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A Qualitative Analysis of High School Students' Experiences in the Latinos in Action Program

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Latinos in Action Program

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Educational Specialist in School Psychology

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ABSTRACT

A Qualitative Analysis of High School Students' Experiences in the
Latinos in Action Program

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This research was a qualitative program evaluation of students' perceptions of Latinos in Action (LIA), a peer-mentoring program that seeks to improve high school Latino graduation rates and college admittance. The study was conducted with college students who participated in the program in high school. LIA graduates were interviewed to determine what major factors influenced and supported them in their academic decisions. Additional data included an interview with the program director, results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), and a video of one of the interviewees. The researcher explored students' experiences in the LIA program with the goal of determining how the program impacted their goals to graduate from high school and attend college. While all of the students planned to attend college before participation in the program, they did not know how they would be able to get there. LIA provided the motivational support and the direction to help students get to college. In addition, all of the students mentioned parent support as a major influence. Other influences included positive peer support, a supportive high school teacher, school involvement, and being a role model for younger students.

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Introduction

There is a population of students in the United States that continues to grow—the Latino student population. These students bring a rich cultural heritage and make many wonderful and lasting contributions to American society. Many of these students go on to become doctors, lawyers, educators, politicians, and so forth. On the other hand, Latino students are dropping out of high school at a higher rate than any other population of students, preventing them from being qualified for jobs like those listed above. Nationally, 21.4% of Latino students dropped out of high school in 2007. This percentage is much higher than the African-American student population (8.4% dropout rate) or the Caucasian student national dropout rate (5.3%) for the same year (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a).

Student who drop out of high school are at a great disadvantage when compared with those who graduate. Some concerns about the effects of dropping out of school come from a study conducted by Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007). Students who drop out of high school have fewer opportunities for employment. Those who do find employment often end up working in low-skilled, low-paying positions, and have few opportunities for advancement. In 2000, the average income for a high school dropout was $12,400 compared to the average $21,000 income for high school graduates with no college. Additionally, students who drop out early are more likely to experience health problems, engage in criminal activities, and depend on welfare or other government assistance programs.

Educators are continually striving to develop programs to support the Latino student population in reaching their full potential (Fisher & Griggs, 1994; Rodríguez, 2008; Vélez & Saenz, 2001; White, 2001). Stereotypes are prevalent and may lead some to believe that Latino students do not want to go to college, or lack the cultural support or expectations to do so.

However, Venerable (1982) has shown that there are many Latino students who do want to go to college, but are unaware of available resources to help them get there. Programs designed to help Latino students contain elements found by researchers to enhance student success including peer and teacher support, a positive learning environment, and extracurricular activities (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007; Latino Coalition of Hillsborough County, 2000; Yosso, 2006). One such program has been developed for students in the state of Utah, called *Latinos in Action*.

Latinos in Action (LIA) is a cooperative-learning tutoring program, created by Dr. Jose Enriquez, with a major goal to sustain Latino students through high school graduation and to encourage and support college entrance. The program also seeks to help students better engage in high school academics and activities. The LIA program provides three supports for students. First, it provides a cohort where students can build peer relationships. Second, it provides a high school teacher who can act as a role model for the participants of the program. Finally, it provides a service-learning opportunity through the tutoring experience.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to evaluate the effectiveness of the Latinos in Action program from the participants' perspectives. This study explored students' experiences in the LIA program through the use of qualitative methods with the goal of determining the way the program impacted their goals to graduate from high school and attend college. The researcher hoped to hear about the experiences that helped the students succeed in high school and prepare for college. The researcher also hoped to hear about what students gained through the LIA program, the struggles they faced in high school, and what the program could have done differently to better help them.

The research was a qualitative, retrospective, program evaluation that consisted of inquiring about student perspectives, through structured and semi-structured interviews, from LIA graduates who are currently enrolled in a college program. Participants were asked how the program helped them prepare for high school graduation and college enrollment and what types of experiences they had with the LIA program. This method of program evaluation examines the phenomena under study from the point of view of student participants. To add additional dimensions to the data, there was an interview with program developer, Dr. Jose Enriquez, who was asked questions about the program and its participants. There was also data from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) conducted with previous LIA students and a video of one of the interviewees talking about her experiences in the program.

Through the stories and experiences, one could learn about the journey from high school to college from students who were actual participants in the LIA program. Participants also shared their suggestions for program improvement. Issues of acculturation, enculturation, and stereotypes associated with culture, as well as overcoming such stereotypes, arose as students' experiences in a public high school were shared. This information could potentially provide a basis for national program implementation.

Research Questions

The researcher attempted to answer five questions with the data. These questions included

1. What types of support does Latinos in Action provide for students who want to graduate from high school and attend college?

2. Which forms of support through Latinos in Action did students feel were the most effective in helping them attain their educational goals?

3. How does Latinos in Action foster academic achievement?

4. How influential do students feel the LIA program was in relation/comparison to other factors, such as familial support and cultural expectations?

5. How can the program be improved?

This paper will review the applicable literature and describe the methodology of the study. The results of the research and answers to the research questions will follow. The discussion and conclusion of the research includes lessons learned from the findings, a review of the personal and social significance of the work, and plans for future research and continued learning. An autobiographical piece is also included with this research to allow readers to become familiar with the researcher's journey to involvement with the program.

Literature Review

The literature review attempts to cover the major concepts and factors that are important in the study of the Latinos in Action program. This review focuses on the current statistics and demographics of the Latino population in the school districts across the state of Utah as compared to the nation on average. Reasons why students drop out of high school and what can possibly be done to combat the problem are considered. The significance of cooperative learning is discussed as well as the impact that such programs can have on the attitudes of high school students toward gaining higher education. Role models are also important in education as seen in a survey used to discern student engagement amongst high school students, the High School Survey of Student Engagement (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). Finally, qualitative approaches to program evaluation through the use of interviews is presented.

It is important to recognize that there are many names to refer to the Latino population, including Latina/o, Hispanic, and Chicana/o. However, according to a recent article, "Latino is often preferred by many because it is more inclusive...Latino includes everyone from Latin America while Hispanic—descended from a Spanish-speaking land or culture—may not" (Castillo & Basu, 2012, para. 4). Furthermore, this research was associated with the program, Latinos in Action, a name used to include both genders. When asked why Latino was chosen over any of the other names used to refer to this population, the developer of the program responded that the program has been developed particularly for students in the west coast region of the United States. Most of the participants are from South and Middle America, the Latin nations (J. Enriquez, personal communication, February 28, 2011). For continuity purposes, and by reason of the program name, this document refers to all of these groups as Latino.

Latinos in Education

Today's Latino students have the potential to overcome many negative stereotypes that are commonly held against them, such as apathy towards education or an unwillingness to work hard enough to reach high goals. Yet for those that desire to overcome such stereotypes, obstacles are prevalent that pose challenges. These obstacles include the odds that are against Latino students when it comes to high school graduation and dropout rates, national and state test scores, social and financial support, and expectations from others around them. Each of these will be considered in the following sections as well as ways to support Latino students in reaching their goals.

Demographic characteristics. The population composition in the United States is rapidly evolving. The Latino population in our nation, and in the state of Utah, continues to grow. Latinos make up the largest non-European ethnic group in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2002). In Utah, Latino is one of the largest racial/ethnic populations in the school districts, second only to White/Caucasian (13.2% and 80.8%, respectively; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Currently, 9.2% of the student population in Utah has limited-English proficiency (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). A study of Utah schools shows that over fifty schools in Utah had a Latino student body population of 50 percent or greater in the 2008-2009 school year (Utah State Office of Education, 2008). The concern arises when one learns that fewer Latino students are graduating from high school and more are dropping out of high school than any other population of students. Nationally, 21.4% of Latino students compared to 5.3% of White students dropped out of high school in 2007 (U.S. Department of Education, 2008a). More recently, Chapman, Laird, Ifill, and KewalRamani (2011) indicated that Latinos had the highest percentage nationally (17.6%) for individuals between the ages of 16 and 24

years old who were not enrolled in high school and lacked a high school credential. This was compared to Blacks at 9.3%, Whites at 5.2%, and Asian/Pacific Islanders at 3.4% (pp. 8-9). In Utah, the Latino student population does much better than the national average with 8.6% of Latino students and 3.3% of White/non-Latino students dropping out of high school in 2007 (Park & Raphael, 2007). Even though Latino students are dropping out of high school at a lower rate in Utah than in the nation on average, there is still a disproportionate number of Latino students dropping out compared to White students.

Not only should the high dropout rates raise concern, but also the low graduation rates must not be overlooked. Yosso (2006) observed

> Only 44 of every 100 Chicana/o students graduate high school, seven earn a
> baccalaureate degree, and less than one earns a doctorate degree. This compares to 83 of
> every 100 White students graduating high school, 26 earning a baccalaureate degree, and
> 10 earning a doctorate. (p. 165)

In Utah, the percentage of Latino students who graduated from high school in 2007 was 72%, compared to the White/Caucasian student 90% graduation rate. By 2008, only 69% of Latino students graduated from high school in Utah, whereas 91% of White/Caucasian students graduated. Out of the 3,403 Latino students enrolled in high school that year, only 2,350 made it to graduation (Utah State Office of Education, 2008). These high dropout and low graduation rates are alarming to educators and must be addressed.

Unfortunately, the pressure and stress for students does not end for those who do graduate from high school. Yosso (2006) found that only 26 of every 100 Chicano elementary school students continue on to college. Most of those who do go to college attend a community college rather than a 4-year university; of the 26 who continue on to college, 17 begin at a

community college. "Nationally, 70% of Chicanas/os who enroll in community colleges aspire to transfer to a 4-year university; however, less than 10% of these students reach their goals of transferring and earning a bachelor's degree" (p. 99). Next, we look at why students are dropping out of high school at such alarming rates.

Reasons for dropping out of high school. According to Alvarado (2009), there are three categories or domains—individual-related, family-related, and school-related domains— that have been most frequently cited in the literature as to why students tend to drop out of high school. However, the domains do not work in isolation from each other. Rather, they work in concordance with each other, each influencing the others. The presence of multiple variables is an especially strong indicator that a student is at risk for dropping out of school.

Individual factors. Individual-related factors include such things as academic expectations and performance, grade retention, social integration, self-esteem, and language ability (Alvardo, 2009). Vélez and Saenz (2001) found a number of individual-related factors that may influence student dropout rates. These individual factors include the following: oppositional behaviors/adversarial subcultures, academic expectations and performance, accelerated role taking, generational status and acculturation, Spanish language use, and ethnic group membership—finding that Mexican-Americans tend to have the highest dropout rates, followed by Puerto Ricans.

Family factors. A number of family-related factors were found to increase Latino student dropout rates including family structure, family socioeconomic background, and social capital, meaning a network of social connections. Structural-level factors were also found, including school practices, size of ethnic group, and community economic context. They also found that Latina girls are at a high risk of becoming teen mothers, a risk strongly associated

with elevated dropout rates (Vélez & Saenz, 2001). One of the major conclusions of the research was that "the racial and ethnic group, family, and community into which an infant is born place him/her on different tracks regarding educational success" (p. 460).

   School factors. School-related factors refer to school practices and policies. They also refer to the community context in which the students and school are located (Alvardo, 2009). Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) identified a number of school-related factors that may influence student dropout rates. They found that early school failure might negatively influence a student's feelings of self-efficacy and chances for success, therefore weakening the student's attachment to school and identification with academics. Other factors included test scores, grade retention, special education services, and engagement behaviors.

   The authors also identified some differences between schools with low dropout rates and those with high dropout rates. For example, students who experienced academic difficulties were more prone to drop out. Attendance rates also influenced dropout rates. Poverty and ethnicity were also found to influence dropout rates finding, "the higher the dropout rates, the lower the percentage of White students" (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2007, p. 333). The authors also found that school climates, family involvement, instructional strategies, and student engagement all influenced dropout and retention rates. Furthermore, the characteristics and behaviors of the teaching staff such as dress, supervision, and interaction with students impacted student success because teachers were the most frequently encountered role models outside of the family. Additionally, they found that students who feel a sense of belonging and are connected to the school are less likely to drop out. Another difference between schools with high and low dropout rates was the physical condition of the facilities; those with low dropout rates were cleaner, in better condition, and more orderly.

Other influences. Carpenter and Ramirez (2007) found a number of influences that increase the likelihood of Latino students dropping out of high school. These include the following: time spent on homework during the week outside of school, socio-economic status, participation in an English as a Second Language (ESL) program, language other than English spoken regularly in the home, family composition, parental involvement, student race/ethnicity, teacher certification, percentage of White students in the school, school type, and urbanicity.

They also found a number of other variables that may increase the likelihood of dropping out including: grade retention, number of suspensions given, inclusion in a dropout program (decreases dropout rates), country of birth, gender, hours per day spent watching television, hours per day spent using a computer, and hours per week spent working. Other variables include hours per week spent in extracurricular activities, number of siblings who dropped out, test scores, whether a test was required for graduation, whether the school allows choice in enrollment, level of gang problems in the school, how much influence gangs have in compelling others to dropout, poor academic achievement, and exclusion from school for disciplinary reasons (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007). This list shows the complexity of multiple factors and variables that may influence student dropout rates.

The authors found that some of the most influential factors include, first, being held back; second, whether the student participated in a dropout prevention group (decreasing the likelihood of dropping out); and finally, high frequency dropout rates for students who had siblings who dropped out of school. Interestingly, they found that students, who were born outside of the United States, tended to drop out less than those who were born within the country (Carpenter & Ramirez, 2007).

National and Utah state test scores. One way to look at the effect of the factors influencing the dropout rate on Latino students is to examine the national and state test scores. Test scores of Latino students are a concern for educators, especially when considering the many risks and obstacles that the students already face in the education system. The test scores for the 2007 school year fourth-grade reading scores showed a 26-point difference between White and Latino students for national and Utah averages (U.S. Department of Education, 2008b). Fourth-grade math scores showed a 21-point difference for the national average, with Utah showing a 24-point difference. Eighth-grade reading scores fared worse with a 26-point national average difference compared to Utah's 31-point difference. The national writing scores showed a 21-point difference, whereas Utah showed a difference of 28 points. A call for progress in Latino education is inherent in these average test scores. It is puzzling to note that Utah's test scores are so much worse than the national average, even though the Latino dropout rate in Utah is much better than the nation on average. Unfortunately, if students continue to receive low test scores, the chances of being accepted into college will become slimmer.

Attitudes toward higher education and potential barriers. It appears that many Latino students desire to go to college but are unable to find the resources available to help them get there. As one mother described in Yosso (2006),

> What would you call the dreams I have for *mis hijos*, the hopes I have that my children will go to college and do all the things I never had the chance to do? …I might not have a lot to give my kids in terms of money, but I always talk with them about my dreams…My mom held onto her hopes for a better future and always encouraged me to dream. And now I have dreams for my kids. (p. 41)

Venerable (1982) conducted a study to determine the attitudes of Latino secondary students and their parents toward higher education. Participants were given a questionnaire written in Spanish through three community centers. Of the 500 students and parents who responded, the author found that 70% of the students and 80% of the parents indicated that although they valued education the factor preventing them from attending college was financial insufficiency. Furthermore, Haro, Guillermo, and Gonzales (1994) found in six out of ten interviews with college Latino students that they "felt the lack of financial aid was the most serious obstacle to the achievement of their educational goals" (p. 36). These studies indicate a significant need to educate students and parents about grants, scholarships, and other financial aid possibilities that are available. Many families are unaware of these resources or simply do not know how to obtain them.

