can you share your experience as a Latinx student in the first-generation scholars program?

Involvement in the First-Generation Scholars Program

1. What led you to join the program, and what were your expectations when you first became a part of it?
2. Reflecting on your time in the first-generation scholars program, how would you describe its overall impact on your college experience and subsequent graduation?

Support and Resources

1. What resources and support systems did you find valuable in your retention and academic success, and what resources were not helpful? Were there any resources that you would have liked to have but were not offered?
2. Did you have a mentor or advisor within the program who played a significant role in supporting your retention and academic success? If so, how did that relationship positively influence your journey?

Personal and Professional Growth

- In what ways did the first-generation scholars program contribute to your personal and professional growth beyond the academic realm?

Overcoming Challenges

- Reflecting on your experience, please tell me about specific challenges or obstacles that you faced during your college journey. How did the program effectively address or help you overcome these challenges?

Community Engagement

- If you were able to participate in activities within the university's local community, how did these experiences enhance your connection with the community and enrich your educational journey? Was this fostered by the first-generation scholar's program?

Financial Assistance

- Could you share how the program's financial assistance or scholarships impacted your educational journey?

Alumni Support and Suggestions for Improvement

1. How could the first-generation scholars program further enhance its support for alums, especially regarding post-graduation resources and mentorship?
2. As an alum of the first-generation scholars program, looking back on your experience, what aspects do you think the program could have been more effective in, or where do you believe it could have provided additional support?

Advice for Current and Future Students

- Looking back on your time as a Latinx student in the first-generation scholars program, what advice would you give to current or future Latinx students who are part of the program to enhance their retention and overall experience?

Closing Thoughts

- Lastly, is there anything else you would like to share about your experience with the first-generation scholars program and its impact on your life as an alumnus?

APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT FORM



Santa Clara University

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Fostering Success: An Examination of the Influence of First-Generation Scholars Programs on Latinx College Students' Educational Journeys and Post-Graduation Trajectories (IRB 23-08-2005)

Dear Perspective Participant,

I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education & Counseling Psychology at Santa Clara University. I am conducting a research study to examine the effects of first-generation scholars programs on the experiences of Latinx college students.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve an individual interview with the researcher. This may last up to 60 minutes. This interview will take place in person on-site or via Zoom. The interview will be audio recorded. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Participants must be at least 18 years old.

There is no direct benefit to you anticipated from participating in this study. However, it is hoped that the information gained from the study will help showcase the importance of first-generation scholars programs for Latinx students encompassing both their time enrolled in higher education and post-graduation.

If you have any questions concerning the research study please email me at lsalazar@scu.edu or Dr Ofoegbu at eofogbu@scu.edu.

Sincerely,

Lori Salazar

By signing below you are giving consent to participate in the above study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Committee, through the Office of Research Compliance and Integrity at (408) 554-5591.



APPROVAL DATE: September 01, 2023

PI NAME: Lori Salazar

Education

Santa Clara University

500 El Camino Real

Santa Clara, CA 95053

SUBJECT: APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS APPLICATION 23-08-2005

SCU FWA: 00002737

REVIEW TYPE: EXPEDITED

PROTOCOL TITLE: FOSTERING SUCCESS: AN EXAMINATION OF THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST-GENERATION SCHOLAR PROGRAMS ON LATINX COLLEGE STUDENTS' EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS AND POST-GRADUATION TRAJECTORIES

Dear Lori Salazar

You received approval from the IRB at Santa Clara University on September 01, 2023, to conduct your research in the above referenced proposal. The expiration date of your IRB approval is August 31, 2026, and a Continuing Review must be submitted by August 31, 2024. For any changes to the approved protocol, amendments must be submitted for review. The faculty P.I. is also required to keep all signed consent forms for three years for auditing purposes.

Note 1: SCU policy requires those working on Human Subjects projects to complete the CITI Basic Human Subjects online training course. It is important to note that HSC approval requires all members of the research team to complete the CITI training. This is an OHRP - Federal Wide Assurance requirement. CITI training is valid for three years.

Note 2: COVID-19 In an effort to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to subjects (45 CFR 46.108(3)(iii)) and the Santa Clara University community, **all IN-PERSON visits for human research activities must be in compliance with the University COVID -19 policy per provisions of SCU's Research Resumption Plan.**

If you have any questions, please contact either myself at (408)-554-5591 or Samantha Herman at (408)-554-4408.

Sincerely,

Esther Pham, Director

Office of Research Compliance and Integrity