FOCUSING ON RETENTION: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR
FIRST-GENERATION LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

FOCUSING ON RETENTION: CREATING A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR FIRST-GENERATION LATINO COLLEGE STUDENTS

Genette Alvarez-Ortiz

The purpose of this narrative study is to explore the role of student-faculty interaction and how this interaction may affect student success and completion of a college degree for first-generation Latino students. The study adopted a narrative methodology to explore students' educational experiences. The purpose of the study is to expand the understanding of the experiences of first-generation Latino college students and recognize the value of their narratives. The framework examines the intersection of Tinto's Integration model and social capital theory. The rationale and significance of the study were to examine the intersection of the two models and whether student experiences with faculty have influenced their persistence in college. I reviewed the literature review on understanding the college experiences of first-generation students and the social/cultural capital theory. One common theme throughout the literature is the importance of creating an environment for students to feel supported.

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CHAPTER 1

The college education process can be intimidating because of students' difficulties navigating college systems, policies, and terminology. It is easy for students to feel overwhelmed and lose motivation. Faculty can play a significant role in assisting students to achieve higher education dreams. Helping students identify academic resources and providing clear guidance on the expectations of being college students can be done through student-faculty interactions, thereby giving Latino students, particularly first-generation college students, a sense of belonging to the campus.

These are students who, in particular, may lack necessary social capital: no role model within the family, underrepresented on campus (Museus et al., 2016; Vega, 1990). Faculty interaction would provide first-generation students with the tools to help bridge the divide between their self-assessment of ability and academic preparedness (Dika, 2012). As the first-generation Latino population increases, their educational needs must be addressed efficiently and productively, ensuring that they, and all students, have every opportunity to continue to be contributing members of society. The purpose of this study is to explore the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital and how to improve student success and completion of a college degree for first-generation Latino college students.

Purpose of the Study

This qualitative explored narrative of first-generation Latino college students and the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital, and how improving student-

faculty interactions can help Latino college students find success and complete a college degree as a first-generation student.

Focusing on the experiences of first-generation college students is key to understanding the whole picture of first-generation experiences. Faculty can play a significant role in assisting students to achieve their higher education dreams. Helping students with academic resources and providing clear guidance on college students' expectations can be done through faculty interactions with students, thereby giving the first-generation college students a sense of belonging to the campus.

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework

In 1993, Tinto revised his 1975 model to address the persistence pathways of students from diverse backgrounds. Tinto (1997) argued that students who lacked personal interaction with others on campus were more likely to withdraw. For over thirty years, higher education followed Tinto's student integration theory based on the belief that successful students navigate college by separating from their lives before college. Social capital is defined as "the resources that accrue to an individual through social networks" (Dika, 2012, p. 596). Cultural capital plays a role in all levels of education of different racial and ethnic groups. It may affect their success in an academic environment (Angerame, 2013). The social capital theory is "about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity" (Claridge, 2004, p. 16). Claridge (2004) argued that social capital is linked to the success of Latino students. He recommended attention to the effects of social capital on first-generation student preparedness, which higher education needs to address. The constructs of social and cultural capital have often been applied in ways that limit understanding of

how first-generation Latino college students integrate into college. Therefore, the study

aims to examine the intersection of the two models and whether student experiences with

faculty have influenced their persistence in college. The researcher worked to expand the

understanding of the experiences of first-generation Latino college students and

recognize the value of their narratives. The researcher centered the students' perspectives

on understanding how they make meaning of their experiences within the social capital

theoretical framework, mainly as they connect to cultural capital and Tinto's Integration

theory (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Concept Model of Theoretical Framework

Persistence in College	• Students • Institutional Commitment • Faculty Interaction
Tinto's Integration Theory	• Academic Integration • Social Integration
Social Capital	• Student Experiences • Personal • Family • Educational
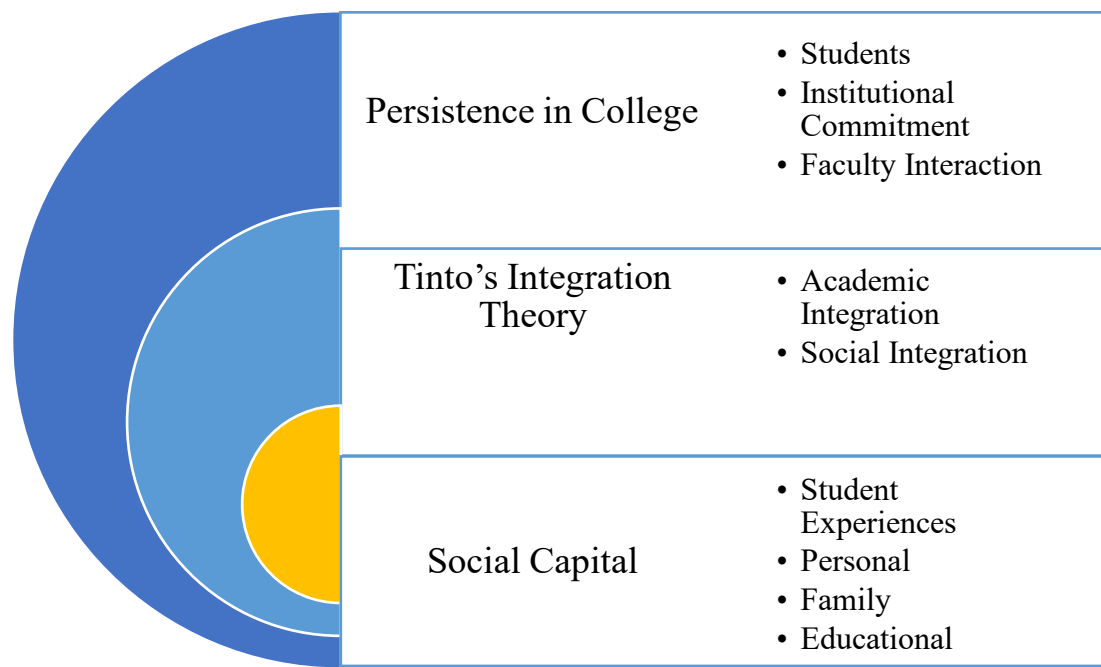
Significance of Study

According to the National Center for Education Statistics report (2017), Latino

students participating in U.S. higher education and the Northern County Community

(NCC) are growing significantly. NCC is a comprehensive, full-opportunity higher education institution. All who can benefit from its resources have the opportunity to expand their knowledge and skills and pursue the goal of lifelong learning. The college is dedicated to high-quality, low-cost education and career preparation to meet the needs and interests of the community it serves. As NCC continues growing its student body, the diversity of the student body has changed. One evident change is the number of enrolled Latino students. According to the most recent NCC Environmental Scan (2017), Latino students make up 27% of the student body. Higher Education institutions also noticed a change in their student enrollment of Latino students, especially first-generation college students. According to the National Center for Education Statistics report (2017), Latino students attending college between 2005–2015 rose from 21% to 30%. Since this demographic change will likely continue to grow, it is in the best interest of higher education institutions to take a proactive approach and conduct research to better understand the Latino students enrolling in colleges.

The Latino Student Population

Latino students enroll at NCC as full-time students. In Fall 2018, 87% of students who identified as Latino enrolled at NCC as full-time students. 65% of Hispanic students are eligible for the Federal Pell Grant Program, which provides need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and post-baccalaureate students to promote access to postsecondary education. Of the Latino students eligible for the Pell, 99% received one. This number of eligible recipients is higher than the institutional percentage of 52% and higher than other racial groups: 31% white students, 64% Asian students, 63% Black/African American students, and 46% of other races.

In Fall 2018, Latino students had the highest percentage of first-generation students. At NCC, 37% of first-time college students were first-generation students in 2018. Of first-time college students, 32% were Asian, 35% Black or African American, 26% White, and 18% were from other races. Among Latinos, 50% were first-generation college students, and 48% of Latino students needed remediation in at least one subject area. The same is true for 33% of Asian students, 40% of white students, and 62% of African-American students. In terms of specific subjects, 41% of Latino students need remediation in Math, 21% need remediation in Reading, and 19% need remediation in English.

