

Spring 4-26-2018

Self-Perceived Success of First-Generation College-Going Latinx Students

Sarah Mongillo
sarah.mongillo@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses

 Part of the [Chicana/o Studies Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Latin American Languages and Societies Commons](#), [Latina/o Studies Commons](#), and the [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Mongillo, Sarah, "Self-Perceived Success of First-Generation College-Going Latinx Students" (2018). *Honors Scholar Theses*. 628.
https://opencommons.uconn.edu/srhonors_theses/628

Self-Perceived Success of First-Generation College-Going Latinx Students

Sarah F. Mongillo

The University of Connecticut Department of Urban and Community Studies

Thesis Advisor: Daisy Reyes, The University of Connecticut Department of Sociology

Abstract

This exploratory study aims to address the unique experiences of Latinx first-generation college-going students during their undergraduate careers. Literature has emphasized the obstacles Latinx students face during admission phase to college, this research examines the experiences of students attending a predominantly white institution (PWI) in the northeast. Latinx individuals are the most underrepresented ethnic group on college campuses, and those whose parents lack knowledge of the US education system must overcome additional struggles. Through qualitative data analysis of 20 undergraduate students' survey responses, this study finds that first-generation college-going Latinx students feel isolated in their college experience and prioritize non-traditional measures of success.

Key Words: *First-generation college students, Latinx students, cultural capital, self-efficacy, stress, perceived success, higher education, PWI*

Introduction

This study examines first-generation college-going Latinx students' experiences of navigating and adjusting to college life and expectations at a predominantly white college (PWI). Attaining a college degree is critical for the social mobility of individuals from underrepresented groups and low economic means, thus it is crucial that we understand the barriers to success they face (Ovink, 2017). Latinx students are a significant group to study because they attend college at increasing rates, yet continue to face barriers to graduation. For example, 35% of Latinx individuals ages 18-24 attended college in 2014, a 13% increase since 1993. However, only 15% of Latinx individuals ages 25-29 obtain a 4-year degree. Moreover, of those attending college, approximately half are enrolling in 2-year institutions (Krogstad, 2016). Even some high-achieving, top Latinx students attend two-year institutions or non-elite schools due to familial concerns over cost and living arrangements, often resulting from a lack of knowledge about how to apply for financial aid (Ovink, 2015; Radford, 2014). Consequently, the paths of Latinx students involve more barriers to graduation (Fry, 2011). Often times, these students have more responsibilities at home, like figuring out the education system on their own, helping their families financially, and teaching their parents about college. Torres and Solberg (2001), tell us just how important familial support is as it is a direct predictor of a student's self-efficacy and stress. When responsibilities overwhelm students they can rely on their family as a safe resource when challenges exceed their own abilities. Many of these students are already highly involved in their college environment and studies, so extra responsibilities can lead to additional stress and frustration. Stress and ability to engage with their environment are predictors of persistence in college, also according to the model (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Therefore, it is important that we understand the experiences and struggles that Latinx students face once in college, especially

those who are the first in their family to attend (Ovink, 2017) because it will allow us to address the discrepancy between graduation rates. This research focuses on barriers to success by analyzing Latino students' responses to questions about many aspects of their college life.

Literature Review

The challenges of first-generation college-going Latinx students often begin with their parents' lack of knowledge about the U.S. educational system, which can include information about financial aid and can be exacerbated by language barriers (Heredia, 2009). Parents are a main resource when applying to college as well as succeeding in higher education, yet most parents without college degrees often can provide very limited support. Research demonstrates that first-generation Latinx college students' at-home environment can affect their predisposition to attend college and their projection of success (Heredia, 2009; Radford, 2014). Latino students' at-home environment can include moral support and at times financial support for college (Auerbach, 2006; Ceja, 2006; Meza, 2011; Heredia, 2009) rather than the inherited cultural capital about college navigation that can catalyze success (Atherton, 2014; Ovink & Veazy, 2011; Saunders, 2004; Torres & Solberg, 2001; Tramonte & Willms, 2010). Therefore, many first-generation Latino college students find that they have to learn functional information as well as college know-how on their own as well as expose their parents to it (Auerbach, 2006; Ceja, 2006). This double-role as student and transmitter of information to their parents might affect students' experiences in college and self-reported stress levels. These factors intersect in students' daily lives to create a unique, and challenging college landscape for first-generation college-going Latinx students.