Another study in which the authors wanted to learn about urban adolescents' future academic and vocational aspirations also found tension between the value of education and the limited resources and opportunities provided to students in their schools and communities (Sirin, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves, & Howell, 2004). The authors indicated that students' aspirations in educational attainment, careers, and family life, significantly influence their experiences later in life. Barriers to these aspirations include "institutional racism, institutions (such as schools) that are reflective of racist, sexist and classist society and inequities in resources that are a product of social class position" (p. 439). Other barriers include poverty, racial discrimination, and resource-strapped schools. Arbona (1990) found that, although Latino adolescents have the same level of aspirations as European American adolescents, they feel less confident in their ability to overcome these barriers.

Social class can often be a barrier for students who desire to go to college. Lareau (1989) found that middle-class parents are more connected to the school and advocate for their children by using their social resources such as educational values, class position, income, material resources, and social networks than working-class parents. According to Brown, Fukunaga, Umemoto, and Wicker (1996), social class affects the future achievement of both educational and occupational attainment. Participants in the Sirin, Diemer, Jackson, Gonsalves, and Howell (2004) study "indicated that they believed they had more opportunities now than had previous generations of racial/ethnic minorities" (p. 448), and listed the following as resources: self-reliance, "getting serious," future time orientation, social support, and capacity for structural thinking.

Yosso (2006) found that there continue to be barriers for students who actually do attend college. She found that Latino students who attend college experience much more stress than their White undergraduate classmates. Contributing to this stress are, "(a) student loan debt and employment to offset loans, (b) academic work and socioacademic adjustment, and (c) contributing financial support to their families" (p. 101). Furthermore, many Latino students who do attend college must face discrimination once they get there. A study from the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center (2006) found

> After overcoming multiple barriers to meet and exceed college entrance requirements, Chicana/o students often find that their college classmates and professors believe they do not really "deserve" to attend a four-year university. As they learn to negotiate an often-hostile campus racial climate, Chicanas/os tend to experience higher levels of stress than White undergraduate students. (p. 2)

These findings provide a basis for programs designed to combat the problem of student dropout

rates at the high school and college levels.

Attempts to combat the dropout problem. A number of ideas have been generated to combat high student dropout rates. According to Vélez and Saenz (2001), major structural changes are needed to combat high Latino dropout rates in our school systems. They say, "Policymakers and educators will need to develop creative strategies to ensure that Latino students are adequately prepared to meet the challenges and opportunities that await them when they reach working age" (p. 446).

Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) provide a number of implications for educators to help combat the problem of student dropout rates. These include providing a safe and positive learning environment, setting high and attainable goals and expectations, facilitating academic and social successes, changing the organizational structure to become student-centered, and reassessing the relevance of educational programs to reflect students' social and economic interests to promote school engagement. They also suggest offering courses and activities that are geared to meet the needs and the interests of the students. In addition, they suggest providing a rigorous academic focus and support for students in need, showing interest in the students, and providing support for the teachers and staff. They propose identifying the students most at risk for dropping out, providing interventions for them based on individual needs, and monitoring their progress. Finally, building positive relationships and nurturing all students, they say, are high priorities (p. 334).

Rodríguez (2008) argues that what is needed are courageous leaders who can positively impact the future of the Latino community. He talks about the irony of many leaders asking mainstream and underground rap and hip-hop artists, many of whom dropped out of high school themselves, to tell children about the importance of staying in school. In order to come up with

effective solutions, he says, policy leaders need first to grasp and understand the magnitude of the problem. Rodriguez states what is needed are meaningful student-teacher relationships and stimulating academic engagement.

Results from one study indicate that there are four major factors that contribute to Latino student success: personal motivation to succeed, supportive parents, supportive teachers, and student involvement in extracurricular activities. Additional factors include a supportive school administration; a supportive community; letting students know that their families, schools, and community expect them to finish school and continue their education; staying out of trouble; positive connection to school through activities/participation; ability to function cross-culturally; academic skills and awareness of supports; and school social environment and safety (Latino Coalition of Hillsborough County, 2000). These factors are important and may emerge as possible themes when considering influences to academic success.

Fisher and Griggs (1994) found that goal orientation and self-confidence were important personal attributes in student career orientation selection for college Latino and African-American students. After interviewing the students, they found that "being able to establish a goal or focus was the most widespread perception the students had about themselves and their success. They became one with the goal, which gave them a clear vision of the path to follow" (p. 16).

Rodríguez (2008) argues that students must be involved in the process of reform, being allowed to share their knowledge and teach about their experiences. However, he says, "the fact is, there is no silver bullet" (p. 262). Thus, it is left up to educators to use creativity and sensitivity as they work with students most at risk for dropping out of high school.

Positive peer and parent support. As Yosso (2006) found, Latino students tend to rely heavily on their peers and social networks to direct them through the high school level of the educational pipeline. She also found that parents greatly influence their children. She stated, "Positive and encouraging messages about pursuing higher education usually come from Chicana/o parents…studies show that when compared to other working class families, Chicana/o parents maintain higher educational aspirations for their children than do White parents" (p. 60). She then described how this support fosters academic achievement and challenges students to view their bilingual heritage as a source of strength and motivation. Thus, it is important to have support from parents and peers who can positively influence students' academic achievement.

Role models in education. Another way to help the Latino students' academic experience may be through good role models. As Fisher and Griggs (1994) found, "The aspect of role models was one of the major factors cited frequently as having motivated and influenced the respondents in the process of academic achievement and career development" (p. 18). They then cited two types of role modeling that emerged from interviews with college Latino and African-American juniors and seniors. First, students noted a desire to be a role model for others. They found that students who perceived themselves as role models "sustained their inner drive to succeed in their chosen profession" (p. 29). Second, students noted the importance of having significant others demonstrate that goals can be accomplished.

It is especially important for students to have role models whom they see as similar to themselves. However, there is a lack of Latino educators available to accommodate the rising numbers of Latino students. As Yosso (2006) puts it, "Though research shows the importance of race/ethnicity and gender role models and mentors for the development of future professionals, Chicanas/os remain underrepresented in the ranks of high school teachers" (p. 59).

Solórzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera (2005) describe how there is a "lack of achievement and attainment at each point in the educational pipeline [that has] resulted in both a loss of talent to U.S. society and a loss of important role models for the next generation of Latina/o students who aspire to educational and professional careers" (p. 277). Yosso (2006) describes how in California, where the majority of students in the public schools are considered "Students of Color," almost 75% of the teachers are White. She also found that this is a problem on college campuses, where "numbers of other Student and Faculty of Color are going down instead of up" (p. 119). Yet, California is not the only state where this disproportion exists.

In Utah, the statistics of underrepresentation of Latino teachers are even starker. The percentage of newly hired teachers in Utah who reported ethnicity other than Caucasian for the 2007-2008 school year was 18.5% (Dickson, 2008). The number of minorities completing a teacher education program in Utah colleges and universities dropped to 108 in 2006-2007 from 119 the previous year. More specifically, the percentage of Latino students enrolled in a teacher education program in Utah from 2006-2007 was only 1.6%; whereas the percentage of White students enrolled in a teacher education program that year was 87.7%. This is surprising given that 13.2% of the general population in Utah schools in 2006 were Latino (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Moreover, when comparing the percent of minority students completing educational programs in Utah colleges and universities in 2007 (where Latino students accounted for 35% of minority students) to the number of minority students enrolled in the Utah school districts (where Latinos accounted for more than 50% of minority students) it becomes evident that there is a lack of Latino students going into higher education who can act as role models for the rising Latino population (Sperry, 2007). The gap needs to be filled between the high numbers of students in Utah schools who are Latino, versus the low number of Latino students

going into educational careers. Students who have had experience as paraprofessionals in the school systems can help fill this gap.

Paraprofessionals. With the institution of No Child Left Behind, there has been an increase in the qualifications of certified teachers and a need to train prepared professionals. Paraprofessionals are generally considered to be an excellent resource. To become professionals they only need additional training to become certified teachers. Rintell and Pierce (2002) suggest using paraprofessionals to ease the teacher shortage in bilingual communities. Many paraprofessionals have the background of coming from another culture which enables them to work with bilingual students. Therefore, they have an advantage of knowing the culture and language of the students. Conclusions from the Fisher and Griggs (1994) study indicate a need for "mentoring opportunities in numerous settings, in order for minority students to develop and maintain their career direction" (p. 29).

Cooperative learning. Cooperative learning can provide the opportunity for mentoring experiences as mentioned by Fisher and Griggs (1994). Student paraprofessionals can experience cooperative learning while tutoring a younger student population. White (2001) examined the effects of such a program on seventh grade at-risk students' educational and social engagement. The program involved having students work together on projects on campus and in the neighborhood community. White found that the program, a four-week, summer service-learning program for Latino students, did significantly help to increase academic achievement (grade-point average), credit completion, school attendance, and involvement in extracurricular activities for its participants as compared to a matched group of non-participants. Peer bonding was also enhanced, as was individual self-efficacy. This study provides hope that service-

learning programs can have a significant positive impact on the educational careers of Latino students.

Student Engagement

This section discusses a number of ways that have been developed to measure the effectiveness of programs designed to help high school Latino students. The National Survey of Student Engagement, for example, was designed to assess the extent to which students are engaged in the educational process and what they gain from their education. It can be used to discover patterns of student-faculty interactions and the degree to which students participate in other educational practices. Questions that ask about reading, writing, and other like-characteristics are included. Also asked are questions about educational and personal growth, opinions about school, and grades. These are all used to establish the degree of student academic performance, characteristics, and engagement (Kuh, 2001). Based on the National Survey of Student Engagement, the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) was specifically designed for use with high school students.

High School Survey of Student Engagement. Yazzie-Mintz (2007) collected data on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) in 2006 and provided a report on his findings. The HSSSE was designed to document, describe, and monitor student engagement in educationally purposeful activities in secondary schools. Respondents to the study included 81,499 students from 110 schools within 26 different states. The author of the study found a gap between the three levels of engagement: cognitive/intellectual/academic engagement, social/behavioral/participatory engagement, and emotional engagement. More specifically, Yazzie-Mintz found

(a) Girls reported being more engaged across all three domains than boys; (b) White

students and Asian students report being more engaged on all three dimensions than

students of other races; (c) Across academic tracks, students in honors/college

preparatory/advanced classes report being more engaged on all three dimensions than

students in other tracks; (d) Special education students report being less engaged on all

three dimensions than students in other academic tracks; (e) Students in general/regular

education classes and students in career/vocational classes report approximately equal

levels of engagement on all three dimensions, and fall between the other two tracks in

terms of levels of engagement on all three dimensions; and (f) Students who are not

eligible for free or reduced-price lunch programs report higher levels of engagement on

all three dimensions than students who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch

programs. (p. 8)

These findings have a number of implications for Latino students. First of all, Latino students in

general were found to have less school engagement on all three dimensions than White and

Asian students. The fact that students in special education programs report less engagement on

all three dimensions also may impact many Latino students as it is widely believed that these

students are overrepresented in special education programs (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Many

minority students are also overrepresented in vocational courses and receive free or reduced-

price lunch at school, thus possibly also being impacted by these findings.

Yazzie-Mintz (2007) provided many significant qualitative results in addition to the

quantitative results of the survey that can be useful when working with Latino students. When

students were asked open-ended questions about their high schools, answers varied widely. One

student responded, "At our school college is made accessible [sic] to everyone. We also stress

diversity a lot" (p. 9). Another responded, "I feel that some of these teachers don't like me for who I am" (p. 9). Still another responded, "I think my school is very close minded [sic]. Being a minority at my school has been one of the most difficult…" and, "[Name of High School] is a very closed-minded school. Almost all students and teachers are racists and don't encourage education after high school" (p. 10). It is imperative for teachers, administrators, and students to be equally accepting and helpful to all students, and to encourage them to continue their education after high school. Education provides freedom and opportunities for students, as well as economic advantage. Students also need encouragement and support from their mentors and role models, somebody who truly cares for and believes in them.

Survey results from participants in Latinos in Action. As part of his dissertation, Dr. Enriquez (2012) collected survey results comparing Latinos in Action (LIA) students and non-LIA Latino students, grades 10-12, in five Utah high schools at the end of the 2008-09 school year, using the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE). The survey served to gather information about students' attitudes towards high school and higher education. It was also used to compare high school engagement and plans for college of LIA students and non-LIA peers. A total of 128 students completed the survey—86 within LIA and 42 outside of the program.

Results from the survey indicated that three of the variables measured had statistically significant differences in means across the two groups. These differences included (a) school contributed to growth in understanding of self, (b) students speak Spanish at home, and (c) highest level of education desired. Perhaps the most telling results were those that indicated that participation in the Latinos in Action program improves student attitudes towards continuing education among paraprofessional-tutors (see Table 1). Furthermore, there were very few

notable differences in background and demographics between LIA and non-LIA participants, which suggests that participants were no more privileged before becoming involved in the program than non-participants in the educational system. Dr. Enriquez (2012) concluded that participation in the LIA program correlates with greater expectations for continuing education beyond high school. He also concluded that participation in LIA should contribute to the beliefs and values that students place on their culture and abilities to work as bilingual paraeducators; however, due to the small sample size, no causation could be determined between specific program components and either of these findings. Specific results from the survey are shown in Table 1.

Qualitative Measures of Student Success

In addition to quantitative measures of student engagement, such as the National Survey of Student Engagement and the High School Survey of Student Engagement, qualitative measures can be used to not only determine student engagement in schools but also to evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to promote the academic success of Latino students. This type of research provides in-depth insights into the thoughts, goals, and desires of the students themselves. Through qualitative methods, students are allowed to speak up and share their stories and experiences.

Importance of student voices in qualitative research. Over the years, a theory has been developed to help combat the problems of race and racism in our communities, called the Critical Race Theory (CRT). Originally developed by legal scholars, CRT is beginning to be used in the field of education. CRT provides a foundation from which one can begin to look at the experiences that those who are traditionally marginalized are actually having. The method called counter-storytelling allows people from marginalized groups to speak up and share their

Table 1

Mean Comparisons of Latinos in Action and Non-Latinos in Action Tutors' Attitudes Toward Higher Educational Goals

	Non-LIA	LIA
School Engagement		
Feel good about school	3.44	3.40
Important part of high school community	2.89	2.99
Engaged at school	2.98	3.09
Self Esteem		
School contributed to growth in understanding self	2.17**	2.47**
School contributed to growth in developing personal belief and values	2.35**	2.60**
Ethnic Relations		
Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student of a different race/ethnicity from you	2.20	2.07
Had conversations or worked on a project with at least one student of a different income background, personal values, religious beliefs or political opinions from you	2.28	2.09
Tutor's gender	0.40	0.35
Highest level of parental education	2.09	2.27
Eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches at your high school	1.11	0.98
Family Issues		
Reason for attending school: your parents	0.48	0.58
Would drop out because of family issues	0.08	0.06
Language Spoken at Home		
Speak Spanish at home	0.83**	0.96**
Speak another language at home	0.04	0.07
Highest level of education desired	3.71****	4.44****

Note. Non-LIA n =42, LIA n =86. Adapted from [Mean comparisons of Latinos in action and non-Latinos in action tutors' attitudes toward higher educational goals], by B. Y. Ashbaker, 2009, unpublished raw data.
*p < .10. **p < .05. ***p < .01. ****p < .001.

experiences. From these counterstories, one can begin to hear what the people are saying and can therefore begin to reverse the commonly held misconceptions in our society (Darder, Baltodano, & Torres, 2002; Delgado, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Hartlep, 2009; Yosso, 2006).