Research has found lower enrollment in four-year institutions, higher enrollment in community colleges, and higher non-completion rates among Latino students who attend college (Gonzalez, 2015). College completion requires higher academic rigor, social competence, and self-direction than high school completion, posing challenges for many unprepared students. Suppose institutions fail to focus on the college completion of Latino students. In that case, the lack of college completion could continue as the norm. It also suggests that the higher education system is ineffective. As the Latino population increases, their educational needs must be addressed efficiently and productively, ensuring that they, and all students, have every opportunity to continue to be contributing members of society.

Research Questions

The following are research questions related to first-generation Latino students enrolled in a higher education institution and how they perceive their college faculty experiences.

RQ1: How does the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital create a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students?

RQ2: What knowledge and experiences have enabled Latino students to persist towards degree attainment?

These questions explored students' path to college, their experiences at college, and their experiences with faculty.

Definition of Terms

First-generation students: I considered whether the educational background of first-generation college students' parents did not exceed high school in or outside the U.S.

Student-faculty interaction: Students' relationships and interactions with faculty.

Student success and completion: Behavior exercised by the student to stay in college and progress to degree attainment.

Tinto's Integration Model: The belief that successful students navigate college by separating from their lives before college.

Social Capital: Resources and critical forms of social support embedded in one's network and accessible through direct or indirect ties with institutional agents.

Cultural Capital: The underlying factors that provide students with the means and adaptations to persist in their educational environment.

CHAPTER 2

One common theme throughout the literature is the importance of creating an environment for students to feel supported. As a literature review framework, an overview of Tinto's integration theory and social capital model was done. Also, the literature reviewed how building social capital may enhance a sense of belonging, which may impact the persistence of first-generation Latino college students.

Theoretical Framework

I discuss Tinto's theory in the subsequent section. Faculty can play a role in helping students navigate through college. Lundberg et al. (2018) examined how Latino student learning is not merely an issue of student effort but how colleges and universities cannot serve them effectively. Latino students who attend college have higher non-completion rates than other college students (Gonzalez, 2015). Research shows that students who are encouraged by faculty to take advantage of tutoring and other educational services are more inclined to complete their studies. Faculty interaction with students may nurture social capital, helping students navigate their educational experience (Lundberg et al., 2018; Museus et al., 2016. The impact of students interacting with faculty can be a dominant form of cultural and social capital on student academic success. Social capital is defined as "the resources that accrue to an individual through social networks" (Dika, 2012, p. 596).

Review of Literature

Tinto's Student Integration Model

I focused the literature review on two research areas related to Latino students: first, the faculty's role as supporters of student persistence, and second, the impact of

student-faculty interaction. Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) formed the student integration model, which explored college students' reasons for leaving college before degree completion based on a sociological perspective (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Tinto's model outlined the characteristics students bring to college, such as family background, personal ability, and experiences (Terenzini & Pascarella, 1978). These characteristics affected the student's initial goals and commitment to the institution and how the student navigates within the academic system. Students demonstrate their engagement on campus through academic performance, interactions with faculty/staff, involvement in extracurricular activities, and peer group interactions (Trolian et al., 2016). Tinto argues that interaction with educational and social systems allows students to integrate, which forms the students' goals and commitments. As Tinto (1975) explained, "Other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be his commitment to the specific institution and the goal of college completion" (p. 96). However, some have criticized Tinto's work for its focus on assimilation/acculturation to the college environment, which may not be appropriate for minority students (Rendon et al., 2000).

Figure 2

Tinto's Student Integration Model (1973)
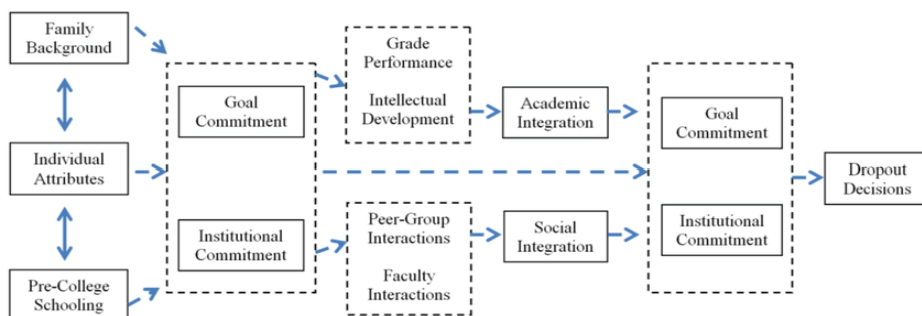
Figure 3

Revised Tinto's Integration Theory (1993)
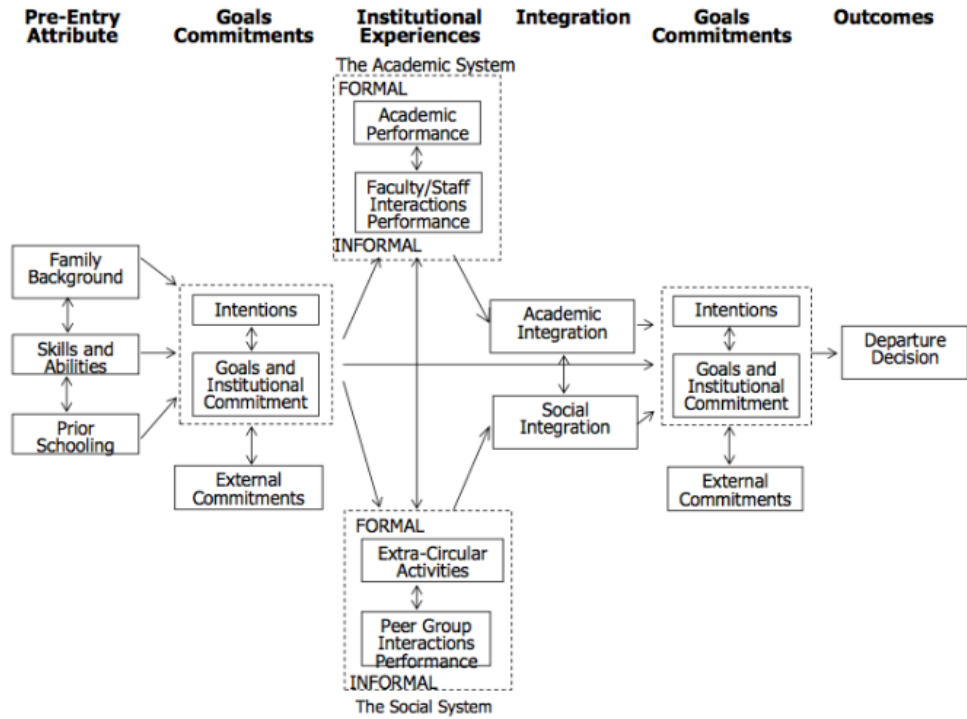
Students who demonstrated greater motivation were more satisfied with their school work and displayed more confidence in expressing knowledge (Mina et al., 2004; Vega, 2016). The ways faculty interact with Latino students may link to student learning (Lundberg et al., 2018). In support of faculty engagement with students, the literature review highlights how institutions can provide professional development opportunities for faculty to become aware of their roles as advocates and raise understanding of their responsiveness to close the equity gap among students (Vallejo Peña, 2012). College completion requires higher academic rigor, social competence, and self-direction than high school completion, posing challenges for many students who find themselves

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unprepared. However, I recognized the study was limited in its focus on the behavior of faculty and not on students' attitudes regarding those behaviors.

As previously described, Tinto's student integration theory is based on the belief that successful students navigate through college by separating from their lives before college (see Figure 2). Tinto's Integration model provides many factors for why students withdraw from institutions (Tinto, 1975, 1993). Many scholars criticized the limitations of his theory, pointing out that it did not address the levels of persistence among students of color. These arguments resulted in Tinto revising his integration theory, (see Figure 3). For example, Case and Hernandez (2013) pointed out that cultural integrity is the responsibility of institutions to create learning environments that are supportive and inclusive of students of color. An example is a theoretical model of student success called the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) Model for racially and ethnically diverse student populations (Museus et al., 2016). This model is described more in the section below.