Retention Barriers

Although more Latinx students are enrolling in college than ever before, statistics demonstrate that they graduate at much smaller rates than their white peers. This discrepancy is the result of the barriers some Latinx face that are often times a result of additional barriers and poor preparation during high school. These issues are further compounded by first-generation college student responsibilities and lack of resources. Thus, after controlling for other factors, first-generation college students are 13% more likely to withdraw from college by their second year (Choy, 2001) and Latinx students have the lowest expectation for degree attainment out of any other racial or ethnic group (Hurtado, 1997). First-generation college-going Latinx students may experience lower graduation rates due to myriad barriers such as limited or no financial aid, lack of knowledge of available financial aid, lack of involvement, lack of inherited cultural capital, low self-esteem, identity concerns, and lack of staff interaction (Meza, 2011). These barriers among other factors, may lead to non-traditional paths that these students take to graduation. Non-traditional paths include prolonging college, attending community college, or attending part-time, a path that the US Department of Education considers a risk factor to dropping out (Fry, 2011). However, Latinx first-generation college students are more prone to taking these paths due to commitment to family, working part time, financial concerns, or their families' desire for them to live close by (Fry 2000; Ovink 2015; Radford, 2014).

Students who are first-generation college-going come from families that make an average of \$62,070 less than those of non-first generation students (Pappano, 2015), financial concerns prove to be a significant challenge when choosing paths that guarantee graduation. Not only that, but families who come from low socioeconomic standing may come from areas where school systems under-prepare students for college or do not help with the process. Having a strong

mentoring base for college preparation is critical because, without proper guidance, some students passively opt out of success by not preparing for exams properly, not taking proper required courses, or any other issue that can be addressed by proper advising (Tierney & Venegas, 2009). The backgrounds of Latinx first-generation college-going students provide a challenging course to a bachelor's degree, so this study aims to find out how these backgrounds contribute to the experiences of these students and what can be done to address their struggles.

Role of Parents

Much of the literature on the experiences of first-generation college students notes that their parents offer a form of non-traditional support for college (Auerbach, 2006; Atherton, 2014; Barry, 2009; Ceja, 2006; Meza, 2011; Heredia, 2009) that differs from the inherited know-how that most middle-class parents with college degrees provide (Ovink & Veazy, 2011). Rather than offering advice about time management, involvement in extracurricular activities, or preferences for majors, parents who did not go to college may offer only advice on morals or responsibilities. Parents who lack college experience tend to express pride and encouragement for their children's aspirations for college, but can only provide emotional rather than informed support throughout their careers (Auerbach, 2006; Ceja, 2006; Espenshade, Radford, & Chung, 2009; Heredia, 2009; Meza, 2011). From the parents' perspective, their role of moral supporter is highly regarded because they can encourage important virtues such as hard work and other general traits that are important for success (Auerbach, 2006). Some parents support comes in the form of stories of their own resiliency to demonstrate that college will provide a better life, (Meza, 2011) or background assistance such as driving students to necessary meetings or giving them money for books (Ceja, 2006). However, the absence of relevant knowledge at home contributes to

students' lack of awareness in college and can affect academic outcomes as significantly as low standardized test scores and GPA can (Atherton, 2014).

Although moral support is highly valued, it does not provide students formal guidance on the processes, resources available, or navigation of college life. For that reason, parents rely on the institution to guide their child in the process in the form of counselors, peers, and communication from the university (Espenshade, et al., 2009; Meza, 2011). These parents do not understand the system, but they trust it and desire to know it. This strategy often is not adequate for proper guidance, especially in "silent systems" where the university does not reach out to parents to let them know what is needed from their student. Parents have expressed frustration with these types of systems because they feel like the university is not properly taking care of their child (Meza, 2011), yet they do not possess the cultural capital to proactively prevent or overcome these challenges. Also, parents that do not primarily speak English are more hesitant to get involved or intervene on their child's behalf in the educational system (Heredia, 2009), which demonstrates the many intersecting challenges that Latinx students face. One of the biggest disadvantages of being a first-generation college student is the lack of their parent's college know-how and guidance. These disadvantage compounded with language barriers can place the students in a very isolated and challenging position as they pursue their degree (Ceja, 2006).

Stress and Self-Efficacy

First-generation college students are at a disadvantage, and the effects are highly evident in standard success measures and in testimonials (Ceja, 2006; Heredia 2009; Dennis, Phinney & Chuateco, 2005; Meza, 2011; Choy 2001). In one study that investigated the role of parents and siblings as informational sources for Chicana first-generation college students, the students revealed that their parents' lack of formal understanding of college left them feeling

overwhelmed and stressed in their experiences (Ceja, 2006). However, the college attendees also felt like it was their responsibility to expose their parents to the processes and requirements of attending a university. For these students, a double-role of broker of college proficiency as well as a new learner of this information created additional stress and affected self-efficacy (Auerbach, 2006; Ceja, 2006). The idea of self-efficacy revolves highly around one's own perception of their ability to take a course of action to overcome obstacles. Therefore, student's own testimonials, such as the one in this survey-oriented research, are highly valuable to understanding how they overcome challenges that they feel exceed their abilities. Self-efficacy is an important determinant of educational outcomes as it predicts indicators of success including social integration, persistence, and stress (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Torres and Solberg claim that availability of familial support is strongly associated with self-efficacy because it provides a safe, reliable environment to rely on when challenges exceed their own abilities, and it also allows them to develop identities that more readily perceive challenges as transitions rather than threats (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Students who have a family that have a solid background and experience in going to college can easily default to their parents as resources, but first-generation college students must navigate the system on their own. However, studies have shown that first-generation college-going Latinx have an exceptional sense of self-determination when navigating college and doing what they have to do to succeed, which is further mediated by campus involvement and access to a strong support network where they can also immerse themselves culturally (Clayton, Medina, & Wisemen, 2017; Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Fischer, 2007; Gonzalez & Ting, 2008). Students in a specific college predicament, such as being the first one in their family to go to college, or not relating culturally to the mainstream student body, may experience college in a different way than their peers. Students' decisions to discontinue