Diaz-Greenberg (1998) conducted a study to explore through students' perspectives the importance of having their voices become known. Four major themes from the study emerged. First, students desire to have adults elicit and legitimize their voices within the classroom. Second, the students perceived that many teachers were afraid they "might lose power if students were allowed to actively come to voice in the classroom" (p. 15). Third, and perhaps one of the most important themes, was ethnic identity; participants stressed how culture, language, and identity are integral parts, interwoven throughout life. Fourth, participants stated that major reforms are needed in education as a learning process. This study is significant because it shows a few of the many concerns and challenges that Latino students face everyday as they attend school and desire to make lasting contributions within the classroom.

Dixson and Rousseau (2006) examined the power and promise of allowing those from groups that are generally considered marginalized to talk and share their stories. This type of research helps the reader or the listener to see the world through the eyes of the storyteller. "By using [such] stories...we can rethink our research or pedagogy in accordance with the new knowledge that inheres in them and can act upon it to realize our untested feasibilities" (p. 201). This type of research can give meaning to actual lived experiences.

In Yosso (2006), Claudia Vasquez uses counter-storytelling to listen to students in a Los Angeles high school and record what they are saying. One student remarked,

I'm not in AP, but doesn't that mean that I should have *more* instead of less? More teachers who know what they're doing, better books, and actual animals to dissect in science class instead of just a worksheet to read about? Why do they give all the extra stuff, the good teachers and everything to the students who are probably already going to college? What about the rest of us? (p. 85)

Another student added, "Exactly! I'm one of like four [Latinos] and Blacks in the AP classes. And the only reason is because my older sister, Alejandra, goes to UC-Oceanview." She went on to say,

I feel lucky to have the chance to be in AP classes. I'm lucky to have a sister in college who can guide me on what to do to get there. But so many other students are smarter than me. They're gifted and talented, but they just aren't lucky, so they don't get the chance to go on. (p. 86)

To this a final student responded, "Education shouldn't depend on luck" (p. 86).

Student voices can be powerful; the actual words and experiences from the students themselves can add significant meaning to the issues of high school education and college enrollment personalizing the research (Cho, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Dixson & Rousseau, 2006; Yosso, 2006). Perhaps the best way to obtain personal and valuable information from the students themselves, and to help people understand these students' experiences, would be through the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews, where students are allowed to talk and express their genuine thoughts, feelings, ideas, and concerns. Such methods can be employed to evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to help students; the inquirer can ask questions about their experiences and gain an idea of program effectiveness from their perspectives.

Qualitative program evaluation. Qualitative program evaluation is a method of research used to explore specific facets of a program and to give voice to participants' experiences. This method of research provides in-depth information that can assist in the enhancement of program development (Vaterlaus & Higginbotham, 2011). This can include evaluating specific parts of programs or perceptions of program participants, as is the case with the present research. Yuksel (2010) describes program evaluation as the process of contributing to the development of an education program, the decision on a program, and the describing of the current situation through the evaluation application process.

Characteristics of qualitative research. According to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), there are five basic characteristics of qualitative research. First, qualitative research is done in a natural setting as a direct source of data, where the researcher is the key instrument. Second, it is descriptive, meaning that is uses words or pictures instead of numbers. This approach argues that nothing in the world is trivial, but everything has the potential of becoming a clue that might unlock a more comprehensive understanding of what is being studied. Third, qualitative researchers are concerned with the process of investigation, not just the outcomes or products. Fourth, qualitative researchers analyze data inductively. Finally, "meaning" is of essential concern to the qualitative researcher, where one seeks to understand how different people make sense out of their lives. In other words, they are concerned with the participants' perspectives of lived experience.

Schram (2003) argues that qualitative inquiry is not a search for knowledge for knowledge's sake, but rather an exploration of the significance of that knowledge. Qualitative inquirers are not attempting to prove things right or wrong but rather to interpret practice or encourage others to action. When interpreting the data, Schram argues that each description

must be a plausible representation of the phenomenon to which it refers, and this representation should accurately reflect the purposes and sensitivities of the researcher. Furthermore, the researcher must support his findings with evidence. Finally, he says, "You will undertake inquiry not so much to achieve closure in the form of definitive answers to problems but rather to generate questions that raise fresh, often critical awareness and understanding of problems" (p. 6). Therefore, upon completion of the research, the inquirer should consider raising new questions that have been generated by the research.

When conducting qualitative evaluations, Chen (2005) reminds researchers that "Stakeholders find evaluation useful if they both offer conclusions on how well programs have worked, and provide information that assists stakeholders in figuring out what must be done next to securely attain—or even surpass—program goals" (p. 6). Therefore, the assessment of a program's performance merits only one part of the evaluation. To be most useful, a program evaluation needs to provide stakeholders with knowledge of the program elements that are working well and those that are not. Assessment is a means, not an end, of program evaluation. The ultimate task of a program evaluation, says Chen, is "to produce useful information that can enhance the knowledge and technology we employ to solve social problems and improve the quality of our lives" (p. 17).

Some may wonder whether qualitative research is scientific enough. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) argue that hard scientists often take diverse and unascertainable steps in discovering and solving problems. Scientific research, they argue, involves rigorous and systematic empirical inquiry, which is data based. Qualitative research, according to them, meets these requirements. Still, as Schram (2003) notes, "It is not necessary (or feasible) to reach some ultimate truth in order for your study to be credible and useful" (p. 97). In fact, there are even benefits to using

qualitative research over quantitative. As Poovey stated, "There are limits to what rationalizing knowledge epitomized by statistics can do. No matter how precise, quantification cannot inspire action, especially in a society whose bonds are forged by sympathy, not mere calculation" (as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 1).

   Benefits of qualitative research. There are many benefits of qualitative research. Yuksel (2010) points out that issues such as perceptions or beliefs cannot be explained with numbers effectively or be understood sufficiently since the context is not described exactly. Qualitative approaches highlight the importance of looking at issues in their usual setting and collecting comprehensive data through techniques such as case studies, participant observation, descriptive narratives, focus groups, or in-depth interviews. Qualitative research can therefore be used to examine a program in all of its parts, or in smaller elements such as through the perceptions of its participants, in order to begin making judgments about the program. Another benefit of qualitative research, according to Bogdan and Biklen (1982), is that individuals such as teachers who have direct contact with clients such as students can use the results in order to be more effective.

   Quantitative research has the ideal of generalizing results and places emphasis on identifying "truths" that do not depend on context. Qualitative inquiry, on the other hand, preserves the natural context. Due to the small sample size of most qualitative research, which is used to gain an in-depth understanding, results are not possible to generalize statistically. However, Merriam (2002) argues that such research can exhibit reader or user generalizability. This means that the readers themselves can determine the extent to which the findings can be applied to their specific setting. To facilitate this, the researcher must provide enough detail of the study's context so that comparisons can be made. Furthermore, Bogdan and Biklen (1982)

argue that not all qualitative researchers are concerned with generalizability, but need to explicitly state whether the findings are generalizable or not.

Collection of valid data. To assist with a qualitative study's internal validity, Merriam (2002) offers five suggestions. First, triangulation can be used where the inquirer includes multiple data collection methods, such as interviewing and observations. Second, asking participants to comment on the interpretation of the data to see if it "rings true" for them can be used in a method known as member checks. Third, the findings may be peer reviewed, such as by a thesis committee. Fourth, the researcher must critically reflect on himself as the researcher. Finally, the researcher must be engaged in the data collection phase long enough to ensure in-depth understanding of the phenomenon, which leads to saturation.

Analysis of qualitative data. When analyzing data, qualitative researchers seek to present the findings in a way that rings true for the reader. According to Peshkin (2000), the interpretation of findings means building upon assumptions of fact, or what is perceived and selected as important and meaningful, and incorporating them into a line of reasoning. The credibility of the interpretation rests on others seeing and accepting the relation between the researcher's facts and his reasoning. In other words, the presentation is a matter of persuasion and not proof. Since the research is conducted from one person's point of view, other interpretations and understandings are possible and may compete with the researcher's own.

Eisner (1998) identifies four dimensions that can be used to analyze qualitative data. First, descriptions can be used to educate and allow readers to visualize what a place or process looks like. Second, interpretation can be used to situate the educational event in a larger context, provide reasoning behind the observed events, and project possible consequences for the observations. Third, evaluation may be implemented to understand and appraise participants'

experiences in educational contexts. Finally, thematic analysis allows the researcher to formulate themes and recurring messages that pervade the situation and unify the experience. Thematic analysis is one of the most commonly used methods of data analysis in qualitative research. Thematic analysis focuses on identifying themes and patterns of lived experience. According to Leininger (1985), themes are identified by "bringing together components or fragments of ideas or experiences, which often are meaningless when viewed alone" (p. 60).

Use of interviewing as applied to qualitative research. There are a number of methods of data collection that may be employed when conducting a qualitative program evaluation; one method is the use of interviewing. According to Seidman (2006), the purpose of interviewing is not so much to get answers to questions or to test hypotheses, but to understand the experience of other people and the meaning they make of it. The researcher must, therefore, be interested in others and their stories, for their stories have worth. Seidman indicates that the basic assumption of in-depth interviewing is that the meaning people make of their experience influences the way they carry out that experience. Furthermore, interviewing allows the researcher to put behavior in context. According to Yuksel (2010), when conducting interviews, one must analyze the data by looking for major themes, categories, and case examples through content analysis that requires more than merely reading to see what is there. These themes, patterns, and understandings are the products of qualitative evaluation. Seidman (2006) concludes that if a researcher is interested in what it is like for kids to be in a classroom, or program, what their experience is, and what meaning they make out of that experience, interviewing may be the best method of inquiry.

Issues in interviewing. A number of issues may arise when interviewing students of a specific racial/ethnic identity. One of the issues is how the interviewees perceive the

interviewer. Fergus (2009) interviewed Latino high school students to determine the effects of skin color in their experience of identity and discrimination. In the notes of his study he said, "I was consistently asked by students to position my racial/ethnic identification. Once I positioned my identification as Panamanian and noted that English is my second language, students made continual remarks implying that I understood their experience" (p. 372). This informs us of the importance of establishing a connection with students, where they can feel comfortable to open up to the interviewer.

Ezzy (2010) suggests that there is more to interviewing than cognitive articulation. He argues, "Emotions are central to the conduct of interviews" (p. 163). Similarly, "Autoethnographers have demonstrated that emotions, bodies, and researchers' 'vulnerable selves' play an integral role in the research process" (p. 163). Interviews are shaped just as much by how the interviewer feels as by what specific questions are asked. According to the author, interviews can either be experienced as conquest or communion. Interviews experienced as conquest contain the methods of probing, directing, questioning, and active listening—the typical masculine metaphors. On the other hand, interviews experienced as communion consist of a mutual understanding, friendly feelings, warmth, and intimacy. As Charmaz put it, "As a researcher, I sought to have people tell me about their lives from their perspectives rather than to force my preconceived interests and categories upon them. So I listened" (as cited in Ezzy, 2010, p. 164), which is important when it comes to interviewing. Ezzy states that one can feel what kind of person they need to be to allow for the level of comfort necessary to hold an interview of communion even before the interview begins: "My experience suggests that the emotional framing of an interview can be thought and felt beforehand, in a similar way to the development of theme lists or questions" (p. 166). This requires the interviewer to analyze his or

her own feelings beforehand and throughout the interview process, and to engage the emotions in that process.

   Interview styles. Beyond the connection with the interviewee and the use of emotions, there are different styles that need to be considered. Enosh and Buchbinder (2005) suggest that there are four different styles evident in interviewing. These styles include the following: struggle, deflection, negotiation, and self-observation. When speaking about self-observation they state, "Rather than driving toward getting the interviewee to reveal the 'hidden reality,' one should try to understand the interviewee's way of understanding his or her reality, definition of it, and meaning-making processes" (p. 613). Therefore, when interviewing, the interviewer should allow the interviewees to speak and express their feelings without attempting to take too much control from them in the interview process. It is important to try to understand the interviewee's viewpoint and perspective. This will allow the interview to go where it needs to go naturally.

   While interviewing Latino and African-American students about factors that influenced their career choices, Fisher and Griggs (1994) found it useful to include a question that asked about "suggestions for others," indicating, "The question…was included to help them prioritize key factors they believed were essential for career development and choice" (pp. 11-12). They also believed that informal, semi-structured interview questions were the "best method to ascertain in-depth descriptions and interpretations of experiences that they perceived to have significantly influenced their career decisions" (p. 11). The interviews were tape recorded, and participants were given a questionnaire prior to the interview to obtain additional information on personal data.

Steps in designing an interview. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (1997) identified four steps to consider when designing a structured interview. First, the broad overall questions that the survey is intended to answer must be developed. Next, these overall questions must be translated into measurable elements as hypotheses or more precise questions. Third, the specific population must be identified. Finally, the study can proceed to the development of specific questions to be asked in the interviews. They also provided three criteria that must be met when composing appropriate questions. First, the questions must be relevant to the purpose of the study. Second, respondents must be selected who can answer the questions. Third, the questions need to be relatively easy to answer and should not create embarrassment to the respondents, nor should they cause an undue burden on them.

Cohen and Manion (1989) identified a number of guidelines that should be followed when analyzing the materials gathered from interviews for a phenomenological study. These include the importance of transcribing the interviews, reading and rereading the transcriptions to gain a broad picture of the data received, seeking for meaning relevant to the research questions, searching for significant themes across the cases and individuals, and composing a summary of the findings. The author must compose a summary of all of the interviews "which would accurately capture the essence of the phenomenon being investigated…such a summary captures the 'world' in general, as experienced by the participants" (p. 333).

Limitations in interviewing. According to the ERIC Clearinghouse on Assessment and Evaluation (1997), there are a number of limitations to consider when conducting open-ended interviews. Because there is no structure for the answer, the questions must be tightly focused to get the type of information the researcher desires. The information gathered from this method of research also requires accurate and time-consuming transcription. Therefore, the use of this

method should be limited to studies that include a small sample size. Although there are some limitations to this method of research, if done correctly, the information elicited from open-ended interview questions can be deep, personal, and valuable.