Supportive Higher Education Environment

College completion requires higher academic rigor, social competence, and self-direction than high school completion, posing challenges for which many students find themselves unprepared (Dias, 2017; Gonzalez, 2015; Layous et al., 2017; Museus et al., 2016). Case and Hernandez (2013) pointed out that cultural integrity is the responsibility of institutions to create learning environments that are supportive and inclusive of students of color.

A theoretical model of student success called the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) Model for racially and ethnically diverse student populations

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(Museus et al., 2016) recognizes how students' academic persistence is shaped by external factors (e.g., family influence and financial factors) and precollege inputs (academic preparedness). The model focuses on two categories: cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness. Cultural relevance is how students relate to the campus environment, and cultural responsiveness is how designed campus programs and practices address the needs of culturally diverse student populations. Cultural relevance examines the cultural engagement of campus by using five indicators:

- Cultural familiarity examines college students' opportunity to work closely with faculty and staff who understand their background.

- Culturally relevant knowledge looks at whether students have occasions to learn and exchange knowledge about their cultural communities.

- The cultural community service indicator examines community service activities on campus in which students can participate to benefit their home communities.

- Cross-cultural engagement relates to student discussions about social and political problems with students from diverse backgrounds.

- The final indicator measures how students feel that the campus values their culture and background.

Cultural responsiveness examines four indicators: collectivist cultural orientations, humanized educational environments; proactive philosophies; holistic support. The collectivist cultural orientations examine the values of teamwork and mutual achievement instead of individualism and rivalry. Humanized educational environments survey the college's commitment to developing relationships with students. Proactive

philosophies drive the institution to create support systems and opportunities for students to take and provide support. Holistic support ensures students have access to at least one faculty and staff member they trust to provide information and support (Trevino & DeFreita, 2014).

To develop a better understanding of how campus environments can influence students' sense of belonging, Museus et al. (2016) conducted a study at a four-year urban research university to analyze the impact of the nine CECE indicators and to develop a better understanding of how culturally engaging environments influence students' sense of belonging. The research question was the following: "Are culturally engaging campus environments associated with students' sense of belonging in college?" (Museus et al., 2016). The researchers collected survey responses from 499 participants. The survey included demographic information, academic preparedness, financial factors, and status in school. The survey had 54 items that measured each CECE indicator and included a three-item "sense of belonging" scale, which measured how the students see themselves as part of the campus community, feel whether they are a member of the campus community and feel a sense of belonging to the campus community. The study confirmed that campus environments can have a positive influence on student outcomes. Specifically, Latino students who reported that the faculty was interested in them demonstrated a greater sense of belonging (Tovar, 2015).

Atherton (2014) focused on the academic preparedness of first-generation students in higher education. He studied previous works on this subject and highlighted the variables used by Pascarella et al. to examine the success rates of first-generation college students. These variables are preparation for college, transition to college,

attainment, and persistence. Atherton (2014) noted that these variables alone do not provide a holistic picture of how students can achieve academic success. He conducted research using the social capital theory, which compares the differences in the academic preparedness of first-generation and traditional students. The author explored whether first-generation students are less academically prepared regarding objective academic measures of preparedness when compared to traditional students. The finding shows that first-generation students are less academically prepared regarding subjective self-ratings of academic preparedness than traditional students (Atherton, 2014). Atherton (2014) used a sample of first-year students from a public, four-year university in Southern California who participated in the Cooperative Institutional Research Program survey from 1999 to 2009. To measure the objective academic preparedness measurements, the study used SAT scores for math and verbal subjects and high school GPA. The GPA was categorized by students who earned a B+ or higher and those who did not. The subjective academic preparedness measurements were questions posed to students regarding how they rate themselves and their overall academic abilities, including writing and math. The students' answers were divided between those who ranked themselves in the top 10% and those who ranked themselves average or below average. The independent variable in the study was the first-generation status, defined as students who answered that their parents never graduated from college. The study also looked at race, gender, when the survey was taken, English as a second language, household income, and if the students lived at home. The overall analysis of the first hypothesis (objective measure) showed that students whose parents had college experience were significantly more likely to have higher levels of academic preparedness in comparison with first-generation college

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students (Atherton, 2014). Therefore, the findings supported the first hypothesis in the study. The results that examined the second hypothesis (subjective measure) identified that no difference between first-generation status and their personal view of their overall academic abilities, including writing and math skills (Atherton, 2014). The findings did not support the study's second hypothesis. Atherton (2014) noted that, in general, the study confirmed the literature on the link between the academic preparation of first-generation college students and the successful completion of their college degrees.

Social Capital and Building a Sense of Belonging

Similar to Atherton's research, Claridge (2004) argued that the success of Latino students is based on social capital. The social capital theory is "about the value of social networks, bonding similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity" (Claridge, 2004, p. 16). However, he recommended attention to the effects of social capital on first-generation student preparedness, which higher education needs to address.

Low student self-evaluations and low academic performance have a direct correlation. Vega (2016) followed ten high-achieving first-generation Latino college juniors and seniors at a Hispanic-Serving Institution in the southwest to document the first-generation students' motivation to persist in college. The study noted four variables: academic rigor, support networks, internal motivation, and responsibility (Vega, 2016). Vega (2016) noted it was essential to understand how first-generation Latino college students decide to go to college and what factors can benefit them with their persistence and success. According to the Pew Research Center (as cited by Vega, 2016), Latino students enroll in colleges and universities at a rate higher than other racial/ethnic groups.

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However, they do not complete their degrees. First-generation students are most likely to drop out of college within the first two years of their studies. Vega (2016) addressed two research questions: "What factors influenced high-achieving first-generation Latino college students' postsecondary enrollment, and what factors influenced high-achieving first-generation Latino college students, postsecondary persistence?" The students participating in the study were identified by the College's Office of Institutional Research. Vega (2016) used the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) for this study because it explores "how people understand the major events in their lives" (Vega, 2016, p. 14). The IPA helped to clarify how the students perceived their decisions to start college and persevere. Students completed demographic questionnaires and participated in interviews with a researcher (individual, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews), which allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions.

The student's ability to keep up with the academic rigor in college directly resulted from students taking advanced courses in high school and previous enrollment in a community college or a college. The students described how having a dedicated support system provided specific guidance to their educational needs. The support came not only from home and school but from friends with "social capital related to applying to college" (Vega, 2016, p. 16). These friends helped them navigate the college/financial aid application processes. The internal motivation and responsibility to succeed were believed to increase their hopes for a better quality of life in the future. Also, making their families proud and serving as role models for other relatives to pursue their college dreams was a string variable for the students' persistence.

Conclusion

The literature review focused on research on Latino college students and on evidence-based faculty's role in student retention. Further research is needed to demonstrate the importance of faculty interaction with Latino students. The reviewed studies provide the framework to continue future studies. Atherton (2014) described the link between the academic preparation of first-generation college students and the successful completion of their college degrees. He emphasized the importance of understanding the effects of social capital on first-generation student preparedness needs to address this. Trevino and DeFreitas (2014) recognized how faculty provide academic and motivational validation. Museus et al. (2016) identified the benefits of faculty mentors creating a positive environment for students. This study aligns with others that suggest that college campus environments and faculty can positively influence student outcomes. Tovar (2015) showed that Latino students who reported that faculty were interested in them demonstrated greater belonging. Faculty can play a significant role in assisting students to achieve higher education dreams. As the Latino population increases, their educational needs must be addressed efficiently and productively, ensuring that they, and all students, have every opportunity to continue to be contributing members of society.

CHAPTER 3

In Chapter 1, I introduced the purpose of the study to explore the theoretical

models of Tinto's integration theory and social capital. The study aimed to examine the

intersection of the two models and explore whether the students' experiences with faculty

have influenced their persistence in college. In Chapter 2, I discussed literature related to

integration theory and social capital.