their studies linked to their perception of barriers and their ability to integrate to the campus environment (Bordes & Arrendando, 2005; Fischer, 2007).

This study examines the overall experiences and specific challenges at a four-year university of Latinx first-generation college-going students. The standards for measuring success were the students' own academic values and aspirations as they create their version of a successful college student. Much research has been done on application and access to college for this group of students, but this research aims to measure students' self-efficacy and willingness to persist in college and their self-perceived success.

The study aims to address the following research questions: 1) where do students receive their information about college (parents, high school staff, college prep programs etc.)? 2) How do Latino students describe their transition to college? 3) How do students self-report experiences with stress while in college? 4) How do they describe success? 5) How do they evaluate their own success? 6) How do they characterize their relationship with college experience?

This is an exploratory study, but the researchers hypothesize that students will indicate receiving informational knowledge about college mainly from individuals that are not their parents. We expect college preparation programs to play a role in providing them the tools to navigate college.

Methods

Research Site, Survey, and Recruitment

This study's intent is to explore the experiences of a population of first-generation college-going Latinx at a predominately white institution through their own words. The university is a large, research-intensive northeastern institution with an active student population

with many student organizations and a lively athletic culture. Student were recruited from the Latino Cultural Center, specific courses, and other organizations on campus that attract Latinx students, like Students for Success, a transition program for first-generation college students. The director of each organization was contacted with the proposed research, and the link to the survey was sent to students who may be eligible. The study was advertised at these organizations, but not every student would qualify to complete it. Therefore, in accordance with university policy, no monetary or extra-credit points for courses were offered as incentive to participants. However, the study aims to expose the barriers and unique experiences of students like themselves to potentially gain representation and benefits in higher education. Assuming this end goal is valuable to the students, they were encouraged to take part in this study.

A survey with 40 questions that encompassed student profiles, attitudes about success in college, open-ended questions about receiving familiar and institutional support in college, acquired knowledge and skills was designed to prompt students to talk about their transition and relationship to college. The survey consisted of closed ended and open-ended questions about their personal experiences in higher education as related to their perceived transition and success. It identified factors that might hinder or affect their success such as commuting to campus or teaching their parents about college processes. The survey also asked for basic demographics such as grade level, race/ethnicity, first generation status for college attendance, gender, household income, and demographics of home town.

Participants

The final population sample consisted of 20 students of various undergraduate level, who identified as Latinx, as the first person in their family to attend college, and that attend the main campus of the university. To qualify these students, they entered the survey and met criteria

based on their answers of the following questions: “Have at least one of your parents completed a 4 year degree?” “Do you identify as Hispanic, Latino, Latinx?” and “are you currently an undergraduate at the main campus of the university?”

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this study was collected through a survey. The survey was designed to outline the students’ daily realities and responsibilities for going to college, their idea of what constitutes a successful college student, their background, and how well they meet their own standards of success. To do so, the students answered questions about their high school advising experience, their characteristics (i.e. major, honors program, full-time status), life on campus (i.e. extra-curricular activities, commuter status, involvement), to rank their importance of certain measure of success, to rank the extent to which they have met these measures, and demographics. Response structure varied between open-ended questions, multiple choice, and 5-level Likert scale options ranging from “disagree” to “agree”. Students were sent the link to this survey, powered by an online secure and encrypted survey tool, and filled it out on their own time and on their personal computers. The data was sent via the software to the researchers who qualitatively analyzed responses.

After reviewing demographics, the researcher identified questions that had the most relevant impact on the study, and analyzed the results by manually tallying the percentage of respondents per response. For example, researchers considered responses to a question that asked students to rank their stress from extra responsibilities related to being a first-generation college student on a scale from 1 to 5 as significant because the average rank was 4.9, the highest average out of all stress-related questions. Additionally, all open-ended responses were reviewed multiple times and analyzed qualitatively for emerging themes.