Another possible limitation of the use of interviewing is the reliance on memory. Concerning memory, Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) share some groundbreaking work by Alessandro Portelli from which they reason,

> At the heart of Portelli's method is the tension between what narrators report and "what actually happened" as he understands that from alternative accounts. Through such techniques, Portelli teases out the psychological reality and symbolic meanings of the stories people tell about themselves and their individual and collective pasts, meanings that he views as the real insights to be gained from research drawing on memories. (p. 40)

In other words, while memory is fallible, it still plays an important role in how a person sees himself and is shaped by the past, for even false memories leave their mark. In fact, it may just be that an individual is not even aware until much later in life how much of an influence an earlier experience had on later decisions and outcomes.

Summary

Latino students are dropping out of school at much higher rates than other populations of students nationwide. While there are many reasons why Latino students drop out of high school, programs are being implemented to combat the dropout problem and encourage students to graduate from high school and attend college or enter careers of choice. A number of elements included in these programs are peer supports, role models, and cooperative learning. One program that has been designed to include each of these elements is a program implemented in Utah called Latinos in Action. Various methods of research have been used to determine the

effectiveness of such programs, including surveys, such as the High School Survey of Student

Engagement, and other methods of quantitative research. Yet, to allow readers and researchers

to understand a program from the perspective of its participants, qualitative methods, such as

interviews, can be used to allow participants to speak out and share their experiences and readers

to understand the program from the point of view of its participants.

Method

This section discusses the development of the study, research design, participants of the research, setting of the research, measures that were used, procedures, method of data analysis, and design limitations. Interviews with LIA graduates were conducted to answer five research questions. In order to enhance the depth of data, text from an interview with program developer and coordinator, Dr. Jose Enriquez; results from former students on the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE); and a video of one of the student participants talking about her experiences in the program were included. Brigham Young University's institutional review board (IRB) approved the research before any contact with potential participants was made (see Appendix A).

Researcher

Before beginning an exploration of the methods of this research, it would be appropriate to introduce myself as the researcher and explain why I chose this particular topic. When I was preparing to apply to graduate schools in School Psychology I wanted to attend a university with a strong multicultural emphasis, which BYU offered. However, when I started the program at BYU, although I knew I was interested in studying something about multiculturalism, I did not have a specific research focus. When I was offered a research assistantship position with Dr. Ashbaker, she mentioned a few programs that she was involved in as possible thesis topics. Then she told me about Latinos In Action (LIA). Even before she could get through the first sentence in her explanation of the program, I knew that this was what I wanted to study.

Why LIA, and not any of the other programs that Dr. Ashbaker was studying? I come from a Latino/bilingual background. My mother was born and raised in Uruguay, a small South American country sandwiched between Argentina and Brazil. Her family, before her,

immigrated to Uruguay from Spain. My father was born in the state of Washington, his ancestors coming from England. Therefore, I have dual ethnic ancestry.

As a child, we spoke mostly Spanish in the home, my mother and I learning English together by watching Sesame Street. We often visited her family in Uruguay, making the trip at least once every two years. When I started preschool, English became the primary language spoken in the home. I quickly forgot how to speak Spanish, until I graduated from high school and served a mission for my church in Uruguay. Upon returning from my mission, I worked as a bilingual tutor for a class of elementary students who had recently moved to California from Mexico. This experience helped me to appreciate a new culture. It was at the end of that school year that I left California to attend BYU in Provo, Utah.

I tell this to help the reader understand my interest in working with this population. I was interested in working with the Latino population because I am half Latino. While it may or may not be that there are unequal opportunities for Latino students in the educational system, it is undeniable that Latino students are dropping out of high school at a greater rate than any other population in the United States. Since I have white skin, light hair, and light brown eyes, and because I speak English and was born with an English surname, I may not have experienced what many Latino students face as they go through the educational pipeline. However, I felt a connection with this particular population, and I wanted to do all that I could to be involved and to learn. In fact, this research has fostered my desire to advocate for modifications that would benefit the Latino student population.

The Latinos in Action Program

Latinos in Action (LIA) is a cooperative-learning tutoring program for high school Latino students, developed by Dr. Jose Enriquez to combat high dropout rates and encourage Latino

students to attend college. The program is designed to train bilingual high school students to act as paraprofessional-tutors for children in the elementary and junior high schools. To join, students must meet at least three criteria: they must be bilingual, maintain a 2.0 GPA, and apply for the program by completing a one-page application form.

Latinos in Action provides a number of services to students, schools, and communities. The program offers tutoring and translation services (e.g., at parent-teacher conferences) to English Language Learner (ELL) students and their parents. Furthermore, LIA students act as positive minority role models for younger students who look up to them as successful peers. In turn, LIA participants receive support as they prepare for high school graduation and college admission and are encouraged to continue in their academic endeavors.

Program goals include (a) retain Latino students through high school graduation to college entrance, (b) encourage education majors; (c) help students better engage in high school academics and activities, (d) improve academic achievement for young children, (e) attain a 100% graduation rate for LIA seniors, (f) build applications for college admissions and scholarships, and (g) obtain greater understanding and respect between teachers and their LIA paraprofessionals. In addition, program coordinators hope to reduce the disproportionate identification of minority students in special education and develop literacy and numeracy skills for participating students.

Research Design

This study was a qualitative, retrospective, program evaluation from the perspective of student participants guided by five research questions: (a) What types of support does Latinos in Action provide for students who want to graduate from high school and attend college? (b) Which forms of support through Latinos in Action did students feel were the most effective in

helping them attain their educational goals? (c) How does Latinos in Action foster academic achievement? (d) How influential do students feel the LIA program was in relation/comparison to other factors, such as familial support and cultural expectations? and (e) How can the program be improved?

In order to answer the research questions, a number of data collection methods were used. These included

1. A survey of students' demographic information

2. Structured and semi-structured phone interviews and email correspondence using open-ended questions

3. An interview with the program developer

4. Information from previous LIA and non-LIA students through the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE)

5. A video of one of the interviewees talking about her experiences in LIA

This type of research design allows researchers and readers to understand the participants' perspectives of their experiences in the Latinos in Action program and how the program influenced their academic careers. Judgments about program effectiveness based on the students' perceptions can also be made as a result of the findings.

Participants and Sample Selection

Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with a convenience sample of students, now in college at Utah Valley University (UVU) and the University of Utah, who participated in Latinos in Action in high school. Six students were interviewed for the study. The program director was also interviewed as part of this study.

Each of the participants completed a pre-interview questionnaire, which provided pertinent demographic and background information. The following table illustrates the information gathered from these questionnaires.

Table 2

Demographics Information for Student Participants

Pseudonym	Self Identified Race/Ethnicity	Primary Language	Place of Birth	College	College Class	Major	Time in LIA
Gabriel (M)	Hispanic/Latino	Spanish	Mexico	Utah Valley University	Freshman	Computer Science	1/2 semester
Felix (M)	Mexican/Latino	Spanish	Mexico City, Mexico	Utah Valley University	Freshman	Behavioral Science	1 year
Walter (M)	Latino	English	American Fork, Utah	Utah Valley University	Freshman	Computer Science	About 1 year
Miriam (F)	Hispanic	Spanish	Peru	University of Utah	Freshman	Nursing	1.5 years
Sophie (F)	Latina	Spanish	Mexico	University of Utah	Freshman	Plans to study Nursing	1 year
Oliver (M)	American, Mexican-American, Hispanic, Latino	English	El Monte, California	Utah Valley University	Senior by credits, Sophomore by years in school	Culinary Arts, but plans to change to Secondary Math Education	1 year

The recruitment process used to select participants involved several steps. This study included six participants, chosen by a convenience sample. A number of recruitment methods were implemented over a three-month period in order to find potential participants. IRB approval was obtained to recruit participants by letters to subjects, through a third party, by random selection, and by telephone calls to potential participants. Each of these methods was used in the recruitment process.

Underscoring the challenges of recruiting this population, the methods used to recruit participants are described in some detail. First, Dr. Enriquez distributed a letter to possible candidates introducing the study with the primary researcher's contact information and encouraging them to participate (see Appendix C). Letters were also distributed through the LIA

coordinator at Utah Valley University (UVU). She also agreed to make verbal announcements encouraging students to participate at the annual LIA conference and planning meetings.

Social media was also used during the recruitment process; an advertisement was placed on the LIA Facebook page asking for respondents, and messages were sent on Facebook to students meeting criteria. Additionally, emails were sent to all of the coordinators of the LIA high school programs introducing the researcher, describing the research, and asking for potential participants that met the criteria for inclusion. A number of coordinators responded to the email, most of who indicated that they did not know of anybody that met the criteria for inclusion. However, one coordinator provided a contact person, and another provided a list of three. Unfortunately, the first contact's phone number had been disconnected. Furthermore, one of the phone numbers from the list of three had been changed. Finally, the other two individuals were contacted by telephone, and both agreed to participate. Interviews were set up with each of them, and the research was underway. However, after a number of attempts, one of the participants could no longer be reached. Fortunately, a third participant was reached and interviewed. He also referred a number of his friends and spoke to them about the research before referring them. From this referral list, two more participants were contacted and interviewed.

The final three subjects were self-selected, meaning they chose to participate. One of the participants contacted the primary researcher by telephone, indicating a desire to contribute to the research. She also mentioned that a friend of hers was interested in participating and contacted her about the study. Her friend, the fifth participant, then initiated a phone call to the primary researcher. The final individual included in this study indicated interest in participating

in the research by sending an email to the primary investigator. Unfortunately, it was not determined which of the methods of participant recruitment sparked the most interest.

Results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) were included to supplement the data (Enriquez, 2012). The HSSSE was collected to compare LIA students and non-LIA Latino students, grades 10-12, in five Utah high schools. The survey was used to gather information about students' attitudes towards high school and higher education and to compare high school engagement and plans for college of LIA students with their non-LIA peers.

A total of 128 students (86 LIA and 42 non-LIA) were administered the HSSSE. These were not the same students as those interviewed for this research, but were students from the 2008-09 school year. Bilingual Latino students made up 10% of the student body. All of the students had a GPA of 2.0 or higher. The total number of female respondents exceeded the number of male respondents (81:47). However, Dr. Enriquez (2012) noted that is was reflective of the LIA classes, where about 60% of students are female.

There were very few notable differences in background and demographics between LIA and non-LIA participants. This suggests that the participants of the HSSSE were no more privileged before becoming involved in the program than non-participants in the educational system.

Setting and Materials

Interviews were conducted over the telephone and conversations were recorded with the use of GarageBand, an audio recording device on the primary investigator's personal laptop. Each of the participants agreed to be recorded before the audio recorder was started. A script for the interview process was followed (see Appendix D). Materials included a computer for audio

recording, an informed consent that was read and signed by each participant (see Appendix C), a

pre-interview questionnaire, an interview guide with the questions to be asked and specific

prompts for follow-up information (see Appendix D), and a pen and notebook for the interviewer

to take written notes.

Participants were interviewed over telephone at a time that was most convenient for

them. The primary investigator conducted the interviews with participants in a place most

convenient for them. Each participant also gave his or her email address for further

correspondence and returned the signed consent form through email. Interviews took between

one to three hours to conduct per participant.

Additional data were collected to be able to compare or enhance the depth of the

information shared by the student participants. After the interviews with the students were

conducted, Dr. Enriquez was interviewed. The primary investigator contacted him over

telephone and he agreed to be interviewed. A time was set up over the phone, and the interview

occurred the next day and took approximately one hour.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) was also acquired and

included with this research. The HSSSE was administered as part of Dr. Enriquez's dissertation.

With IRB and parental approval, the students participating in LIA were invited to complete the

survey, as were a random sample of bilingual Latino students with a minimum GPA of 2.0. The

students were in grades 10-12, from the 2008-09 school year. Of the 235 students selected, 128

completed the surveys. The rest of the surveys could not be used due to a lack of parental

consent forms.

A video of one of the interviewees was used to compare her responses in another setting

with those in the current interview. This video was recorded as part of a publicity campaign for

Latinos in Action. Miriam was interviewed by an outside interviewer and Dr. Enriquez shared the video with her consent.

Measures

A pre-interview questionnaire (see Appendix D) gathered background and relevant demographic information from participants, as suggested by Fisher and Griggs (1994). The purpose of this questionnaire was to gather information such as gender, race/ethnicity, place of birth, high school graduation year, current college and college class, major, and length of time participated in the program (see Table 2).

The interview questions (see Appendix D) were developed to gather the most important information from participants for the purposes of this study. Interview questions were framed according to the domains of the LIA program: first, to provide participants a cohort where they can build peer relationships; second, to provide a high school teacher who can act as a role model for the participants of the program; and finally, to provide a cooperative-learning opportunity through the tutoring experience.

The High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) was also used and included with this research, which asked specific questions about the students' engagement in high school and their goals for education after high school. The survey was administered to students in either English or Spanish. Three professionals affiliated with Latinos in Action and Brigham Young University developed the Spanish translation.

Questions from the HSSSE asked students to agree or disagree with a number of statements on a Likert-type scale. The statements focused on feelings of success, motivation, goals, and class work. Additionally, three open-ended questions were included. A few examples of the items included (a) "Adults in this school want me to succeed," (b) "I have the skills and

ability to complete my work," (c) "I am motivated to work by..." (d) "Talked to teacher about your classwork," (e) "Talked to an adult about career goals...and how to apply for college," and (f) "Discussed ideas from readings or classes with others outside of class (friends, family members, coworkers, etc.)". Another measure included a video of one of the student participants talking about her experiences in the LIA program, recorded previously as part of a publicity video for Latinos in Action.

Procedure

Once the pre-survey questionnaires were completed, participants were interviewed via telephone. During the course of the interviews, the primary investigator followed a script approved by BYU's IRB (see Appendix D).

Following the guidelines of Charmaz (as cited in Ezzy, 2010), introductions took place first, which provided the interviewer an opportunity to build a relationship of trust with each participant and help participants feel comfortable answering questions openly and honestly. After introductions were completed, the pre-interview questionnaire portion was conducted. Following the pre-interview questionnaire, the inquirer began the interview process, using the interview questions as guideposts. Participants were asked about school engagement, college goals, and the impact that Latinos in Action had on their educational development and achievement. Each interview was audio taped using the program GarageBand on the personal laptop of the interviewer for the purpose of transcribing the interviews afterward in preparation for the data analysis portion of the research.

After the interviews were transcribed, the researcher sent the transcripts to each of the interviewees in order to determine whether the information was accurate. One of the participants

responded and indicated that there were a few minor errors in the transcript, but that overall everything appeared accurate. None of the other participants commented on the transcripts.

Due to the relatively small number of participants, additional information was sought to support or refute the identified answers to the questions included in the analysis. An interview with the program founder and director was conducted in order to include his perception of the program, as well as to compare his results with those of the student participants. Results from the HSSSE were included to add depth to the data pool (Enriquez, 2012). Additionally, a video of one of the interviewees talking about her experiences in Latinos in Action was used to compare and contrast the information received through the interviews. These data were incorporated to add depth, reliability, and validity to answers from the student interviews.