In Chapter 3, I outline the methodology guiding this study and the research

content. It was a way of understanding experience in a person's life (Clandinin &

Connelly, 2000). Clandinin and Connelley (2000) described how a researcher becomes

more insightful about a person's life continuity. The collaboration of the inquirer and the

participants in narrative inquiry is essential, as noted below:

"An inquirer enters this matrix in the midst and progresses in this same spirit, concluding

the inquiry still in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling the stories of the

experiences that make up people's lives, both individual and social. Simply stated,

narrative inquiry is stories lived and told." (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20)

Methodology and Procedures

The proposed study employed a qualitative research design, narrative inquiry to

examine the intersection of the social capital theory and Tinto's Integration theory, and

whether student experiences with faculty influenced persistence in college. The narrative

inquiry methodology recognized the voices of the first-generation Latino college students

at NCC. Narrative helps a researcher capture a story and share it (McQuillan, 2004).

Jackson & Allen (2007) argued that narrative is active and relates to the here and now.

Kim (2016) highlighted how this inquiry helps the researcher capture individuals'

feelings, goals, perceptions, and values during a time and place of an experience. This approach allowed the students to share lived experiences not identified from quantitative research data. Clandinin and Connelley (2000) described how a narrative provides insight into the continuity of a person's life. Using the students' interview narratives allowed me to test Tinto's (1995) integration theory of student integration for social capital.

Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined validation strategies used in qualitative research and recommended that a researcher use at least two of the strategies. For this study, the researcher used the following five strategies: corroborating evidence through triangulation, clarifying researcher bias, engaging in reflexibility, seeking participant feedback, generating rich descriptions in writing, and peer review.

Research Questions

The research questions were purposefully broad to allow the researcher to listen carefully and develop a set of interview questions to guide the study. The research questions were related to first-generation students and how they perceive their college faculty experiences. These questions explored students' path to college, their experiences at college, and their experiences with faculty:

RQ1: How does the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital create a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students?

RQ2: What knowledge and experiences have enabled Latino students to persist towards degree attainment?

Sample and Participants

Since this study sought to understand the experiences of first-generation Latino college students and their experiences with faculty members contributing to their

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persistence and graduation, I selected a purposeful sample. I sent an email invitation to 125 students, and six students agreed to participate (see Table 1). I determined the sample size through a method of data saturation, considered a variation of demographic information in the sample size (Miles et al., 2020). The students were willing participants who provided honest responses to the interview questions. Patton (2002) and Creswell & Poth (2018) argued that interviews provide insight into what is not observable and help the researchers understand the world through their lens. This study intended to learn from the students' experiences in building relationships with faculty members and whether this interaction is associated with persistence in college.

Table 1

Student Participants

Pseudonym	Student Type	Interview Time
Milagro	Continuing	1
Carmelo	Continuing	1.5
Juanito	Continuing	1
Ivette	Continuing	1.5
María	Continuing	1
Lourdes	Freshman	1

Student Interviews

The COVID-19 pandemic changed how this research was conducted. As I prepared the proper steps in meeting the study participants, I was forced to go digital. Initially, the initial interviews were planned to be conducted for 45-50 minutes each on campus, but the interviews were moved online, using Zoom. I recorded the answers and kept field notes. I chose semi-structured interviewing to allow the students to validate their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

While this study was designed to explore the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital and how to improve student success and completion of a college degree for first-generation Latino students, the interview questions were conceived with the use of Tinto's integration theory and elements of the social capital/community cultural wealth model. I developed the interview questions to align with the research questions with an open-ended structure to allow the students to share their perceptions. The data was triangulated with the interviews, transcripts, and observation notes.

I conducted individual video-recorded interviews to collect stories of the students' perceptions of their experiences as a first-generation Latino college student at NCC. I transcribed the recorded interviews for future analysis. I also kept field notes, which is part of the research methods and procedures consistent with a narrative inquiry methodology. The student interviews were scheduled during their availability. As shown in Table 1, the interviews were conducted for 1–1½ hours each.

Reflective Journal

I kept a reflective journal to describe feelings about the student's responses. The reflective journal documents the researcher's reactions, observations, expectations, assumptions, and biases about the qualitative research (Kim, 2016).

Data Collection Procedures

All interactions with the students and the collection of information complied with the NCC Office of Institutional Research and with St. John's University (see Appendix C and D). After acquiring IRB approval, the researchers sent an invitation to participate in the study along with the (see Appendix A). The researcher explained the purpose and the procedure of the study to the participants. Personal information was removed to protect

the identities of the participants. I kept Information and artifacts collected during the study in a locked and secure fashion to maintain the confidentiality of all participants. This approach will allow the students to share their lived experiences that cannot be identified from quantitative research data (Kim, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2016).

I used interviews, field notes, academic transcripts, and video recording to enhance triangulation and verify the findings. These steps allowed for a better understanding of the data collection and validation observed by the researcher. I conducted video-recorded interviews to collect stories of the students' perceptions of their experiences as first-generation Latino college students at NCC. I transcribed the interviews for future analysis. During the student interview, I investigated whether the interaction between students and faculty created a supportive environment. I identified what knowledge and experiences had enabled the Latino students to persist towards degree attainment. Each student signed consent and assent forms and was interviewed individually. Table 2 presents the data collection methods with the designated research question.

Table 2

Summary of Research Questions, Data Collections, and Data Analysis

Research Questions	Data Collection	Data Analysis
How does the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital create a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students?	Semi-structured interviews Academic transcripts	Coding Field notes
What knowledge and experiences have enabled Latino students to persist towards degree attainment?	Semi-structured interviews Academic transcripts	Coding Field notes

Data Analysis

I collected the qualitative data through student interviews. I videotaped, transcribed, and coded the interviews. For coding, I used Braun & Clarke's (2016) six phases of reflexive thematic analysis. Table 3 illustrates the six phases of thematic analysis. In the first phase, I became familiar with the data. I read each transcript separately twice to capture the whole story of the student. I made notes of things of interest and personal responses to the data. During the second phase, I began coding the data by capturing the meaning of the relevant concept using Tinto's integration theory framework and the social capital/community cultural wealth model elements. In the third phase, I clustered together similar codes to identify potential themes. I generated the themes to highlight the key findings. I used theoretical coding since it functions like an umbrella covering all other coded and categories, which "specifies the possible relationships between categories and moves the analytic story in a theoretical direction" (Saldaña, 2017, p. 251). I checked whether the themes were related to the coded extracts and the whole data set. I refined the themes and identified overarching themes around a central concept. Finally, I provided an analytical commentary with extracts from the transcripts to illustrate themes and their relation to the research questions.

Table 3

Braun's & Clarke's Phases of Thematic Analysis

Phase	Description of Process
Familiarizing yourself with the data	Transcribing data, reading/re-reading, noting ideas down.
Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set.

Searching for themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
Reviewing themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and entire data set, generating a thematic map of analysis
Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
Producing the report	Selecting of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature

Trustworthiness of the Design

The trustworthiness of a qualitative study can be evaluated based on the steps a researcher takes to ensure continuity and congruence throughout the study (Jones et al., 2006). Creswell and Poth (2018) outlined validation strategies used in qualitative research and recommended that a researcher use at least two of the strategies. I followed five strategies to ensure the study's validity: corroborating evidence through triangulation, clarifying researcher bias and engaging in reflexibility, seeking participant feedback, generating rich writing descriptions, and peer review (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A reflective journal helped me establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kim, 2016). I documented decisions throughout the research process to reflect and interpret my decisions and become aware of personal biases.

Research Ethics

This study examined a specific group within the higher education environment. I selected a purposeful sample of first-generation Latino college students at NCC. I sought

approval from the College's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to request enrollment data from the Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Strategic Plan (OEISP).

The population for this study was comprised of participants currently attending college. The study utilized interviews, field notes, artifacts, and video recordings to enhance the triangulation and verify the findings. This allowed for a better understanding of the data collection and validation that the researcher observed.