Findings

To begin analysis, responses were filtered so that only respondents who completed the entire survey remained. This step resulted in a sample size of $n=20$, consisting of 18 women and 2 men. All volunteers were at least full-time students at the undergraduate level at the university's main campus location. Additionally, all identified as Latinx and as the first person in their family to attend college. Most respondents were active on the college campus, with 90% being involved in some type of extra-curricular activity between interest clubs, sports, community service, and academic organizations. Among respondents, 35% commuted to campus, with 5% of the total sample having over 1 hour of a commute to school. Additionally, students most frequently came from households that make \$0-\$40,000 annually, and live in predominantly lower to lower-middle class neighborhoods. A summary of respondent characteristics can be viewed in Table 1.

Table 1 **Sample Characteristics**

		Sample Representation
Credits taken	12-20	90%
Transfer Status	From Community College	20%
	From Regional Campus ¹	15%
	Did Not Transfer	65%
Weekly Hours Working for Employer	Less than 10	15%
	10-20	35%
	21-40	20%
	Does Not Work	30%
Age	18-20	60%
	21-25	30%
	30+	10%
Gender	Male	10%
	Female	90%
Yearly Household Income	\$0-40,000	70%
	\$40,001-\$80,000	20%
	\$80,001-\$100,000	10%
Family Structure	Siblings	90%
	No Siblings	10%
Commuter Status	Commute	35%
	Do Not Commute	65%

Table 1

¹The research site is the state’s flagship university that has a main campus in one location and four regional campuses in different locations that offer accessibility, small class sizes, and university faculty to other parts of the state.

Experience with Stress and First-Generation Status

The stressor that students indicated as their highest source of stress was “other responsibilities related to being a first-generation college student” with an average stress level of 4, with 5 being the highest amount of stress on the scale. In fact, seven total students ranked these responsibilities with a stress level of 5. The next highest stressor, with an average stress value of 3.9 is “paying for school,” a stressor that does not necessarily only apply to first-generation college students. For that reason, the responses to “other responsibilities related to being a first-generation college student” are considered significant because they are specific to the sampled population, and a possible defining characteristic. These data contribute to the researchers’ understanding of how students describe their stress at college, as being a first-generation college student is their primary source of stress. These levels outweigh even stress about students’ course loads, with a mean of 3.75, and time management with an average stress level of 3.85. One of the most significant findings is that 100% of students in the study agreed that they have extra responsibilities related to being a first-generation college student (see table 2), and it is clear these responsibilities are a perceived source of stress for most.

Relationship with Administration

We asked a series of questions intended to understand student’s proficiency/familiarity of the college process such students’ interactions with faculty, and guidance during the transition process as well as during their undergraduate careers, and 100% of students reported that they know exactly what is expected of them as a college student. However, many students demonstrated a not always positive relationship with administration. The theme of resentment for administration encapsulates the respondents’ feelings of general neglect from professors, misguidance, and lack of an understanding support base. These feelings are mostly directed towards professors or faculty not involved in transition or special programs specific to the

population. For example, when asked if they are guided within their major, one respondent provided this response: “Hardly. Most professors show little interest in their students and can be very condescending” (middle-class Hispanic man, 22). Many students, 65%, said that they do not have a relationship with a professor, while 50% said they feel guided within their major.

The following student experienced both good and bad counseling, and considers it a factor in her challenging transition to the main campus. This student responds to the question, “Are you guided within your major?” with the following statement: “Yes, my adviser is a great resource [at the main campus]. At my regional campus, my adviser did a very poor job which also complicated my transition to the [main] campus” (lower-class White-Mexican woman, 18).

This theme is a continuation from their experiences in the college application process where students described their school administration as less than helpful. Some students attributed poor results to poor guidance within the system, as exemplified by the following remark:

“It was mostly a process that I had to take on by myself. My high school counselors ‘guided’ me, but ultimately their guidance lacked and a lot of decisions were made poorly as a result of their advice” (Lower-middle class Latina woman, 19).

A general lack of guidance from faculty in high school complicated students’ college preparation and transition, while poor faculty and student engagement at the university is something the students cited as a complication to their transition and overall college success. However, other sources of a support base were seen as a positive.

Support System

Adjusting was seen as a challenge as 70% of students cited difficulty in a different learning environment than the one they are used to due to the size of the campus and classrooms, as well as the rigor of work. Many students referred to a support group that helped them ease the transition, and many times, this support base was from a program called Students for Success, which is a program for first-generation college students, or students from a low socioeconomic or underrepresented background. For some, a support group eased the transition, like for one student who described their transition as, “Relatively easy, I made a lot of friends during a program called SFS [Students for Success] at [University], I branched out and met other people through them as well as getting involved on campus” (middle-class Hispanic man, 22). For others, the transition was a major challenge, and the support base was seen as a possible source of guidance. This student exemplifies this theme with her response to the question “How would you describe your transition to [University], was it easy or relatively challenging?” The student told us:

“Challenging because I feel alone. I mean still in the process of my transition to be honest I guess friends that I made in SFS” (lower-class Puerto Rican woman, 19). Like this student, many others have felt alone throughout the entire college process.