Classroom teachers administered the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) during class time. Data was collected late in the year to ensure that LIA students had already completed their volunteer work as paraeducators in the elementary schools. The surveys took approximately 45 minutes to complete. Students were told that no grade would be associated with the survey. Responses were kept confidential and participation was completely voluntary. Again, these surveys were conducted with LIA and non-LIA students from a previous school year, not with the students interviewed in this study. However, results from the surveys can be compared to the responses of the participants interviewed.

After the interviews were conducted, taped, and transcribed, the transcriptions became the texts used in the analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the results. Once the data were collected, the researcher began the process of analysis. Before analyzing the data, the researcher read the interview transcripts and made annotations while closely examining the texts. During this process, the researcher became familiar with the participants' language, inflection, and the

answers themselves (Aronson, 1994; Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The data were analyzed using an inductive approach through thematic analysis while answering the research questions (Harmon, 2008; Magolda & Ebben, 2007). Two additional researchers reviewed the transcripts and the question answers and found the answers to be consistent with the interviews and agreed with the findings. This provided reliability to the answers chosen by the primary investigator.

Data Analysis

The data analyzed were qualitative data. After the interview data were collected, the researcher transcribed the interviews and the video into written format. From these transcriptions, the researcher was able to begin the process of analysis by identifying possible patterns of experience across each of the data sources. The data were analyzed using an inductive approach through thematic analysis while answering the five research questions (see Research Design). The questions were developed to guide the data analysis. The data were used to answer each of the research questions, providing an in-depth analysis of the information gained from the student interviews, and to make a solid judgment of program effectiveness from the perceptions of the participants.

The researcher answered the questions by finding common themes and differences among the cases and determining how each of the questions could be answered with the data received (Yuksel, 2010). Relevant data to the questions were identified and patterns were combined into sub-themes within the question answers to link the ideas together in a meaningful and coherent way. To assist with this process, the researcher printed the interview transcripts and wrote annotations within the margins and color-coded themes that were evident across interviews. A table was created for each of the interviews in order to pair the interview data with the questions being asked to facilitate the answering of the questions. The tables included two

columns for each interview; the column on the left included the research questions, while the column on the right included bulleted themes that answered the questions based on student responses with the page number that linked to the direct quotes within the transcripts. Verbatim responses, direct quotes, and examples from the participants were then used to provide the "for instance" moments and to ensure accuracy. The transcripts were re-examined to ensure that no relevant data was overlooked (Aronson, 1994; Howitt & Cramer, 2008).

Results from the HSSSE were included within the questions they answered, namely questions one and three, and compared against the interview data. Results from the student video were analyzed in the same manner as the interviews were analyzed. The researcher transcribed the video into written format and searched for themes throughout Miriam's response. These themes were included within the interview data while answering the research questions. Direct quotes from the video were included as the researcher compared Miriam's responses in the video with her responses in the phone interview.

Research Design Limitations

Potential confounding variables to this study included the participants' gender, family income, socio-economic status, country of birth, years lived in the United States, cultural values, religion, parental influence, sibling influence, and peer relationships. Additional potential confounding variables included racial/ethnic identity, language ability, accent, skin color, scholarships, internship/work experience, college preparation courses, and other programs/extracurricular activities the students may have participated in throughout high school, which may have also contributed to the students' decisions to attend college.

A limitation of this research was the use of a retrospective study design that can be prone to distortions of memory. This research relied on asking questions related to the past, asking

participants to recall their experiences from memory, to determine how these experiences helped them stay engaged to graduate from high school and the impact that Latinos in Action had on their educational decisions. As Maynes, Pierce, and Laslett (2008) explained, even fallible memory plays a role in how a person sees himself and is shaped by the past. Therefore, while the participants in this study may have shared "revisionist's history" of their experiences, this history still impacts where and who they are now and in the future.

A final limitation of the research design was the use of a small sample size. This makes the findings impossible to generalize to a larger population. However, readers can implement user generalizability, which means that readers can determine to what extent the findings can be applied to their unique settings.

Results

The following is an analysis of the results of the findings, guided by the interview

questions. The questions were developed to focus the data and provide answers to facilitate an

understanding of the LIA program and to examine the effectiveness of the program based on

student perceptions. Data used to answer the questions included interviews with student

participants; an interview with the program director, Dr. Jose Enriquez; results from the High

School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE); and a video of one of the interviewees. The

five research questions guided the analysis of the data. Answers to the questions were structured

by the themes found in the responses by the student participants and include the pertinent

information given from the interview conducted with the program director, the High School

Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE), and a video of one of the student participants.

Research Question 1: What types of support does Latinos in Action provide for students

who want to graduate from high school and attend college?

Question number one is organized according to the responses from the four data

sources—the student interviews including the video interview, the program director, and the

results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement. While Dr. Enriquez was asked this

question directly, answers from the students and the survey were derived from the information

obtained through multiple interview questions.

Responses from the student interviews. Students reported several forms of support

offered by the Latinos in Action program to achieve the goal of high school graduation and

college enrollment. Emotional and informational supports were the most often cited forms

throughout the interviews. While the two types of support came together at times and crossed

over from the goal of high school graduation to college admittance, there was delineation

between how emotional support and informational support were most important for the students. For example, positive peer pressure, a form of emotional support, was more important to students in meeting the goal of high school graduation than it was for enrolling in college, though it did at times function as a smaller form of support to help motivate students to enroll in college.

The forms of emotional and informational support reported were as follows, and each will be discussed in greater depth following their enumeration: (a) forms of emotional support that helped meet the standard of high school graduation included positive support from peers, intimate friendships with teachers, a sense of belonging in school, and an increase of self-esteem; (b) responses regarding support for admittance to college that were more informational included guest lectures, dissemination of information on financial aid, and direction and focus of goals and desires.

Emotional support and high school graduation. None of the students directly voiced concerns that they were ever afraid they would not graduate from high school. Yet, there were examples from almost every student of someone close to them who did drop out of high school. Felix, for example, cited that both his mother and his sister dropped out of high school, but believed that because of their experiences he would not have dropped out. "I learn from personal experiences," he said, "seeing how her life [his sister's] is and how difficult she has to live now because she just dropped out of high school and the opportunities she gets are very limited, so I want to broaden my opportunities." Each student also expressed similar feelings of being the exception to their family pattern, except in the case of Miriam, whose parents both graduated from a university in Peru, and Walter, whose father graduated high school then briefly attended college, and whose mother graduated from college out of the country. Both Miriam and Walter,

however, did cite friends or acquaintances who dropped out. Additionally, all voiced an understanding that the statistics and unstated, and occasionally expressed, stereotype was that they were likely candidates for dropping out of high school.

All students expressed that the emotional supports of Latinos in Action made them more confident in their journey through high school and made the journey more enjoyable. In light of their understanding that the odds were against them, it is easy to understand that emotional supports, more than straight facts or information, were the primary forms of support felt from the program in connection with their high school graduation.

Positive support from peers. Every student responded in multiple ways that the positive peer pressure created by Latinos in Action supported them in achieving high school graduation and motivated them to move on to college. Walter provided a primary example of the importance that positive peer pressure played for the students in Latinos in Action in both high school and continuing on to college. Walter reported that during his senior year he had full-time employment and was no longer sure whether or not he wanted to go to college. He made his decision to enroll after being approached by a friend from Latinos in Action:

My friend was like, "I already enrolled [for college] and everything," so I was like, "Alright, I'll just have to enroll"…so I did. That just really, really helped me that way…kind of just having like that bond of trying to push each other to do good.

This bond that Walter said helped push him to finally decide on college was also what helped him during high school. He stated, "We…always helped each other…always pushed each other to do better."

In the video interview, Miriam emphasized peer support as one of the most important forms of support she received from LIA. She stated that LIA was like a second family, and that

the students helped each other reach their goals together. This reiterated what she indicated in the interview when she said that, after serving together with the other LIA students, they became more than classmates, but "like a second family."

Sophie likewise greatly felt the support of not just her high school peers but peers who shared more in common with her than the majority population at the school. "I was jealous of all my Latino friends because before that class [Latinos in Action] usually all my classes were full of Caucasian students, so it was nice to be around someone like...me." She added, "If I succeed I have to try to...make my people succeed, so that we can all succeed together." Later, Sophie made a comment about what made her LIA peers more similar to her than the Caucasian students she had previously been with in classes. When asked if she had any Latino teachers who influenced her she responded, "No because there weren't any Latino teachers in my high school...but my Latinos in Action teacher, she was a Latina, well, her ancestors were, but you know, didn't really count because she didn't speak Spanish fluently." However, when asked again if her teacher influenced her in any way she said, "Yeah, because she knew of our struggle." From Sophie's statements, as well as the other students, a strong bond among the students was their language and "their struggle" as she labeled it.

This understanding between students created a stronger peer bond than the students felt could have existed within other classes or clubs in their high school, and provided greater emotional support. Additionally, the positive pressure to achieve from that group had more of an impact than it did from other high school peers or programs.

Intimate friendships with teachers. LIA teachers supported the students in a number of ways. Both Sophie and Miriam felt their LIA teacher became a friend rather than just another teacher. Felix said that his LIA teacher was not the reason he went to college, "But it was nice

talking to her about it." Gabriel said his LIA teacher influenced him, but did not explain how.

Oliver talked about how even now that he is in college he continues to work closely with his LIA

teacher; only now, they work on an almost equal level, as co-teachers of the LIA classes at his

former high school. The teacher is nearing retirement, and Oliver plans to take over the program

at the school when she retires.

Miriam had the most to say about her LIA teacher:

She taught me a lot of things...and if I needed (academic) help, like, as in, like, anything,

she would be there for me. And she could actually help me, so I would go to her, and,

even emotionally, in my personal life, anything, she would always be there for me. I go

visit her all the time...she's...been there for me than any other teacher I've

ever...[known]...we had no clue what we were doing; we just had this paper saying what

we were supposed to do. But she being in there for us, being supportive..."I'm here for

anything that you need," made a difference for sure.

Whether the students felt especially close to their teacher or not, the responses about the teachers

were always positive.

Sense of belonging in school. As discussed in the literature review, only 69% of Latino

students in Utah graduated high school in 2008, compared to 91% of White/Caucasian students

(Utah State Office of Education, 2008). Nationally, 21.4% of Latino students dropped out of

high school during 2007 while only 5.3% of White/Caucasian students dropped out (U.S.

Department of Education, 2008a). Statistics in 2006 show that across Utah districts, 13.2% of

enrolled students are Latino, while 80.8% of students are White/Caucasian (U.S. Department of

Education, 2006).

As a minority within the school population and identifying with a group with significantly lower graduation rates than the majority campus population, Latino students' responses illustrated their feelings of not being viewed as an important or productive population on their campuses. One of the most particularly telling responses came in the form of a story told by Oliver about his first day in his Latinos in Action class. Oliver said he walked into the classroom door and seeing that the teacher was an older White woman, he thought the class was not going to be quite what he had hoped for. He was again confused when she addressed him in Spanish, asking how he was doing:

> I [was] like "What?!" None of my teachers speak Spanish and…everyone who [did] in elementary and middle school, they got mad [at] and they kinda basically outlawed Spanish when I was growing up. They said, "No more speaking Spanish," because a lot of students that spoke it only spoke it to swear at other kids when they didn't wanna let them know what they were saying. So they said, "No more Spanish. You guys speak Spanish, you get sent to the office." And so, I thought, why is this lady [LIA teacher] breaking the rule? And then I'm like, okay, I think she…she probably wants me to speak Spanish so she can send me to office…I was always on the defense with some of the teachers because…one of the teachers in 8th grade…came up to me and confessed, "Hey, [Oliver], I'm really sorry for misjudging you. I honestly thought you were just going to be another delinquent in my class."

Oliver later used the word "cholo" to describe what he was sure many of his science teachers over the years thought he was going to be. As Oliver became more involved in Latinos in Action, he felt more emboldened by the sense of belonging he felt there:

I'm tired of being the one that's hiding...I'm not going to hide anymore, especially in Latinos in Action…we'd always kind shut our voices down and never let ourselves be heard…[but]…I told them [fellow students], "Hey, you know what guys, lets do this," and we planned activities and we did service and…we went out with a bang…I was going to let people know who I am.

Oliver used the supportive belonging he felt in Latinos in Action as a means to opening himself up on his high school campus, taking charge of activities, and becoming an active part of the school community.

Miriam's experience in Latinos in Action also helped her feel a sense of belonging to a group of Latino students who were like her and did not fit the negative Latino stereotypes. "When others come to LIA," she said, "the first thing I…think of is…that [they] have the same goals as me." Miriam said that she frequently had the experience of talking to students who were not in LIA who would tell her their parents did not want them to participate. "I would just be so shocked…Your telling me that your parents…don't want you to do this because it sounds funny?" Not only did it sound funny to their parents according to some kids, but it was also simply not important. Miriam noted that many parents told their kids that if they wanted to get a job and help support the family then that would be better, or if they just managed to not get pregnant they would be happy with them. She felt from talking to Latino students outside of LIA that the attitude of the parents that was passed on to the children was, "'If I survive this way then my children can do the same' and I do not agree with that at all," Miriam said. Latinos in Action provided Miriam a place where she could fit in, not only as a Latino student, but also as a Latino student who had aspirations beyond what she felt many of her Latino peers and their parents had.

Gabriel explained the sense of belonging most succinctly. He said, "I think the program itself is just a great program for Latinos, because you feel part of a school and you don't feel like an outsider."

Increase of self-esteem. Responses from the students did not indicate a trend in feeling they had low self-esteem, but rather that Latinos in Action added self-esteem in additional areas and increased any already existing confidence they had in their abilities. Sophie stated, "I learned that I could bring a lot to the table, well I knew that before my Latinos in Action class it's just that class helped me settle down." Other students expressed similar insights that their time in Latinos in Action affirmed their capacities and helped them become confident in other areas such as being a role model.

"I think it [Latinos in Action] helped my self-esteem," Gabriel stated when asked how LIA influenced or shaped him. He echoed what Sophie said as well about being a role model, "I have higher self-esteem, I think of myself as a better leader now."

Latinos in Action also helped Oliver begin to see himself as someone worth being a role model:

It was just kind of interesting when you're the big kid, how much influence you have on the kids, whether you lead them to a good path or bad path, they decide to follow you and they see you as an example…your decisions impact them too.

It was also because of this that Oliver said he watched not only what he did inside of school but outside as well.

Miriam felt the program not only enhanced her self-esteem and helped her feel like she could be a role model, but also helped her come to a better understanding of who she was and could be as a person, "I was not the person I am today before I did LIA." She later said,

I would definitely not be the person I am today…I'm really, really glad I did it because that was like the period of time, high school was just like, the hardest thing and like the moment when you're…defining yourself…as a person…I'm glad that I did the program…[and] got all this experience from it and [grew] as a person.

Students gained from the program a greater sense of self-esteem, an amount of greater self-respect at being able to see themselves as mentors or role models, and, in Miriam's case, found the program helped define them as a person.

Informational support and college admission. In addition to emotional support, a strong theme revealed throughout and across the interviews was that parents, who wanted their children to attend college, did not have the information to help their child reach that goal. Above all else, parents simply lacked information surrounding college applications, enrollment, scholarships, financial aid, and who to contact. Students who were interviewed found that the Latinos in Action program supported them in their goal of college acceptance through providing the information about college that they and their parents lacked.