Researcher Role

My interest in this topic is that I was a first-generation Latino college student. In the early 1970s, the projects in Brooklyn, New York, were my primary motivation for attending college. My parents came to N.Y. from Puerto Rico with the hopes of living a better life. My father was the financial supporter of the family while my mom took care of the household and her four children. My parents did not have the opportunity to go to college, but they understood the value of an education. Since I was young, my parents ingrained the idea that we would go to college in our minds. They had blind faith that their children would understand and accept their vision, so our destiny for earning a higher education degree was set. Reflecting is all we needed because I am proud to say that we all fulfilled our parents' wishes.

My initial transition to college was challenging. I was a good student, but I never had the confidence or belief that I was on the same level as my classmates. It always seemed that I had to work harder than everyone to earn the same grade. The transition was also uncomfortable because I never went to school with a predominately white student body. I was in culture shock. Both elementary and high schools were predominately Caribbean and Latin American students. I remember sitting uncomfortably

in a classroom in the Fall of 1983 because I had nothing in common. I sat there smiling, not to show my discomfort, and was afraid to participate in the class. I remember vividly that I believed I was not at their level of intelligence. I went to class daily with the secret of not feeling like an equal to my classmates.

Through reflection on my journey as a student, I have understood that education involves more than thinking. It includes our senses, feelings, intuition, beliefs, values, and willingness to learn from gaining information or experiences. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) suggested that when conducting qualitative research, the researcher must "record their feelings as a method of controlling bias" (p. 101) when noting the participants' responses and reactions to the interview questions. After every interview, I took field notes to capture my impressions and the interviewees' emotions, recognizing the potential for bias toward the theoretical frame. I noted any reaction from the observations during and after every interview.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the methodology for this narrative inquiry study that explored the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital and how student-faculty interactions as social capital can improve, if at all, success and completion of a college degree for first-generation Latino college students. In the next chapter, I present the findings.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Chapter 4 focuses on the thematic analysis results used to describe the sample of students and address each of the study's research questions. The purpose of this research is to explore narratives of first-generation Latino college students and the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital, and how student-faculty interactions as social capital improve, if at all, success and completion of a college degree for first-generation Latino college students. I gathered the data to answer the research questions through interviews with six students during the Spring 2022 semester. First, I completed a line-by-line coding of each transcript, resulting in 47 initial codes. I completed a thematic analysis. Three themes emerged with sub-themes. I summarize the findings at the end of this chapter.

Participant Profiles

I provide a brief description of each participant using pseudonyms selected by the student in Table 4. This chapter presents a detailed analysis of the code and theme data. I highlighted quotes from student interviews to capture the students' voices and created tables to outline the codes and themes that emerged.

Table 4

Student Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Ethnicity	GAP
Milagro	36	Salvadoran	2.97
Carmelo	28	Salvadoran	3.56
Juanito	26	Salvadoran	4.0
Ivette	32	Puerto Rican	3.81
Maria	25	Salvadoran	2.68
Lourdes	19	Honduran	3.62

Milagro

Milagro grew up in El Salvador, and in 1986 when she was seven or eight, her father came to the U.S. In 1994, her mother, along with her and her siblings, moved to the suburbs located in the Northeast. Her father decided to move away from their homeland because times were difficult. A few years later, the family received their green cards and became residents. Milagro is a mother of two children, an 11-year-old daughter, and a 6-year-old son. She bought her home at the age of 22. Milagro always aspired to earn a college degree, so she enrolled in NCC after her high school graduation but took time off when she experienced academic challenges. She was away from her studies for seven years but has completed the course requirements with high grades for admission into the Nursing Program.

Carmelo

Carmelo was born in a suburban community in the Northeast. When he was nine, the family moved to the South for employment opportunities. The family moved back to the Northeast about five years ago. Carmelo started college after high school but did not continue due to a lack of motivation. After a five-year break, he enrolled in NCC and studies psychology. He is working full-time while maintaining a full-time course load.

Juanito

Juanito currently attends NCC, pursuing an associate degree in Health Studies. His goal is to transfer to a four-year institution to study physical therapy. Both his parents are from El Salvador; his mother moved to the U.S. at seven years old. His parents were very young when they became parents, and his mother did not earn a high school diploma. Both parents work. His father lives out of state for work but travels back and

forth to be with the family. Juanito went to a university near his home but left after a year and a half because he did not know how to navigate around campus. He started working full-time and took a six-year break from college. He enrolled in NCC and is on the Dean's List. He will graduate in May 2022.

Ivette

Ivette was born and raised in a city in the Northeast. Her Puerto Rican mother was also born and raised in a city in the Northeast. Her dad was born and raised in Puerto Rico. He left the island seeking employment. Soon after Ivette was born, her parents decided to split up. Ivette and her siblings lived with their mother, and her dad was actively involved throughout her childhood. She enrolled at a college immediately after graduating high school but decided to leave after two semesters because she struggled to work and keep up with the coursework. A few years later, Ivette completed an EMT certificate program and has worked as an EMT for the past ten years. Yvette dreamt of continuing her education, so she enrolled at NCC in the fall of 2021 and has registered as a full-time student each semester. She is on the Dean's List. Ivette is married and lives with her husband in the suburbs.

Maria

Maria was born in El Salvador. Her parents moved to the U.S. to find work when she was five. Maria and her sibling lived with her paternal grandmother until she was eight when her parents were financially stable. Her brother joined the family in the U.S. a year later. Maria's family moved to a suburb in the Northeast and has lived in the same home since she arrived. Her parents had to drop out of school at an early age to support their family members financially. Maria earned an associate degree in liberal arts in 2020

and is currently taking pre-requisite requirements this Spring to apply for admissions to the Nursing program.

Lourdes

Lourdes was born in Honduras and moved to the U.S. when she was seven. Lourdes and her parents live in a suburb in the Northeast. She earned her high school diploma in 2021 and is currently majoring in Nursing at NCC. Her parents work full-time, and Lourdes also works full-time to help her parents. She is on the Dean's List.

Results/Findings

A word cloud analysis, illustrated in Figure 4, shows the codes generated from the interviews. After a thorough analysis, I determined several themes that emerged and linked to RQ1 and RQ2. The themes captured the self-reflections of the students' experiences. Therefore, the chapter is organized by each research question's findings and the emerging themes.

Figure 4

Word Cloud Analysis of All Codes

An analysis of the data identified three themes:

    1. Sense of belonging

    2. Building on family

    3. Self-pride and dealing with challenges

The first theme, sense of belonging, emerged from positive relationships with professors and intrinsic motivation. The second central theme to emerge was building on the family. The second theme resulted in fulfilling parents' expectations and reasons for living in the U.S. The final theme, self-pride and dealing with challenges, stemmed from the students' emotions and reflections on their college experiences. The themes and sub-themes are presented in Table 5. Each theme is explained using the description of student experiences, including direct quotes from the participants.

Table 5

Themes and Codes

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency
Sense of Belonging	Academic Performance	35
	Positive Relationships with Professors	15
	Intrinsic Motivation	34
Building on Family	Fulfilling Parents' Expectations	33
	Reasons for Living in the U.S.	32
Self-Pride and Dealing with Challenges	Criteria for Returning to School	40
	Motivation	39
	Lack of Guidance/Negative Experience	18

Research Question 1 Findings

The first research question for this study was how does the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital create a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students? Although the researcher did not find themes that directly answered the first question, an analysis of the interviews categorized a theme of a sense of belonging with three sub-themes.

Theme 1: Sense of Belonging

All six students expressed how they felt welcomed in the classroom. They shared how much they currently enjoy each class and are comfortable engaging with the faculty. Five students returned to college after taking an extended break for various reasons. One began her studies at NCC last fall and expressed that the transition from high school to college was positive.

They all felt supported academically by their professors. Juanito expressed: "I'm really appreciative of the faculty because they really hear students out." Ivette had a similar reaction when describing her professors: "It's nice to know that someone

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genuinely does care about your concerns and how they can help you to make things easier and better for you."

Academic Performance

When the researcher asked how well they were doing in their classes, each participants lit up with pride. Ivette, Juanito, and Lourdes earned honors distinctions. Milagro completed the pre-requisites to enter into the Nursing program and earned only A's in anatomy and physiology, and his lowest grade was a B.