However, some students who have actually made the connections have enjoyed the benefits of future opportunities that these relationships provide. For example, some students who did well in a professor’s class began to conduct research within this professor’s domain. The following student has created an advantageous connection with a professor, but his perspective on professors in general remains jaded and untrusting. When asked if he has a relationship with a professor he responds with: “Professor B. in the ECE [Electrical and Computer Engineering]

Department. I took his class and I did well enough for him to hire me to work in his lab alongside a grad student. He is now my senior design advisor. He's one of the few professors to actually care" (middle-class Hispanic man, 22). Like these students, others mentioned factors that contributed to an overall sense of internal struggle and alienation.

Feelings of Isolation

Like the student who felt alone at college, others struggled with isolation and an inability to relate to others. During the application process as well as while in college, students felt lost, conflicted, and as if they are alone in the process both academically and socially. For example, in the college application process students did not even want to seek out help, because they felt no one could really relate to their situation. For example, in response to a question about who helped with the application process, one student wrote, "I know there would have been people to help if I needed, but I wasn't going to go out of my way to find someone who understood" (middle class Latina woman, 20). This particular student came from a high school where "everyone's families had gone to college for the past generations" so she felt very alone since her parents could not help her and she did not know anyone in the same situation. For this reason, many students undertake the whole process on their own. For instance, students actively sought out other sources of cultural capital such as this student who said, "I completed the college application process by myself. I attended a FAFSA workout at [Another University] to help with filling out FAFSA application" (Hispanic woman, 20). In college, students continued to feel isolated in their situation, which was exacerbated by poor or inexistent guidance. One student demonstrates the solitude she feels on a daily basis by listing "eating alone with pride" as one of the skills she gained outside of the classroom while at college. Other students acknowledge that they have had no help in navigating and succeeding within the system, like one student who summarizes her

experiences as “I have had to do basically everything by myself” (middle class Latina woman, 20). This undergraduate has undertaken everything on her own from the application process to actually attending and navigating the university. Other students like her have found attempts to guide them unprofitable, and have gained knowledge and abilities on their own. The following student responded in the following way when asked if she was guided within her major, “No not necessarily I had 1 meeting with my advisors but I learned to guide myself” (lower class Hispanic woman, 20).

Parents and College

Students were asked questions about parents’ involvement in the college application and navigation process. The questions were asked: “Did your parents offer you tangible² about the college application process?” “Did your parents offer you tangible advice about the college navigation process?” “Who or what helped you most in the college application process?” and “do you feel the need to teach your parents about college?” One student disclosed that her parents did not know about her college performance and told us, “My parents trusted that I did well in school, so they never checked in on my grades. Now that I am in academic probation, only my mother knows that and she asks more about it” (middle class Peruvian/Latina woman, 18). Other students indicated that their parents do not know much about college in general or what it entails, as seen in Table 2. However, although students indicate their parents lack knowledge about college, and specifically what is going on in their own college lives, only 50% agreed that they feel the need to teach their parents about college navigation (see Table 2).

²Tangible advice can be defined as useful advice about the processes themselves including resources available, step-by-step instructions, how to find and apply for financial aid, and what to look for in a college or major.

Table 2 Parental Role

Statement	Number of Respondents Per Category				
	Slightly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	No Opinion
My parents do not know what college actually entails	25%	5%	35%	30%	5%
I have extra responsibilities that students who have parents that attended college do not have	0%	0%	15%	85%	0%
I feel the need to teach my parents about college navigation	30%	0%	20%	30%	20%

Table 2

From the college application process, 100% students said their parents could not provide insight about college (see Table 3). Most students indicated other forms of information such as counselors, friends, teachers, or workshops that they had to seek out on their own. This trend continues as 95% say that their parents cannot offer tangible advice in the college navigation process (see table 3).

Table 3 Parental Advice

Question	Yes	No
Did you Parents Provide Tangible Advice About the College Navigation Process?	5%	95%
Did Your Parents Provide Tangible Advice About the College Application Process?	0%	100%

Table 3

What is Success?

Students were asked to think about what they consider to be success in college. Students ranked measures of success individually on a scale of 1 to 5 and were also asked to provide their own examples of what they consider to be success. When filling out the open-ended portion of their most important measure of success, 35% provided unquantifiable internal measures of success that deal with personal feelings, such as happiness with the degree, knowing that it was “worth it,” and a general sense of accomplishment. Graduating was seen as a top priority, as it was given a 4.9 average out of 5 value in measuring success, but only 15% of students cited it as the most important measure. 50% of total students said they were on track to graduate on time, while others were unsure. Other students attributed skills and knowledge gained as a measure of success. Students outlined the skills and knowledge they have learned inside and outside the classroom, which include time management, professionalism, studying skills, interpersonal skills, field-specific knowledge and skills, and critical thinking. One student indicated that she has learned field-specific skills in the classroom and told us “I have gained many laboratory skills in the classroom related to the Biological Sciences. I also have gained knowledge in Physiology and Neurobiology, Molecular and Cell Biology, Chemistry, Ecology (most classes I took).” The same student also offered many other skills that she learned outside of the classroom including, “How important time management is, coping with challenges and stress, being creative with the resources you have” (lower class Latina/Hispanic woman, 21).