Oliver best described the consensus of the students' knowledge about college before Latinos in Action. He said, "I honestly didn't know where to apply, who to ask, what to do, what the process was before Latinos in Action and honestly I thought I'm not going to be able to go to college."

Gabriel found similar informational support and value in the program when he said the program was a way to keep high school students motivated to do well in high school and move on to college. "[The program is] a kind of motivation for them [if] they don't really know what to do, or aren't really sure they want to go to college." Gabriel, like the other students, knew what was true of the other high school students in his position: they wanted to go to college but

they simply did not know what they had to do to achieve that goal. Latinos in Action helped

provide the information about the process of applying for and attending college that the students

lacked.

Guest lectures. One of the ways students said they learned important information about

college was through guest lecturers speaking in their LIA classes. Sophie felt that having

speakers, like program director Dr. Enriquez, were very influential for the students. Sophie also

felt that having "the university level LIAs going to the high schools" was important. She said the

LIA group at her university had plans to go and speak to the surrounding LIA high school classes

to discuss "how to get to college, how we did it and how you can do it and stuff."

Oliver also believed that guest lecturers imparted more accurate information to the

students and gave them perspective. He told of a girl who was telling him that she did not know

if she wanted to go to college because a peer had told her it was going to be too hard. Oliver said

having speakers who "were Latino students actually in college...[gave] a whole different

perspective of a college student who is succeeding in college, not someone that's got [bad]

grades that hasn't even gone to college, that's still in high school."

According to Sophie, guest speakers helped to give factual information about the process

of applying to college. For Oliver the value of guest speakers was to give the perspective of

being a successful Latino college student.

Dissemination of information on financial aid. Like many other students enrolling in

college, the students from the Latinos in Action program were not always sure how to pay for

college. Latinos in Action helped them learn about financial aid options, most notably about

scholarships. Miriam stated the importance of being informed about financial options for

college:

We really need to get the word out there...[get] people informed...you need to network...all this stuff I learned from LIA...Once I got to LIA...one of my scholarships was just for leadership, which I got from LIA...I don't think I could've gone to college without it—I honestly thought [so] without being in the program, and without learning all those things I did...and my scholarship.

Oliver also said that his Latinos in Action class helped him learn about scholarships. As he put it, "We had people who came and told us about scholarship opportunities...I learned about all this stuff...I knew how to apply to [Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA]." In Walter's LIA class, "They constantly announced there's [a] scholarship available or [an] award or things like that."

Sophie's teacher gave her information on scholarships. She said, "She kept telling me...sign up for certain stuff. She once told me to sign up for a scholarship that I actually got to go to school." Students felt that their teachers helped give them information on colleges and scholarships, and were a source of support in their goal to go to college.

The mixed grade levels in the class also helped with getting financial information. Walter said that listening to the seniors in the class discuss what they were doing financially was helpful. He stated, "The seniors in the class would start talking about...what they've been doing and what scholarships they applied for and things like that."

Direction and focus of goals and desires. When the students were questioned about their desire to graduate high school and attend college, they linked their desires with success and the broadening of opportunities in life. Miriam said her parents often told her "how successful you can be in life because of your education, and that's the only way...you can be successful." Each of the students reported similar attitudes and admonitions from their parents.

Walter understood that there was immediate financial gain to be made by having full-time employment over attending college after his senior year. He reemphasized frequently in his interview how Latinos in Action helped him realize that short-term financial gain was not worth forfeiting his education:

> [It helps you] think differently, you don't always think about just the present...they mentioned you can get out of high school and make good money now but once you start having a family and things like that, then that good money isn't going to be good, you know.

The program helped to redirect Walter's thinking on his financial goals.

Gabriel, at times, also found himself not completely sure of the road ahead he should take. He had goals and desires, but was not sure how to implement them:

> Like I said, I was really unsure about what I wanted to do, or if I wanted to keep on going in school or not and just being able to talk to others and being involved, that just really changed my mindset, like what I wanted to be.

He also advised helping high school students by telling them, "There'll be rewards after but now it's...hard work, you know." Through the support offered from Latinos in Action, Gabriel was better able to choose the direction he wanted to take in his educational path and eventually attend college.

The program also provided students the opportunity to remember to focus on the path that directed them to complete their educational pursuits and not get distracted. Felix, who worked with his family as a janitor, said, "I knew this [working as a janitor] is not what I want to do for the rest of my life and I buckled down and started to study." Felix felt he benefitted greatly from one of the days LIA spent at UVU hearing from guest speakers:

> I remember a guy that went to jail and he was telling us his life story about how bad he
>
> messed up...that influenced me also to go on my decision to keep pushing on through
>
> school and not to get side tracked by any bad influences.

By participating in LIA, Felix was able to stay focused on his goals.

Miriam, like the other students, knew she wanted to graduate from high school and go to college, but needed help directing that desire:

> I only knew that I wanted to go to college. That's the only thing I knew...when I got to
>
> LIA...I actually became interested in going to the colleges and learning about [them and]
>
> trying to decide where I wanted to go...like I didn't...know what I was [going] to go to
>
> college for.

She also noted how important her teacher was in helping to direct the students' desires and goals. "We had no clue what we were doing, we just had this paper saying what we were suppose to do. But she [the teacher] being in there for us, being supportive...made a difference for sure." Whether it was focusing their goals for college, or directing already held desires, like financial well being, the students found that the Latinos in Action program helped provide the support they needed to make those desires and goals more focused, more possible, and more in sync with each other.

Response from the program director. Dr. Jose Enriquez, the program director of Latinos in Action, listed six different forms of support he believed Latinos in Action offered: an institutional agent, positive peer support, connectivity, time for reflection, academic support, and service learning to boost confidence. While the diction used by Dr. Enriquez differs from that used by the students, the forms of support he listed were all responses given by at least one student.

Encouragement from an institutional agent. Dr. Enriquez emphasized that institutional

agents are one of the most important supports LIA provides. He defined an institutional agent as

somebody from within the school that can have a positive influence on students. This person can

be a teacher, administrator, aide, or paraeducator. Parents, siblings, and friends can also be

considered institutional agents as they help students become connected to their schools. An LIA

teacher is available at every school and accessible to every LIA student. Participants also talked

at length about the support they received from their LIA teachers. Through this support, students

were able to build a relationship with a change-agent within the school. These teachers became

people they could trust and go to for help or direction. Dr. Enriquez, like the students,

considered this to be a main support provided by the program.

Positive support from peers. Dr. Enriquez also talked about the importance of friends

and positive peer support provided by the program. Dr. Enriquez considers positive peer support

as one of the reasons that students go to college. Students have opportunities to serve together

and bond with each other and are more apt to go to each other for help and advice because of the

trust and camaraderie they share. The importance of positive peer support was also shared by

every one of the LIA participants interviewed. The majority of participants talked about the

importance of the bond they had with each other, which encouraged them to improve in their

academics and set and reach higher goals for themselves.

Connectivity to school. Connectivity was what the students called a sense of belonging,

or feeling a part of their school. Latinos in Action provides supports that allow students to feel

connected to their schools and the possibility of going to college. As Dr. Enriquez put it,

"There's gotta be some connectivity somewhere, something that connects them to the college or

university." This connectivity can be built by having institutional agents that spark the students'

interest in school. LIA participants, most particularly Gabriel, also mentioned the importance of school involvement that can be maintained through the program connecting students to their schools. Through such connectivity, they are more likely to excel and persevere.

Reflection and course correction. As related under the subsection of "Direction and Focus of Goals and Desires," Dr. Enriquez talked about the importance of time for reflection and course correction. Dr. Enriquez closely linked the time the students spent writing in journals with reflection and course correction:

Now when people reflect, like journal writing, when they reflect upon what they do through their writing, when they reflect upon what they do through their writing...[they're] saying to [themselves], "Well, what is it that I'm doing correct, why am I here and where am I headed?" A lot of those questions come up as you reflect or it might even correct, "What can I do better?" When they start reflecting upon their actions, that's when kids change because that's when they can see the bigger picture.

Dr. Enriquez also noted that putting the students in a class where they are acting rather than just passively floating through school gives them something to reflect upon. None of the students specifically listed journal writing as an impetus for reflecting upon their decisions, but there is mention of teachers and the program as a whole helping them reflect upon their decisions.

Academic support. A number of the participants talked about the study groups and tutoring services that Latinos in Action provided. This was what Dr. Enriquez considered as the academic support offered to students. He said,

You'll have some kids in that class that are good at math, great at science, chemistry, and there are others who struggle with that. When they build a camaraderie and a

friendship...it's an easier... safe harbor of academic availability to tutoring, and academic growth through group work or study groups.

When students build such camaraderie, they are more likely to go to each for help. They feel comfortable doing so because they serve and do things together Dr Enriquez believes.

While none of the students made a direct connection between peer sociality and increased level of comfort in asking for academic help, as Dr. Enriquez posited, Walter did talk about the afterschool help students provided each other. He said, "Like they would have tutors stay after, after class too if you were struggling in math or struggling in English or something like that, then we would stay after and help each other and things like that." Walter also talked about the bond that students had as they tried to push each other to do better. It is evident that students had an opportunity to serve together and help each other academically, but none of the student responses connected the service performed together with a greater level of comfort in seeking academic help from peers.

Service learning. Latinos in Action gives students an opportunity to serve and give back to their communities. According to Dr. Enriquez, service facilitates a confidence boost that provides students with a sense of empowerment. As he said, "It's such an empowerment that allows their confidence to just grow tremendously and it's that same confidence that takes them to the question of upward mobility and helps them reflect." The significance of service learning was not lost on the students. Many of the participants talked about the service they provided to the elementary students, which helped them feel responsible for their actions as role models, as in the case of Oliver, and helped build self-esteem, as with Miriam and Gabriel, as they saw that they could make a positive change in someone's life. Over half of the respondents talked about

the direct effect that being a role model for younger students had on their confidence, sense of empowerment, and self-esteem.

Results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement. Results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) indicated two findings relevant to the question of what types of support LIA provided to student participants. The first of these was that it raised self-esteem. The second was that it increased students' desires to go to college.

Increase of self-esteem. Results from the student interviews indicated that Latinos in Action helped increase already existing self-esteem within the students. For example, Sophie realized through her experiences in the program that she had a lot she could contribute, or "bring...to the table." Results from the HSSSE indicated a significant difference in the growth and understanding of self and the development of personal beliefs and values between LIA and non-LIA students, under the category of self-esteem. Latinos in Action does appear to contribute to this growth per student responses.

Direction and focus of goals and desires. While student interviews yielded results indicating that LIA provided a focus for students who already desired to graduate from high school and go to college, HSSSE results indicated that the program increased a desire to attain a higher level of education. Dr. Enriquez found from these results that compared to non-LIA peers, LIA students had an increased positivity towards continuing their education as a result of the program. Even though no direct causation could be found, results are hopeful in that the program appears to increase student participants' desire to further their education.

Summary of responses to question one. Question number one asked, "What types of support does Latinos in Action provide for students who want to graduate from high school and attend college?" Students reported various forms of support they received from Latinos in

Action that were divided into emotional forms of support and informational forms of support. In analyzing and discussing the different forms of support, responses suggest that while the two categories of support could be applied to high school graduation and college enrollment, emotional support was more important for high school graduation and informational support was more important for college enrollment. The most frequent form of emotional support mentioned by students was peer support, while the most frequently mentioned response for informational support was the dissemination of information on financial aid. Taking into account the students' responses, the response from the program director, results from the HSSSE, and Miriam's video interview, positive peer support was the most frequently reported form of support that Latinos in Action provided. Comparing student responses to that of the program director suggests informational support about financial aid was a more often felt and recognized support by the students than by the program director.

Research Question 2: Which forms of support through Latinos in Action did students feel were the most effective in helping them attain their educational goals?

Whereas question number one asked what types of support Latinos in Action provided for students in general, question number two sought to answer which forms of support were the most effective according to the student and director interviews. Responses from the students are presented first followed by a presentation of the response from the program director.

Responses from the student interviews. Student responses concerning what they thought were the most effective forms of support in attaining their educational goals that they received in LIA related six different forms: motivation from similar peers, encouragement from teachers, a sense of involvement in school through Latinos in Action, opportunities to learn about college, opportunities to render service and be a role model, and the program's focus on the

future. Students mentioned the support they received from teachers more than any other type of support. Five out of six students emphasized that they received encouragement from their LIA teachers, while the sixth alluded to teacher encouragement in an indirect way. The opportunity to learn about college, including scholarships, was mentioned by five interviewees as being an effective form of support. Motivational support from similar peers was mentioned by four of the participants, as was the emphasis on the future and the motivational aspects of the LIA program. Four of the participants also discussed how they were able to be involved in their schools through the LIA program. Finally, three students mentioned being able to offer service and be a role model as one of the most effective forms of support provided by the program. Another student also talked about this but not in the context of helping him attain his educational goals.

The students were not always explicit about which of the various forms of support they believed were more effective than others, but their usefulness, from the perspective of the participants, can be inferred from how often each was mentioned. Thus, the interviewees seemed to consider that encouragement from teachers was the most effective, followed by the chance to learn about college, and then motivation from similar peers. Latinos in Action's focus on the future seemed to be the next most important support from the interviewees' perspectives, with the opportunity to be involved in school through the program at about the same level. Finally, a few of the participants discussed the effectiveness of opportunities to render service and accompanying possibility to be a role model in helping them attain their goals.

To a certain degree there was overlapping of the various forms of support and they often reinforced each other. In fact, one of the students, Miriam, when asked what part of the program she thought was the most helpful, said,

I don't think I can do that, 'cause everything, everything about it just, the support that I

had, everything that I buy, everything was just a big part of it. It's just a whole…it's like

a packet; it comes all together and it works only if there's all aspects or whatever…I have

to tell you that, that everything together, it's very important.

The various forms of support will be discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs.

Encouragement from teachers. All of the students talked about the encouragement they

received from their LIA teachers, whether in a direct or an indirect way. When asked who it was

that supported her most in getting into college, Sophie said it was her LIA teacher. "She had a

lot of belief in me. She kept telling me to sign up for certain stuff. She once told me to sign up

for a scholarship that I actually got to go to school." In fact, she said that without the influence

of that teacher, "I also probably wouldn't be in the Latinos in Action at the university level…

and I'm glad I'm in it right now again."

When asked how he made the decision to attend college, Gabriel said that it was mostly

due to his teachers, but then changed that to say that it was his parents first, then his teachers, and

then his peers. Nevertheless, he did place importance on the influence of teachers. He talked

about how his sister was motivated by a vice-principal (Dr. Enriquez, the founder of Latinos in

Action) to stay in college and added, "For me, it was probably my Latinos in Action teacher."

Felix also talked about a Latinos in Action teacher who "did talk to me a lot about college and

where I wanted to go." Although she was not the reason he attended college, their conversations

supported his desires. According to Walter, "Our teacher, she was pretty good…she really

encouraged us to do better and get things done and things like that."