Positive Relationships with Professors

The researcher noted that the students expressed high praise for their professors. There was no adverse comment from any of the students about their professors. They shared positive interactions with professors in the classroom. Juanito shared:

The faculty has been extremely positive and a lot of the faculty are responsive… I stay to talk to them about the topic of the day and they're very engaging. They bring a lot of insight and different ways of thinking that I would have never thought myself, and it definitely helped me as a student.

Milagro felt it was important to share about one professor who had a great impact on her:

I also had one professor, his name is ███████. That man is incredible. I remember in 2019, I was taking Anatomy and Physiology remotely and at that time, the kids were working remotely. And so, there were two days a week at school today from home, and had just so happened that during my class with him, I had my son at home, and we were literally sit on with that together he will be on one side I'll be on my side and I have to help them at the same time trying to pay attention. One day, I accidentally left the

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microphone on. He heard me helping my son, and he said, "Can you please mute your computer, and I want to talk to you after class." I'm in trouble. So, he talks to me he said, "So, tell me what's going on." I'm like, I'm like, "I'm so sorry." He's like, "Okay," and said "You're not in trouble." So, he asked, "What time is he's in school? Oh, perfect. I have a class that day, the same class that we're teaching today, I have that day." He's like, "I'm going to switch it to that one because I want you to give your most undivided attention because it's your right."

Intrinsic Motivation

Students expressed that it was their responsibility to succeed in earning a college degree. Five students reflected that taking a break from their studies in the past helped them return with self-confidence and the focus to earn good grades. Lourdes, the youngest student in the study, is in her second semester at NCC, and she explained that her motivation stems from life messages instilled in her at a young age:

I think what I experienced as a child . . . what motivated me is that I do not know that the people over in Honduras do not really get the chance to come here, start a new life, and take advantage of the opportunities.

Ivette returned to school after taking a ten-year break, wanting to prove herself:

I felt like I was in the middle of making both parents happy and not myself, and I think that is a mistake . . . when we are younger to think that mom and dad have to be proud of us, and sometimes it is not always the best thing go into school with. We then put ourselves in a position where we feel discouraged or we are not doing something right because our parents are not going to like it, and then we missed the whole true meaning behind what we are doing is for ourselves."

Before he went back to school, Carmelo decided to enroll in a self-care program. He felt motivated about enrolling at NCC and recognized that to maintain his motivation, he needed help:

I'm involved in this program where they teach you about life and teaching you effective methods of really, how to structure your thoughts in a way and how to tackle certain things . . . how to deal with our emotions and how to take a situation and kind of just like stay calm and reevaluate how to communicate, you know, and so that each strategies language teacher, like an effective language on like, just how to push your way through life pretty much just like effective methods.

Milagro nurtured her motivation through a non-profit organization:

So, I left and then nothing. Two years later, I joined this organization that empowers young Latinos, and one of the things that we had to go to meetings and everyone went around the room, introducing themselves, where they lived, and what they do. I didn't have a college background, and me and another girl were the only ones that had no college education, which really, it didn't settle well with me. So, going to those meetings really pushed to apply for school again, and, in fact in 2019, I went back and I, you know, did everything I needed to re-enter the college. And I've been taking one class at a time and a little bit little it.

Research Question 2 Findings

The first research question for this study was what knowledge and experiences enabled Latino students to persist towards degree attainment? I categorized the analysis of the interviews into the theme of building on the family which includes two sub-themes, self-pride and dealing with challenges, with four sub-themes.

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Theme 2: Building on Family

Pursuing a college degree for the students was attributed to the sacrifice and support of their parents. The students had an awareness and respect for their parents' journey for providing them with a better life. Family is significant for the students. Each one shared that they have a loving relationship with their parents and their siblings. Four students live at home, and two have moved out and purchased their own houses.

Fulfilling Parents' Expectations

The students indicated that their parents instilled within them the importance of earning a college degree. Earning a degree brought a belief that a better life was ahead of them. Their parents wanted them to pursue an educational path because their parents could not do so. In the case of Juanito, his mother never had the opportunity to think about going to college because she never completed high school. When Juanito decided to leave college, it was difficult to tell his parents because he was mindful of how his parents would react: "They were obviously a little upset that I left the first time around, but my end game is to really make sure that I finish with a degree, and they're pretty proud of what's going on right now."

Lourdes shared that she knew that she would go to college due to her mother's encouragement. Her parents left their homeland to provide her with an opportunity she would not have experienced if they had stayed in Honduras: "They taught me that education is really important like my mom always used to tell me that education is something that no one can take away from you."

Reasons for Living in the U.S.

The students were aware of the sacrifices their parents endured immigrating to the U.S. from their home country. Going to college and earning a degree was a goal that their parents identified at an early age. The students expressed that their educational accomplishments are their parents' as well. Therefore, they viewed this sacrifice as a source of motivation.

Milagro recognized how difficult it was for her parents to leave their home and make a new life. She understood that their sacrifice would provide better opportunities: We lived in El Salvador until 1994 because my dad did not want to come back because it was difficult times, so we decided to come here to be with him. And we've been here ever since. And a couple of years later, we became residents. So luckily in that aspect, we were lucky enough to be able to be legally here . . . we came with a different kind of experience that was from El Salvador, and we keep that in mind, and we've been living here since.

Maria indicated that her parents wanted to afford their children a better life in the U.S. She recognized that "they came here for an economic opportunity"; she reflected and emphasized that she has not lost sight of how their actions positively affected her life: "You know, very early knew I can definitely understand why my parents had to come here."

Themes 3: Self-Pride and Dealing with Challenge

The students all expressed pride in being in college. They enjoyed their experiences and were proud of their academic accomplishments at Northern Community College. Five students took time away from college because of financial and academic

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challenges. One started at the college right after graduating from high school. When asked whether being a first-generation Latino college student is a source of self-pride, I noted that they were not consciously aware of being first-generation Latino college students. Their focus was to make themselves and their families proud. Carmelo added that their identity is more than being a first-generation Latino college student:

When I saw your email, I took it as a great opportunity to express more than just being Latino and first-generation. I'm native to this land, and we are trying to fit into the mold that was created for us. So, it's more than just my first college experience.

Criteria for Returning to School

The students decided to return to school. They expressed that it was essential to have a purpose for college and excel in their studies. After earning an associate degree, Maria returned to take every pre-requisite for the Nursing program. Her focus resulted in getting high grades in every course: "I graduated already with a degree in liberal arts and science, and I want to pursue a degree in Nursing."

When Juanito returned, his focus was to be a better student, and his determination earned him an honors distinction: "I've started from scratch, and I'm just working my way up the ladder once again that's where I'm at right now." He continued by expressing, "pushed me to do the best I could in school and get good grades."

Motivation

The motivation to attend college was expressed as a personal choice for wanting more in life. Carmelo did not want to return to school until he fully committed to education. He said: "It just kind of awakened in me to pursue an actual career, and I was led into wanting to do psychology for my career and be a therapist."

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Ivette listened to her inner voice and recognized that she had the motivation to go back and earn her degree:

"I decided that I didn't want to get too comfortable where I was, so I wanted to experience more. I wanted to be better than what I was. I know there was always a possibility for me to be better."

Lack of Guidance

Being the first in their families created a stressful situation for the students. Not knowing where to go for guidance or self-advocate resulted in leaving their studies. Each returning student had similar stories of feeling they had no one to turn to and thought it was best to leave. Ivette "realized that working was overwhelming for me with my studies. I did not have the time working overnight, and it was just a lot for me, so I dropped out of college and stayed working."

Milagro expressed her first-time experience at the college. "I just took courses to take courses. I did not go to a counselor to check what I wanted to pursue. And eventually, I gave up was getting bad grades." When the opportunity to return became possible, Milagro successfully completed her pre-requisite courses with high grades.

Conclusion

This chapter reported the findings that emerged from the data analysis. This chapter is organized into three main themes and includes sub-themes. The students provided detailed experiences that addressed a sense of belonging, building on family, self-pride, and dealing with challenges.