Discussion and Conclusions

This exploratory analysis allowed the researchers an opportunity to understand the college process as first-generation college-going Latinx students experience it. We can see that a first-generation college-going status is a pervasive identity, as it affects overall stress and the

students' relationship to college. Emerging themes of isolation, complicated perspective on faculty, and feelings of support demonstrate how these students perceive themselves in the overall college setting.

Feeling alone at college was a common theme throughout many stages of students' college experience. These emotions are also paralleled by students' recognition that they have had to pioneer the entire college application and navigation process on their own. At times, isolation contributed to a reciprocal process between poor guidance and outcomes and feeling alone. Those who felt as if no one could relate to their situation would avoid seeking guidance in an environment where they felt underrepresented, which led to obstacles in their success, like poor decisions made with poor guidance. Professional staff negligence or disinterest contributed to students' general negative outlook on professors, or a defining factor in their failures or difficulties while adjusting. Feeling like professors do not care about their students and success exacerbated students' isolation because they felt like there was no support network anywhere. This theme aligned with previous literature that linked campus integration with student success rates. The college campus, a setting that students perceived as overwhelming, distracting, and a major change from their comfort zone, was a breeding ground for either beneficial alliances, or internal struggles and isolation. Students that maintained a good relationship with professors or program staff were welcomed to door-opening opportunities like research, a resource on campus, or job opportunities. On the other hand, under-preparation in high school contributed to a turbulent transition, where students mostly cited harder classes, larger class size, and inability to navigate the system as major factors in the challenging transition to college. Some students were still adjusting after their first semester, and felt very alone on campus. For that reason, support groups, like Students For Success, that unite students from similar backgrounds, allowed

students to engage in their community and create friendships that eased their transition and alleviated a sense of alienation on campus. These support groups also facilitated academic transition, as the staff were seen primarily as a resource and supplement to information that their parents lacked.

Solitariness in the college experience extended, or perhaps originated, from students' home environment. Students indicated that they received virtually no help from their parents in the application and navigation process, and it was a major challenge simply because they had to undertake it on their own. Consequently, the study found that parents remained in the background of their students' college endeavors and daily lives as they persisted through college. The student who was placed on academic probation demonstrated that the parents are not at the forefront of their students' academic careers, because they had no idea the student was in academic trouble, and they assumed she was getting good grades at college. Nevertheless, students did not overwhelmingly indicate that they felt the need to teach their parents about college, so these students did not relate to the double role between student and knowledge broker. Interestingly, students indicated "other responsibilities related to being a first-generation college student" as their highest source of stress, so future research might do well to investigate exactly what other responsibilities these students take on.

When analyzing for success, students valued graduating, gaining knowledge, and internal senses of accomplishment as their highest standards. Half the students were on track to graduate on time, while some were unsure, possibly because it was too early to tell. However, every student identified multiple skills and specific knowledge that they have gained in college, so overall, these students were successful by their own measures. However, no open-ended question asked students to tell us why or why not they thought they were successful, so there is no

subjective data to add to our understanding. Future research can interview students about how they perceive their own success and give them more opportunities to answer open-ended questions, so as to add subjective data to the literature. This study adds to the body of literature on this topic because student ideas offer a baseline to measure student success while in college, rather than traditional measures. In general, this study included a successful group of students, who functioned within their own unique relationships with college.

Judging students by traditional measures may no longer be a litmus test for success. When understanding success, we must think about the struggles, ideals, acquired skills, and relationships to college that their unique situation yields. A stronger emphasis and better access to student programs to create solidarity and a functional support base on campus is something that many predominately white institutions can benefit from, but often lack. Further, professors will do well to adopt a sense of genuine involvement and concern in their students' success, so that these students do not have to adopt a relationship to college that is defined by singularity.

References

- Atherton, M. C. (2014). Academic preparedness of first-generation college students: Different Perspectives. *Journal of College Student Development*, 55(8), 824-829. The Johns Hopkins University Press from Project MUSE database.
- Auerbach, S. (2006). "If the student is good, let him fly": Moral support for college among Latino immigrant parents. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 5(4), 275-292.
doi:10.1207/s1532771xjle0504_4
- Barry, L. M., Hudley, C., Kelly, M., & Cho, S. (2009). Differences in self-reported disclosure of college experiences by first-generation college student status. *Adolescence*, 44(173), 55-68.
- Bordes, V., & Arredondo, P. (2005). Mentoring and 1st-year Latina/o college students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 4(2), 114-133. doi:10.1177/1538192704273855
- Ceja, M. (2006). Understanding the role of parents and siblings as information sources in the college choice process of Chicana students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 47(1), 87-104. The Johns Hopkins University Press. Retrieved October 29, 2017, from Project MUSE database.
- Cerezo, A., & McWhirter, B. (2012). A brief intervention designed to improve social awareness and skills to improve Latino college student success. *College Student Journal*, 46(4), 867-879.
- Choy, S. P. (2001). *Students whose parents did not go to college: Postsecondary access, persistence, and attainment*. Retrieved from <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED460660>.
- Clayton, A. B., Medina, M. C., & Wiseman, A. M. (2017). Culture and community: Perspectives from first-year, first-generation-in-college Latino students. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 1-17.
doi:10.1080/15348431.2017.1386101