Miriam also emphasized the influence that teachers can have in LIA. She was impressed

by how Dr. Enriquez came to her high school and talked to them. She said, "He would let us

know what we were doing and how many people we were influencing." She also had a teacher whom she described as a great person and "she's been a really big influence in my life." She told the teacher, "I know how I want, but I don't know how to get there. So I wanted some guidance, and she did." When asked whether she had a Latino teacher who particularly influenced her, Miriam responded,

> My Latinos in Action teacher, yes…she is way more. And she…definitely became part of me growing as a person…I've had really good teachers, but, definitely, it's still to this day a very big part of my life and…she was more than an LIA teacher…she was more like a friend...and…that just made the whole program easier on us. And so, I'm very thankful for that.

The one student who did not specifically talk about how teachers in LIA were an important support was Oliver. He did, however, show his appreciation for a Latinos in Action teacher in his interview. He was especially impressed that she spoke Spanish and that she was open to him speaking Spanish.

Opportunities to learn about college. Five out of six interviewees mentioned the opportunity to learn about college as an important form of support in Latinos in Action. When asked which components of LIA were most helpful to him, Felix mentioned peers and then the UVU day, when the LIA students visited Utah Valley University, "and got to meet a few people." He also believes it was very helpful to learn about colleges in the LIA class. In fact, he feels that they should have spent more time with this aspect of the program.

Walter also appreciated the opportunity to complete applications for college in the LIA program and learn about the scholarships that were continually announced. Sophie also thought that being able to learn about colleges was important. In fact, she thought the reason that some

of the other students did not go to college was because they did not get information about the opportunities available for them. Now that she is in college, the university level LIA students are planning to go to the high schools and talk to the students about how to get to college.

Miriam was typical of the students in that she had always planned to go to college, but that Latinos in Action was very effective in directing her focus and helping her learn how to go about reaching that goal. She explained that, while she already wanted to go to college, LIA helped her learn about specific colleges, programs, and financial aid. Before Latinos in Action, she said, "[I] didn't have a clue where I could go to get help…I didn't know what I was gonna go to college for, how I was gonna get the money to go to college, or anything like that." She further stated that she would not have been able to go to college without participating in the program.

An aspect of Latinos in Action that appealed to Oliver was that "they're giving out college credits basically, a scholarship of 1000 dollars, a 100 dollar scholarship, and classes that are three credits each and text book and food and it's…a really great program." He also talked about being able to meet people through LIA, which provided him the opportunity to find information about applying to college. He felt it was also effective to have guest speakers come into the class to give students the perspective of a successful college student.

Motivation from similar peers. Four out of the six interviewees emphasized the helpfulness of peers who were similar to them in attaining their educational goals. When asked how Latinos in Action had influenced or shaped him, Felix said, "It gave me long term friends that I would have probably never had before, which some of them were really great to have because they influenced me." He felt it was a motivation to "see someone their own age and

living the same struggles they do, they have, and then going to college. I think they would, they

could relate and know that they can do it as well."

Walter talked about how helpful it was for his motivation when seniors talked to him

about his college choices and explained their choices and the scholarships they were pursuing.

He also said there was a feeling of "kind of us together, almost like challenging each other to do

better, and…saying, okay we're going to go to college and…kind of get that attitude of like you

have to go to college and things like that." At one point when he was working full time during

the summer, Walter was not sure if he was going to go to college or not; but a friend who had

already enrolled encouraged him to do so too.

Miriam also felt that peer influences were very important. Before she joined LIA, she

said she had no clue "how a little thing that you do to help someone else can make a

change…you cannot get to the top and…not going to be as good as you, getting there, but

bringing people with you, and helping them any way they need help." As she said, she herself

"got tons of support from my peers." She further stated,

> When I would work with my LIA class, it would be totally different than me trying to do
>
> something by myself…Like, if I wanted to do something, and I would come to [my]
>
> class, and we'd do it together, it would be, just, better.

Oliver also appreciated the support from peers that he received as part of Latinos in

Action. He said, "There wasn't any discrimination in our groups in Latinos in Action…it's like

another family you have...more support."

Focus on the future. Another form of support in LIA that some interviewees thought

was effective in helping students attain their educational goals was its focus on the future and the

accompanying motivation that resulted from it. Gabriel said that with Latinos in Action, he

probably would have still graduated, "But not with the same motivation I have now." Felix believes that many of his friends who were not in Latinos in Action did not graduate from high school because they just focused on "having fun today instead of focusing on…how their future is going to turn out." Walter said that one of the main ways Latinos in Action influenced or shaped him was, "You think differently, you don't always think about just the present, just what's going on right now, you think about other…things, you know, towards…the future." He added that participation in LIA influenced him to go to college because "graduating high school isn't as big anymore as…getting into college and so they always…were telling us…get this done and get high school done...so you can get to college."

Miriam also discussed how she received motivation through the Latinos in Action program. She said,

> They keep you motivated, because, like I said, I did know that I wanted to go to college…but it's just the fact that in LIA I feel that I would be, we all knew, most of us know what we wanted to do…we were like, "Oh, yeah, well I went to school with you," so they kept me motivated…just the influences I had from the people around me…I was in a very good environment at the time…we all wanted to go to college.

Focusing on the future helped students realize that there is more to life than the here and now and that by focusing on the future, they would be much more rewarded for their work.

Sense of involvement in school through Latinos in Action. Some of the participants discussed how they were able to be involved in their schools through Latinos in Action, which influenced them to attain their educational goals. Gabriel, for example, said that being involved in Latinos in Action can help students "feel part of a school…like if they join the program they'll probably feel like more a part of the school than if they hadn't been in the program."

Regarding future students, Gabriel said that LIA can "encourage them to keep on going to school, because it'll be a kind of a motivation for them…they aren't really sure they want to go to college, that could probably be something that could teach them right." He also said that LIA encouraged him to continue to be involved in school:

> Like I said, I was really unsure about what I wanted to do or if I wanted to keep on going in school or not and just being able to talk to others and being involved, that just really changed my mindset, like what I wanted to be. I guess that helped me get more motivated like right now in college, I'm to this day, pretty involved, I'm involved in different programs in college right now and Latinos in Action helped me, motivated me to stay involved in school.

Gabriel said that Latinos in Action definitely influenced his decision to go to college and that being involved in the program increased his motivation:

> Because I think like I started my senior year thinking, "Okay, I gotta finish my senior year," but if I wouldn't have been in Latinos in Action I think I probably wouldn't have the same motivation I have now…so I think it really helped me stay motivated.

He also thought he would not have had the same opportunities he has now had he not been in LIA. He believed the same was true for other students, saying, "If they probably wouldn't have been a part of the program they wouldn't have graduated." He also stated, "The more you stay involved in school the more likely you are to graduate."

Other students also talked about how Latinos in Action helped them be more involved in their schools. Oliver and Miriam both talked about how Latinos in Action helped them fit in and develop activities at their schools. Oliver went a little more in depth about how he was able to open up and be himself at his school because of his involvement in the program. Sophie alluded

to how involvement in Latinos in Action helped her achieve her goals. She said, "It shaped me in the way that I know I can succeed." She thinks she still would have gone to college without the program, but "I also probably wouldn't be in the Latinos in Action at the university level so, and I'm glad I'm in it right now."

   Opportunities to render service and be a role model. The fourth form of support that students believed was effective in helping them attain their educational goals was the opportunity to render service, such as through tutoring younger (including elementary) students, coupled with the chance to be a role model. Walter, Miriam, and Sophie mentioned this as one of the most effective forms of support. Oliver also talked about being a role model, but not in the context of its effectiveness as a form of support. Walter said,

> We would tutor younger kids and things like that and so that, like that would make them look up to us and…they would ask us what college are we going to and how did you apply and things like that, and then that kind of helped the younger ones kind of stay more focused in school and kinda help them be more into going to college as well and graduating from high school.

In the above quote, it is not clear what age group Walter was referring to, but it indicates that the tutoring program was helpful to younger students in attaining their educational goals. It possibly also helped the tutors themselves be more motivated to strive to attain their own goals.

   Miriam also liked being able to give service. She said,

> When we started doing Latinos in Action, I thought, "Oh, this is going to be a good work for me…maybe help my community." Like, I would always do service. I would always be involved in school…our goal was to help our community, and make a change for not only ourselves, but…the people around us, because that's what it is…for a family or a

friend, people that we know and…after a certain amount of time that I spent in the

program, in Latinos in Action, it was just…one of the biggest things in my

lifetime…because I was being something good.

Therefore, Miriam appears to believe that one of the purposes of Latinos in Acton was to give

service. She also alluded to a belief that her service helped her to obtain scholarships: "I got my

scholarships by itself…it worked because of all the service I did."

Sophie thought that being a role model through service was helpful. She said, "I like how

we had to go do service learning at elementary schools so that I could be a role model to the

kids." She later reiterated this by stating that LIA helped her believe that she was a role model,

"And that's what I like about it."

Response from the program director. When asked what types of support he thought

the students felt were the most effective in helping them attain their educational goals, Dr.

Enriquez mentioned two of the factors that were emphasized by the students: the institutional

agent (meaning actual employees of the educational system) and peers.

In discussing why he thought that some students do not graduate from high school or go

to college, Dr. Enriquez expanded somewhat on perceptions of the LIA interviewees. Although

85% of Latinos in Action students go to college, for the ones that do not, one of the reasons is

fear of the unknown. Some of the students do not understand the college system, and it seems

overwhelming to them. Another reason that some students do not go on to college is because

they do not want to be a burden on their family, since many families do not have the money to

pay the college tuition. These students tend to go to work to help their families financially.

As for the non-LIA students who do not graduate from high school or go to college, Dr.

Enriquez cited lack of support from peers, an institutional agent, or parents. They are not

motivated to go to college because they did not have the support from a group that says, "Yeah you can." Students that do not have family members or many friends go to college tend to follow that example. Presumably then, Latinos in Action can provide that needed support group, which participants named as one of the most effective forms of support that helped them attain their educational goals.

Although not discussed in the context of which forms of support the students felt were most effective in helping them attain their educational goals, Dr. Enriquez mentioned the opportunity to serve as an effective factor. This is in agreement with some of the students who cited service as one of the primary factors. Dr. Enriquez said that being able to serve and give back allows students to gain self-confidence, which in turn leads to "upward mobility."

Summary of responses to question two. Question number two asked, "Which forms of support through Latinos in Action did students feel were the most effective in helping them attain their educational goals?" Student interviewees emphasized six forms of support that they felt were the most effective in helping them attain their educational goals. Five out of six students said that encouragement they received from their teachers was important. While the sixth student did not specifically talk about his LIA teacher being influential in this area, he did discuss his appreciation for her. When discussing teachers, other relevant personnel should be included, since one student specifically mentioned a vice-principal's influence (namely, Dr. Enriquez). Five students mentioned the opportunity to learn about college as an important factor. This included learning about scholarships, completing college applications, visiting the local university, and having speakers from colleges come to the LIA class. Although all of the students stated that they were already planning to go to college before joining LIA, they learned from the LIA program the specifics of how to actually accomplish this goal.

Other forms of support were also mentioned. Motivational support from similar peers was discussed by four of the students as being effective. This came through pushing each other to succeed, being around other similar students with the same struggles and the same college oriented goals, and helping each other academically. Four students said the emphasis on the future (e.g., going to college) and its resulting motivational aspects was effective in helping them attain their educational goals. Being able to offer service and the chance to be a role model was mentioned by three of the students. A fourth student also talked about the importance of being a role model, although not in the context of helping him attain his educational goals. The main type of service offered by LIA students was through tutoring students in the elementary schools. This helped the younger students stay focused on their schoolwork and be motivated to go to college, as they would ask the tutors where they were going to go and how they applied.

The final type of support that was effective in helping the students attain their educational goals, mentioned by two interviewees, was the opportunity to be involved in their schools through Latinos in Action. Such involvement helped students feel a part of school, provided motivation, and helped give them confidence that they could succeed. These different types of support possibly all reinforced each other; as Miriam said, the forms of support were like a packet and they all worked together.

Dr. Enriquez agreed that support from teachers, what he called the "institutional agent," which can also include other school personnel, and peers were the most effective forms of support in helping students attain their educational goals. He said that many students do not go on to college because they lack the support of their peers, an institutional agent, or their parents, or they do not have an example of friends or family members who have gone to college. He also

reported that some LIA students do not go to college because they have a fear of the unknown, or they do not want to be a financial burden on their families.

Research Question 3: How does Latinos in Action foster academic achievement?

This research question, while similar to question number one, aimed to focus more specifically on how the program helped the students improve in a certain area, educational skills, rather than just overall helpfulness. Responses from the students including the video interview, the program director, and the High School Survey of Student Engagement are presented.

Responses from the student interviews. There were several ways that Latinos in Action fostered academic achievement for participants, according to comments from the students. The strongest of these was the motivation they received from their peers and teachers. Other important factors included the influence that LIA provided on participants' grades and desires to achieve, role models, and school involvement. The program also fostered academic achievement through the tutoring services designed to support the elementary students. Following is a more detailed discussion of each of these factors.

Mutual help from peers. Positive influence from peers was one of the most commonly mentioned factors that fostered academic achievement. Gabriel, for example, stated that his peers were one of the most important influences, after his parents and teachers, who "motivated me to keep going."

Miriam talked about how her peers kept her motivated, and how her LIA teacher always talked about how important it was for the students to help each other. Miriam emphasized several times in her interview how important it was in trying to get to the top to "bring people with you," and help them any way they needed help. She further stated that she "got tons of support from my peers." In the video interview, Miriam mentioned that Latinos in Action

provided a second family, through peers, which provided her, "The push I've always needed to become a better person." Furthermore, it helped to have examples of others succeeding and helping each other.

Walter indicated that the students would always help each other, and "always pushed each other to do better." In fact, he said that the most helpful thing in fostering academic achievement was "with one another kind of exceeding in things…challenging each other to do better." He talked about the competition with his friends of doing better, getting the better GPA, and "having that bond of trying to push each other to do good."

Oliver also indicated that peer support was an important part of the LIA program. He said, "They're not there to make fun of you, you need a shoulder to cry on, you need help, you need someone to talk to and they're there."

Motivation from teachers to succeed. Miriam, Gabriel, Walter, and Sophie each reported that the LIA teachers fostered academic support by encouraging the students to support and help each other. Miriam had especially high praise for her Latinos in Action teacher. She said that she not only influenced her academically, but also played a major role in her growing as a person, which "made a difference for sure." When Miriam first got into LIA, she told her teacher that she didn't know what she was going to be doing there. "I know what I want, but I don't know how to get there, so I wanted some guidance." Her LIA teacher provided a lot of that guidance.

Gabriel stated that, after his parents, his teachers were the next most important factor in helping him stay motivated to keep going. For example, they encouraged him to complete his homework. Walter talked about how the LIA teachers were always telling the students to do

well in school so they could get to college. "They just pushed us, you know, and they…would

constantly tell us, do good in school."

Sophie also talked about the influence of a Latinos in Action teacher:

If I wouldn't have participated…I probably wouldn't have gotten so close with that

teacher. I used to have her as a teacher before Latinos in Action, but then once I had her

as my LIA teacher, we got much closer. So I really liked that, that I could trust someone.