Chapter 5 provides the interpretation of results, the relationship between results and prior research, limitations to the study, implications for further practice, and implications for future practice.
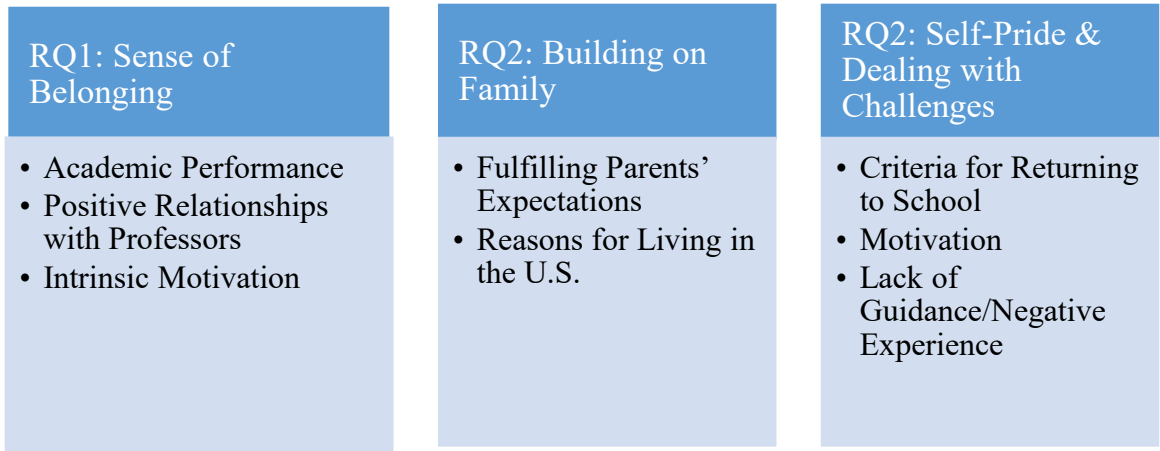
CHAPTER 5

This narrative inquiry study explored the experience of first-generation Latino college students with faculty and the role of this interaction as social capital. The study also explored whether this interaction improves the college experience. I used a qualitative interview approach and thematic analysis (Braun and Clark, 2006) to explore the experiences of first-generation Latino college students in higher education. I used two research questions. The first question focused on how the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital creates a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students. The second question explored what knowledge and experiences enabled Latino students to persist toward degree attainment. I compiled and analyzed data consisting of six student interviews. The study resulted in the following three themes: (a) sense of belonging, (b) building on family, and (c) self-pride and dealing with challenges.

Interpretation of Results

I examined the intersection of Tinto's Integration model and social capital theory to expand the understanding of the experiences of first-generation Latino college students and recognize the value of their narratives. I created the research questions based on first-generation Latino college students' perceptions of their experiences in a higher education setting (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). The results of this research indicate that students with a strong family support structure felt a sense of belonging in college and saw improved learning experiences (see Figure 5).

Figure 4

Emerging Themes

RQ1: Sense of Belonging	RQ2: Building on Family	RQ2: Self-Pride & Dealing with Challenges
• Academic Performance • Positive Relationships with Professors • Intrinsic Motivation	• Fulfilling Parents' Expectations • Reasons for Living in the U.S.	• Criteria for Returning to School • Motivation • Lack of Guidance/Negative Experience

RQ1: How does the role of student-faculty interaction as social capital create a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students?

Five of the students took a leave of absence because they faced adversity, ending their aspirations of earning a college degree. Their experiences relate to the past research highlighting how first-generation students lack social capital related to success in higher education because they do not acquire it from their non-college graduating parents (Soria et al., 2012). The students in the study expressed a desire to learn and persist in their studies. They saw themselves as college students who belonged in the classroom.

Through data analysis, I found that the student participants experienced positive interaction with their professors. The research suggests that more contact between students and faculty enhances college students' development and learning outcomes (Young & Linda, 2009). Tinto's Integration model includes many factors for why students withdraw from institutions (Tinto, 1975, 1993). In Tinto's revised integration theory, he noted that institutions are responsible for creating learning environments

supportive and inclusive of students of color. The social capital theory and Tinto's

Integration theory proved helpful as a framework for understanding how students use the

resources provided by their professors (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Students drew on the

aspirational and social capital within their families, professors, and mentors in the

community as a source of support (Nunez, 2009).

RQ2: What knowledge and experiences have enabled Latino students to persist towards

degree attainment?

The research suggests that Latino students report that family support is more

significant in their persistence motivation. The Latino students interviewed described

how being a college student has determined family and societal expectations. Education

as an obligation to the family demonstrates the potential for viewing one's family as an

extension of self to serve as a critical motivator (Vasquez-Salgado et al, 2015). A lack of

experience and understanding impacts the Latino experience of higher education. As

first-generation college students, participants in this study highlighted the experience of

needing additional guidance because their parents did not have knowledge or

understanding of how a higher institution works. They were at a disadvantage in offering

advice about the benefits of forming college relationships with their professors and

finding on-campus resources (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

<div align="center">**Relationship Between Results and Prior Research**</div>

The research literature supports the finding that models whether student

experiences with faculty have influenced their persistence in college. However, most

research focuses on "traditional age" college students, not first-generation Latino adult

students. The research suggests these students may have difficulty locating assistance

once they arrive at college because they lack the social capital to give them a support network (Moschetti & Hudley, 2015). Creating social capital through relationships with faculty can directly increase student engagement and persistence (Davidson & Wilson, 2013; Moschetti & Hudley, 2015).

Self-efficacy is commonly defined as a person's belief in succeeding at a particular task or situation (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). It is one manifestation of how people perceive themselves due to their past experiences and interactions with others and their ability to exert control over their surroundings (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). Students must engage with others and see themselves as members of an academic and social community whose members, faculty, and staff value their participation; they matter and belong. The result is relatedness or a sense of belonging, which binds the individual to the group or community even when they are not present.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited by the number of participants and the diversity of the sample. I used one method of data collection. The responses were based on self-reported data comprising the perceptions of the students. The students were interviewed once. The study would have benefited if the students had been interviewed twice. Although the data enabled generalization of the findings, it prevented close investigation of several aspects of the relationships in this study. A longitudinal framework would provide more insight into probable causation.

Since I scheduled the interviews remotely, the interviews may have yielded different conversations. The study could have been approved if the sample size was more significant than this research study. First-generation college students are not a

homogenous group because they come from various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic levels. Also, five out of the six student participants were adult students. The study could have been approved if more recent high school graduates had participated in capturing their college experiences.

As the researcher, I identified with the students as a first-generation Latina college student, which could have influenced the interpretation of the results. I noted any bias that came up during the data analysis.

Implications for Future Research

Northern Community College has not directly asked students about their intake experience. This would be an avenue to explore for further research. If the institution is going to try to improve the overall educational experience for students, then it is imperative to know what is currently working and what isn't. The institution cannot make assumptions about where the gaps in systems and structures are. Administrator and faculty perceptions may be different than those of students.

Future research must include current first-generation college students' experiences and how the changing landscape of higher education may impact their sense of navigating their way throughout college. First-generation college students are not a homogenous group because they come from various ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic levels. The population of Latino students enrolling in colleges will continue to grow. It is in the best interest of higher education institutions to take a proactive approach in researching to understand them better and identify ways to support them in achieving academic success. More research is needed to determine the levels of motivation in first-

generation Latino students as they enter college and determine whether motivation decreases, increases, or remains stable as they progress in their studies.

Much of the current research at NCC does not disaggregate the data, and it does not portray an accurate picture of first-generation Latino students. First-generation students have multiple identities (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Further research in this area could provide valuable insight into institutional impact on first-generation students. Researchers have noted a need to conduct more qualitative studies with first-generation students (Soria & Stebleton, 2012). The stories of first-generation students must be shared.

Implications for Future Practice

The study describes the experiences of first-generation Latino college students. College completion requires higher academic rigor, social competence, and greater self-direction than high school completion, posing challenges for which many students find themselves unprepared (Dias, 2017; Gonzalez, 2015; Layous et al., 2017; Museus et al., 2016). Higher education institutions are faced with the question of how to better serve first-generation students. Some helping families of first-generation students have growing expectations. Institutions are creating programs to help families of first-generation students better understand college, and the administration of Northern County College can take positive steps to bring all families to campus.