- Demetriou, C., Meece, J., Eaker-Rich, D., & Powell, C. (2017). The activities, roles, and relationships of successful first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development* 58(1), 19-36. doi:10.1353/csd.2017.0001
- Dennis, J.M., Phinney, J.S., & Chuateco, L.I., (2005). The role of motivation, parental support, and peer support in the academic success of ethnic minority first-generation college students. *Journal of College Student Development*, 46(3), 223-236. doi:10.1353/csd.2005.0023
- Espenshade, T. J., Radford, A. W., & Chung, C. Y. (2009). *No longer separate, not yet equal; race and class in elite college admission and campus life* Princeton University Press.
- Fischer, M. J. (2007). Settling into campus life: Differences by race/ethnicity in college involvement and outcomes. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(2), 125–156.
doi:10.1080/00221546.2007.11780871
- Fry, R. (2011). *Hispanic college enrollment spikes, narrowing gaps with other groups* (pp. 1–30). Washington, DC: Pew Hispanic Center.
- Gonzalez, L. M., & Ting, S. R. (2008). Adjustment of undergraduate Latino students at a southeastern university. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 7(3), 199–211.
doi:10.1177/1538192708317117
- Heredia, R. C. (2009). *Latino parents' perceptions of their involvement in their children's secondary education and the college preparation process* (Order No. 3352203). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305177297).
- Hernandez, J. C., & Lopez, M. A. (2004). Leaking pipeline: Issues impacting Latino/A college student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 6(1), 37-60.
doi:10.2190/FBLY-0UAF-EE7W-QJD2

- Hurtado, S., Inkelas, K.K., Briggs, C., Rhee, B. (1997). Differences in college access and choice among racial/ethnic groups: Identifying continuing barriers. *Research in Higher Education*, 38(1), 43-75.
- Krogstad, J. M. (2016). 5 facts about Latinos and education. Retrieved from <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/07/28/5-facts-about-latinos-and-education/#>
- Longerbeam, S. D., Sedlacek, W. E., & Alatorre, H. M. (2004). In their own voices: Latino student retention. *NASPA Journal*, 41(3), 538-550. doi:10.2202/1949-6605.1360
- Meza, M. L. (2011). *Parental support of Latinos in higher education* (Order No. 3475599). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (892758434).
- Murphy, J. P., & Murphy, S. A. (2018). Get ready, get in, get through: Factors that influence Latino college student success. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 17(1), 3-17.
doi:10.1080/15348431.2016.1268139
- Ovink, S. M. (2017). “In Today’s society, it’s a necessity”. *Social Currents*, 4(2), 128-145.
doi:10.1177/2329496516663220
- Ovink, S. M., & Kalogrides, D. (2015). No place like home? Familism and Latino/a–white differences in college pathways. *Social Science Research*, 52, 219- 35.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.12.018>
- Ovink, S.M., & Kalogrides, D. (2015). No place like home? Familism and Latino/a-White differences in college pathways.” *Social Science Research*, 52(1), 219-235.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2014.12.018>
- Ovink, S.M., & Veazey B.D. (2011). More than getting us through: A case study in cultural capital enrichment of underrepresented minority undergraduates. *Research in Higher Education*, 52(4), 370–394. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9198-8>

- Pappano, L. (2015, April 8). First-Generation Students Unite. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/education/edlife/first-generation-students-unite.html>
- Radford, A. W. (2014). *Top student, top school? How social class shapes where valedictorians go to college*. Chicago, IL : University of Chicago Press.
- Saunders, M., & Serna, I. (2004). Making college happen: The college experiences of first-generation Latino students. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 3(2), 146-163.
doi:10.1177/1538192703262515
- Tierney, W.G., & Venegas, K.M. (2009). Finding money on the table: Information, financial aid, and access to college. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 80(4), 363–388.
- Torres, J. B., & Solberg, V. S. (2001). Role of self-efficacy, stress, social integration, and family support in Latino college student persistence and health. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 59(1), 53-63.
doi:<https://doi.org/10.1006/jvbe.2000.1785>
- Tramonte, L., & Willms, J. D. (2010). Cultural capital and its effects on education outcomes. *Economics of Education Review*, 29(2), 200-213. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2009.06.003>

Appendix 1: Survey Questionnaire

Do you agree to take part in this study?