Case and Hernandez (2013) discussed how one aspect of cultural integrity is that institutions have the responsibility to create learning environments supportive and inclusive of students of color. An example is a theoretical model of student success called the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) Model for racially and ethnically

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diverse student populations (Museus et al., 2016). A recommendation is to incorporate this theoretical model by developing a plan that will enlist the collaboration of the student's families and the support of local community organizations that work with the Latino population. This initiative will rely on Latino traditions' familial and communal relationships. The objective is to educate, guide, and engage parents and other relatives in higher education's intricate and challenging world. This initiative will double the students' supportive network and increase their academic performance. This initiative will improve retention and timely graduation.

With the support network the college will create, faculty and staff will accompany first-generation students from before they enroll until accepted into senior educational institutions or the workplace. This commitment will push Northern County College to go beyond its physical boundaries and dismantle the cultural barriers that have prevented parents and other relatives from fully supporting the students' college experience.

EPILOGUE

This dissertation recognizes that first-generation college students are a diverse group. It is impossible to understand the first-generation college student experience without recognizing the complexity. The one thread that these students consistently have in common is that they started on a pathway that was unfamiliar in order to fulfill the hopes of their families and themselves.

As a practitioner in a community college, and as a first-generation college student myself, I recognize that we have much to offer in creating a welcoming environment. More research is needed to determine the levels of motivations in first generation Latino students as they enter college and determine whether motivation decreases, increases, or remains stable as the students' progress in their studies.

The participants in this study demonstrated their strengths and determination in maneuvering their way through the higher education system. They took charge of their education and their resilience should be applauded. It should not be seen as simply "luck" or "an exception". I recognize that there are many others dealing with their own circumstances who are not able to continue their studies for different reasons but the question remains: What can practitioners do to be advocates on behalf of our students? This is an area I wish to continue to explore in order to help increase academic achievement for first generation Latino college students.

An important outcome from this study of academic performance was positively related to intrinsic motivation and educational goals. Students who demonstrated greater intrinsic motivation were more satisfied in their schoolwork and displayed more

confidence in demonstrating their knowledge. Students who had higher levels of intrinsic motivation had better study habits, persisted in their studies, and had more adaptive cognitive strategies.

The research has confirmed that students who are encouraged to take advantage of the help faculty provide outside of class time are more inclined to complete their studies. Students who demonstrated greater motivation were more satisfied in their schoolwork and displayed more confidence in demonstrating their knowledge. Students who had higher levels of motivation had better study habits, persisted in their studies, and had more adaptive cognitive strategies.

The population of Latino students enrolling in colleges will continue to grow and it is in the best interest of higher education institutions to take a proactive approach in conducting research to better understand them as well as in identifying ways to support them in achieving academic success. Faculty can play a vital role in assisting students to succeed in their higher educational goals: Helping students with academic resources and providing clear guidance on the expectations on being college students; Creating an environment where students and faculty can interact regularly and thereby helping students to have a sense of belonging to the campus. Giving first-generation students these tools can help bridge the gap between their self-assessment of ability and their academic preparedness.

Dear Latino Student,

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study focusing on first-generation Latino college students. This study seeks to better understand the experiences of first-generation Latino college students and their experiences with faculty members contributing to their persistence and graduation. If you were the first to attend college and your parent or parents' educational background does not exceed a high school education, then you are eligible to participate in this study.

Please note that all data will remain confidential and used only for research purposes. In addition, participants will be asked to select a pseudonym that will be used when reporting the findings.

Your participation is appreciated and important to the success of this research study. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions at 917-575-2844 or genette.alvarezortiz17@stjohns.edu.

Sincerely,

Genette Alvarez-Ortiz

Doctoral Student

St. John's University

Student Interview Protocol

Hello, my name is Genette Alvarez-Ortiz, and thank you for participating in my research project for my dissertation study at St. John's University. I would like to ask you a series of questions about your experience as a first-generation Latino college student. Please know that I will not share the data with anyone. As I shared with you already, I would like you to select a pseudonym that will be used when reporting the findings. Thank you for sending me your signed consent forms.

Is it ok if I record this interview?

Thank you so let's begin:

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me a little about yourself (name, major, and hometown)

2. Tell me a little bit about your ethnic background. Tell me a little bit about your family (i.e. size, composition). Including their educational background.

3. What inspired you to go to college? Describe the path that you took into higher education, more specifically, the institution you decided to go and why you chose that college.

4. What was your experience as a Latina first-generation college student (i.e. Your academic experience, social experience on campus)

5. In what ways does being a Latino first-generation college student influence your interaction with faculty? Can you tell me about any memorable experiences you had with faculty?

Consent and Release Form

Background: You have been invited to take part in a research study to learn more about using professional development. This study will be conducted by <u>Genette Alvarez-Ortiz</u>, as part of her doctoral dissertation. Her faculty sponsor is James R. Campbell, Ph.D., Saint John's University, School of Education, Department of Administrative and Instructional Leadership.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked the following:

1.   To be interviewed.

2.   To aid the researcher in her analysis of any data collected.

Risks and Benefits: There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help the investigator better understand how professional development is related to student classroom support.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality of your research records will be strictly maintained by keeping consent forms separate from data, using a coding system to ensure anonymity, and storing all raw data in a locked cabinet off-site from the study.

Participation: Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. For questionnaires or surveys, you have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer.

Questions and Contacts: If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Genette Alvarez Ortiz, or the faculty sponsor, James R. Campbell, Ph.D. at 718-990-1469, campbelj@stjohns.edu, Saint John's University, School of Education, Sullivan Hall, 8000 Utopia Parkway, Queens, NY 11439. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, St. John's University. You can contact Dr. Marie Nitopi, the Board Coordinator, at nitopim@stjohns.edu or by phone at 718-990-1440; or you can contact the Chairperson of the Board, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at digiuser@stjohns.edu .**Copy:** You will receive a copy of this consent document to keep.

<u>Agreement to Participate</u>

_____   _____

Subject's Signature   Date

_____

 Subject's Name (Please Print)

NASSAU COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Institutional Review Board

Date: November 15, 2021

To: Genette Alvarez-Ortiz

           Principal Research Investigator

From: John Osae-Kwapong, Ph.D.

           NCC Institutional Review Board

Subject: IRB Approval

Dear Genette,

Please be advised that NCC's IRB has approved the modification to your proposed research project, **"Focusing on retention: Creating a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students."** This approval authorizes the activities described in your application.

Be advised that changes in the scope or subjects of your research that may occur during the project's work will require approval of NCC's IRB. In addition, it is required that any intended publication of your study that advance conclusions identified with NCC, its students, faculty, or programs must receive IRB review prior to such publication.

Please accept the Board's best wishes for the success of your study.

For NCC's Institutional Review Board,

J. Osae-Kwapong

John D. Osae-Kwapong, Ph.D.

Associate Vice-President and Member, NCC IRB

Office of Institutional Effectiveness & Strategic Planning

Tel. 516.572.7771 ext. 25820

Fax. 516.572.7656

John.osaekwapong@ncc.edu

APPENDIX E

IRB #: IRB-FY2022-141
Title: Focusing on retention: Creating a supportive environment for first-generation Latino college students
Creation Date: 10-26-2021
End Date: 1-9-2023
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Genette Alvarez-Ortiz
Review Board: St John's University Institutional Review Board
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	Approved

Key Study Contacts

Member	James Campbell	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	campbelj@stjohns.edu
Member	Genette Alvarez-Ortiz	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	genette.alvarezortiz17@stjohns.edu
Member	Genette Alvarez-Ortiz	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	genette.alvarezortiz17@stjohns.edu

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Vita

Name	*Genette Alvarez-Ortiz*
Baccalaureate Degree	*Bachelor of Arts, New York University, NY, Major: Latin American Studies*
Date Graduated	*May, 1988*
Other Degrees and Certificates	*Master of Arts, New York University, NY, Major: Higher Education Administration*
Date Graduated	*May, 1993*