Yes or no

Are you at least 18 years of age?

Yes or no

Are you currently an undergraduate student at The University of Connecticut at the Storrs, CT main campus?

Yes or no

Have at least one of your parents completed a four-year degree?

Yes or no

Do you identify as Latino/a Latinx and/or Hispanic?

Yes or no

Who or what helped you most in the college application process and in what capacity?

Open-ended

Did your parents offer you tangible advice about the college application process?

Explain what they offered

Open-ended

Did your parents offer you tangible advice about the college navigation process?

Explain what they offered

Open-ended

To what degree do you agree with the following statement?

Item	Disagree	Slightly disagree	No opinion	Slightly agree	Agree
My parents do not actually know what college entails.					
I know what is expected of me as a college student when interacting with professors and utilizing office hours					
I know how to read and analyze research in my field					
I know how to look up articles and books in the library					

I feel the need to teach my parents about college navigation					
I have extra responsibilities related to college that students who have parents that attended college do not have					
Being the first in my family to go to college is a major challenge					

What is your major?

Open-ended

How many credits are you taking this semester?

Under 12

12-16

17-20

Are you in the honors program?

Yes or no

Have you attended any of the following higher education institutions before UConn?

Check all that apply

2-year trade school

Community college

Regional campus of 4 year institution

Another 4-year school

How would you describe your transition to UConn, was it easy or relatively challenging?

What specifically about your transition made it easy or challenging?

Open-ended

How well do you manage your time on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not well and 5 being very well?

1 2 3 4 5

Are you involved in any of the following extra-curricular activities or clubs?

Greek Life

Academic organizations

Sports

Interest clubs

Community service

Other _____
None apply

If yes, how many hours a week do you devote to extra-curricular activities?

- Less than 5**
- 6-10**
- 11-20**
- 21+**

Do you work during the semester?

Yes or no

If yes, how many hours a week do you spend (including commute) working?

- Less than 10**
- 10-15**
- 16-20**
- 21-25**
- 26-40**

Do you commute to school?

Yes or no

How long is your commute **TO** campus?

- Under 1 hour**
- 1-2 hours**
- 2.5-3 hours**

How much do you believe that commuting interferes with your study-time on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not at all and 5 being significantly?

1 2 3 4 5

How high would you rate your stress level from the following items on a scale from 1 being low to 5 being high?

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Time management					
Extracurricular activities					
Course load					
Paying for school					
Teaching parents about college navigation					
Other responsibilities related to					

being a first-generation college student					
--	--	--	--	--	--

In thinking about being successful in college, how much do you value the following item on a scale from 1-5, 1 not high on priority list and 5 high on priority list:

Item	1	2	3	4	5
Graduating?					
Graduating with honors (high GPA/cum laude)?					
Gaining knowledge and skills in the classroom?					
Gaining knowledge and skills outside of the classroom?					
Minimal stress?					
Acquiring tools such as time management, professionalism, and argument skills?					
Good grades?					
Being involved in extracurricular activities?					
Holding leadership positions?					
Forging relationships with professors/networking?					
Making money while in school?					
Having an internship while in school?					
Having an internship lined up before graduating?					
Having a job lined up before graduating?					

Out of those or one of your own, what is your most important measure of success?

Open-ended

Are you guided within your major? By whom? Explain

Yes or no

Open-ended

What is your GPA?

<1.0

1.0-1.5

1.6-2.0

2.1-2.5

2.6-3.0

3.1-3.5

3.5-3.9

4.0+

Are you on track to graduate on time?

Yes/No/Unsure

Do you, or do you think you will, have a job lined up before you graduate?

Yes/no/unsure

Do you have a strong relationship with one or more professor or instructor? If so, briefly explain who it is and how you developed this relationship.

Yes/No open-ended

What type of knowledge/skills have you learned outside of the classroom?

Open-ended

What type of knowledge/skills have you learned inside the classroom?

Open-ended

How old are you?

Open-ended

What is your hometown?

Open-ended

Describe your hometown with the word that fits best of the following: **Lower/working class, lower-middle class, middle class, upper-middle class, upper class**

What gender identity do you identify with?

Woman

Man

Transgender man

Transgender woman

Agender

Bigender

Non-binary

Other:

What ethnicity do you identify with?

Open-ended

What race do you identify with?

Open-ended

What is your estimated household income?

\$0-20,000

\$20,001-40,000

\$40,001-60,000

\$60,001-80,000

\$80,001-100,000

\$100,001-120,000

\$120,001+

How many siblings do you have, and what are their ages?

Open-ended

Are you the first people in your immediate family to go to college, including siblings?

Yes or no

Are you the first person in your immediate family to go to college, not including siblings?

Yes or no

What is your mother's highest level of education completed?

Some high school

High school

Associate's degree

Some college

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate

What is your father's highest level of education completed?

Some high school

High school

Associate's degree

Some college

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Doctorate