Emphasis on grades and desire to achieve. Walter felt that the LIA program fostered

academic achievement, because it "focused on…doing better and really pushing everybody

to…keep their grades up." He said that a helpful aspect of the program was that if the students

were struggling, they had the support of the program. He believed that the program helped

change the participants' attitudes, and helped in "just getting your homework done, turning

things in and things like that." He also felt that he would not have been as competitive in school

without the program:

Before it used to be like, "Oh, I'm just gonna, you know, get like a B or a B- or at least

pass with a C." But now it's like you just want to be the best, you wanna get to the best

and you know, do good in that class, you know, do good on tests and not just do it to do it

and…get some passing grade.

Another factor that Walter emphasized was that "it's almost like the cool thing now to...be the

good one, be the one that's like the best in your class or…get the good grades and things like

that…to be educated is like the cooler thing."

Walter also appreciated the fact that LIA participants were required to maintain a

minimum Grade Point Average (GPA), and that tutors were available to help. Since the students

were "trying to get everything done…they would have tutors stay after…class…if you were

struggling in math or struggling in English or something like that, then we would stay after."

According to Miriam, this was especially helpful because, at least in her case, her parents were

"just not able to help me academically, and they never have…because they do not speak the

language."

Walter also felt that the focus on not just graduating from high school but going to

college helped the LIA participants focus on their schoolwork. He said he knew

> A couple people that, they never really cared for school and then they started going to
>
> that (Latinos in Action) and then they started saying things and…kinda just changed their
>
> attitude as to…just getting your homework done, turning things in and things like that.

Miriam stated that Latinos in Action truly changed her life and the way she thinks. LIA

became like a second family:

> It was just like one of the biggest things in my lifetime…because I was being something
>
> good, and the people that were with me in the program at my school, we all had the same
>
> goals, we all knew what we wanted, how we could get, how the people were doing.

As a result, Latinos in Action not only helped her academically, but in all areas of her life.

Miriam has found that Latinos in Action can help more people academically than just

high school Latino students. Now that she is in college, Miriam has started a Latinos in Action

program at her university. About this she said, "I have someone that should help me, should help

me stay in college, graduate from college, and all that good stuff."

Sophie talked about how influential Latinos in Action was for her success, and how it

helped foster a desire to help other Latino students succeed. She further commented that LIA

was helpful in that the students could be informed of all the opportunities that are out there. This

was important because some students believed

That they couldn't do it, they couldn't get to that level where we all can like go to

college, it's just some believe that they have certain walls up in front of them but…I

guess it's just they don't get informed of all the opportunities that are out there.

Latinos in Action, therefore, helped students overcome this barrier and become motivated to try

to achieve.

Provision of role models. Latinos in Action gave students a chance to become role

models and to have positive role models of people who were similar to them. Walter described,

"That sense of pride of being a role model for younger kids and your peers around you." Gabriel

also thought that being a role model was one of the most helpful parts of the program, "Because

that really helps you get started as the leader. It kind of teaches you, like you need to start like

your leadership skills, that the program really helps define what leadership is." This is

something that can presumably foster academic achievement. Sophie also believed that being a

role model was an important part of the program, which was an opportunity that LIA provided

her.

Oliver believed that the LIA program helped turn participants into role models. He

talked about how the older students had an impact on the younger students. Whether inside or

outside of school, the decisions the older students made influenced the younger students who

were always observing them.

Not only were students given the opportunity to be a role model for others, but the

program also provided positive role models for them. Felix said that one thing that helped with

academic decisions was "seeing an example of someone that was like me, kind of, that isn't too

old because…you just get more motivated to see someone their own age and living the same

struggles they do." He made this comment partly in relation to making the decision to go to

college, but it also relates to the decision to try to do well academically. Felix also appreciated

the opportunity to visit a local university. When LIA students went to visit the school, Felix was

particularly impressed by a guest speaker, who had gone to jail, who talked to the students about

the dangers of making mistakes in life.

A part of the Latinos in Action program that Oliver talked about as being helpful was

when speakers came to talk to them in their class. He said that some of the speakers were Latino

students who were in college, and that influenced him a great deal because it taught him how to

be patient, "With school in general, just being patient, being able to study and not get it the first

time, second…eighth, ninth try, keep practicing and you'll get it." Oliver said that another

reason it was helpful to have speakers come from college was to give students the perspective of

a college student who was succeeding in college. They could explain to the students that it was

not that hard as long as they attended class, paid attention, and kept their grades up. The

implication was that the high school students would then be more motivated and have more

confidence to keep trying. He used an example of high school students wanting to go to college

but saying that college was too hard. Oliver would ask students,

> "Who is the one telling you that college is hard?" And she's like, "My friend." And I'm
>
> like, "Well I'm going to ask you some questions about your friend: does your friend pay
>
> attention in class?" "Well, no." "Does your friend go to class?" "Uhm, kinda." "Does
>
> she have good grades?" "Uhhh, not really." I'm like, "Why are you trusting these
>
> people? …You gotta listen to the [right] people." That's why I really enjoy having guest
>
> speakers come to the class, they give them a whole different perspective, they give them
>
> perspective of a college student who is succeeding in college, not someone that's got

[bad] grades that hasn't even gone to college, that's still in high school. And that's the

thing—perspective.

Positive role models fostered a desire to achieve within the participants.

Opportunity to tutor younger students. One important aspect of the Latinos in Action

program was that the participants went into the elementary schools to tutor younger students.

The direct purpose of this was to help those students with their academic achievement, although

it may have also had an indirect effect of motivating the LIA students toward their own academic

achievement.

All six of the interviewees talked about how much they enjoyed going to the elementary

schools to help students who were struggling there. Gabriel, for example, said, "Probably the

best part was going to elementary schools and teaching the little kids and helping them read and

stuff." He really enjoyed helping the younger students and watching them learn. He added,

"You could like see you were their role model, like they would always be glad to see you and

that just felt good and was a good feeling for me." Walter also liked this aspect of the program,

because it helped him think about others, and the younger kids would look up to the older

students. He said, "That kind of helped the younger ones kind of stay more focused."

Miriam saw the elementary school tutoring aspect as a way to serve the community. She

felt it was important to work with Spanish-speaking students and help them improve their

English. "That was one of the biggest turns for me." Furthermore, in the video interview,

Miriam talked about how providing community service helped her learn the importance of

"being yourself, and the good you can do to the community just by helping out, like, doing little

things, and, they do make a change." From such service, she was able to grow as an individual.

Sophie was another student who enjoyed going to the elementary schools to do service there, "So that I could be a role model to the kids." Felix said that, when they went to the elementary schools, "I did feel like I was making a difference in a few student's lives", and that, "I personally saw improvement and that I was actually helping them." He went on in more detail,

It's a great program, helping young…children in elementary schools get learning how to read because I also, I guess we were supposed to focus on Hispanics and teaching them how to speak English, but I also saw a few of the American children that were struggling and that's where I saw a lot of improvement as well, learning how to read and write.

Oliver was another participant who talked favorably about going to the elementary schools to tutor younger children. He said,

And the thing is about Latinos in Action, we don't limit ourselves to Hispanic or Latin students, we don't just help them out, though it is sometimes they need more help. We help the whole class sometimes, or like the one specific kid that needs help, whether he's American. Race doesn't matter. And that was the cool thing, I thought.

Being able to tutor younger students provided the opportunity for students not only to improve their own academics, but also the academic achievement of elementary students.

Response from the program director. Dr. Enriquez had some different ideas on how Latinos in Action fosters academic achievement. One of the ways is through journal writing, since writing helps prepare students for achievement. This provides students the opportunity to reflect on their experiences and learning, which in turn helps them progress and improve their academics. There is also the help of the curriculum offered, academic help, and college preparation activities, such as note taking and time management, which helps students

understand the importance of their time and how to manage it when studying or doing homework.

Results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement. Results from the High School Survey of Student Engagement (HSSSE) did not appear to necessarily show tangible academic improvement, such as higher grades or test scores, but they did show an increase of desire to make and keep academic goals. These results showed that participation in the LIA program correlated with an increase of expectations and a desire to continue education beyond high school. Furthermore, participation in the program appeared to increase an understanding of self and a development of personal beliefs and values. These traits can help students make gains not only within their personal, social, and familial lives, but also within the realm of academics.

From the student interviews, we were able to learn more about what this correlation looked like. For example, Walter felt he would not have been as competitive in school as he became had it not been for the program. Whereas before he would have been fine with a C or a B in his classes, he strived to do the best he could in school, which improved his chances of getting into a good college. Furthermore, before Latinos in Action, some participants believed they would not have been able to go to college. HSSSE results simply indicated that LIA increased a desire to go to college, but a number of the students said that they did not know how to get there. Latinos in Action provided the resources and information necessary for them to be able to get there. It also helped participants like Sophie realize that they could succeed. Finally, Gabriel talked about how Latinos in Action would "encourage [students] to keep on going to school, because it'll be a kind of motivation for them." This describes what the HSSSE results indicated.

Summary of responses to question three. Question number three asked, "How does Latinos in Action foster academic achievement?" Four of the participants talked about the influence of students helping each other, pushing each other to succeed, and even providing emotional support. As mentioned by four participants, teachers helped foster academic achievement by encouraging the students to support each other and providing guidance and academic help. They also kept the students motivated to do well, such as to complete their homework, so they could qualify to go to college.

Three of the interviewees alluded to how Latinos in Action fostered achievement through the emphasis on getting good grades, including requiring a minimum GPA, instilling a desire to achieve, and providing tutors for students who needed them. Furthermore, being in LIA made it a "cool" thing to excel, according to Walter, which also helped bolster academic achievement.

Five students said that being a role model fostered achievement. By helping younger students, they learned how to be leaders and had the motivation to be a good example inside and outside of school, since the younger kids were always watching them. In addition, the LIA students themselves had the role models of other students who were similar to them and who had the same goals (e.g., to go to college). Speakers from the colleges were also invited to come to the classrooms, which gave students the perspective of successful college students.

The final part of Latinos in Action that fostered achievement for the students was the opportunity to tutor younger students. This was mentioned by all six of the participants. Through the tutoring, they were able to help students with reading and other subjects, and also with their English language development.

Dr. Enriquez provided a different focus than did the students as to what he felt fosters academic achievement the most. He said that the main influence is journal writing, since writing

helps prepare for academic achievement. Furthermore, journal writing helps students reflect on their experiences and learning, which leads to academic improvement. In addition, Dr. Enriquez cited the help of the curriculum, the academic help provided, which some students also mentioned, and college preparation activities, such as note taking and time management, as important factors that foster academic achievement.

The results from the HSSSE confirmed some of what the students said. They revealed that participation in LIA was associated with a desire to go to college. The results also showed an increase in the understanding of self, plus a development of personal beliefs and values, which appeared to result in academic gains, as well as gains in the personal, social, and familial spheres. Finally, there was an increase in the desire to make and keep academic goals.

Research Question 4: How influential do students feel the LIA program was in relation/comparison to other factors, such as familial support and cultural expectations?

The interviewees did not directly compare the various influences but there are implications as to which they felt were the most influential, which can be inferred from their responses. Comments from Dr. Enriquez are also included.

Responses from the student interviews. The LIA students described several factors that were important in their educational attainment, or that they felt could be important for other students. These included support from their parents or families; cultural factors, including wanting to overcome stereotypes; and personal factors, such as variations in effort and attitude. Each of these will be discussed in the following sections, after which the Latinos in Action program will be analyzed through the perceptions of the students.

Familial support. The support mentioned most often by the participants as having the most significant impact on their high school education and desire to attend college was the

support they received from their families, particularly their parents. Felix said that it was his

father and mother who most supported him in getting into college. He made the decision to go to

college when he was in the tenth grade, because he was working as a janitor. His parents were

also janitors and he knew that was not what he wanted to do the rest of his life. He further said

that his parents supported him academically, emotionally, and financially, and that "they're

helping me right now with college as well, so pretty much I have my parents to thank for

everything I've done throughout my life." Felix added that since his mother did not graduate

from high school, "She had very little opportunities…so I just emotionally there connected with

her, because I see how much she struggles every day and I don't want to struggle like that in my

future."

Felix stated that he was also influenced to stay in high school and continue to college by

the negative example of a sister:

I have an older sister who did drop out and I…learn from personal experiences¸ seeing

how her life is and how difficult she has to live now because she just dropped out of high

school and the opportunities she gets are very limited, so I want to broaden my

opportunities like in my lifetime, so that's why I'm persisting on.

Another student who said that he was greatly influenced by his family was Walter. He

cited the influence that his parents had on him, mainly through example. His father graduated

from high school and then went to college "for a little bit." His mother, in her native country,

also went to college. About his mother, Walter said, "She was like the top of her class and she

went to college and graduated and got her diploma and everything like that so that really

influenced me in…doing better and also in just pushing yourself." In general, his parents really

encouraged him to do better. Another influence for Walter was a girlfriend, who he said was the

one that most supported him in going to college. About her he said, "She was really like into school and everything…like she took almost every AP class that was offered and…straight 4.0 and stuff like that and so she just really encouraged me to go and to...do better."

Miriam said that she had always wanted to go to college "because of my parents, they both went to college and graduated…they always told me how important an education is and how successful you can be in life because of your education." Speaking of wanting to go to college she said, "I always had that in mind since I was a little kid…after high school I knew it was what I had to do." It appears that her parents had talked about college since Miriam was a little girl. Since that time, her parents always taught her that she needed to "work for what you want and study, study, study." Miriam also said that it was her parents that most supported her in getting into college. She contrasted the support she received from her parents to the lack of parental support for other students:

> Just the fact that I had my parents support me all the time by telling me how important everything that I was doing was, it just made me realize, like, the students are not doing some things that they should be doing because they don't have the support of their parents and their family.

Miriam said that the main types of support she received from her parents were emotional and financial, since they were unable to help her academically. However, Miriam was motivated to work harder when she saw her mother come home from work as a nurse's assistant and spend hours studying English at night, so she could better help Miriam and her brother with schoolwork:

> That was such an effect on me…That's something I would never ever forget, my mom doing that just for me…I sometimes would be like, "Oh, mom, no, I'll do my homework

later," or, "I want to do this," and seeing her coming from work late, sitting in the chair, reading, studying English, that was just, it was just definitely, it would motivate me to do something…I don't think I could have done it without their help.

Sophie also emphasized parental influence as a reason she went to college. As she said, "I was always told to go to college since I was little." She ultimately made the decision to attend college when she was in high school, partly "just because my family, I have a lot of, it's not like pressure, but like my family always looked upon me that I should go to college." Sophie's family was also cited as the main influence that prevented her from dropping out of high school. They were an academic support to her in that they would always give her time to do her homework; in fact, "My mom would rather have me do homework than…chores and stuff." When asked whether her parents helped her academically, emotionally, or financially, Sophie responded, "They helped me out in all the aspects."

Gabriel said that what influenced him to go to college were first his parents, then his teachers, and third his peers. However, he seemed to put parents and teachers almost equal. In fact, he originally said it was "mostly my teachers," but amended that to say, "No, mostly my parents," and then, "My parents and teachers, and then my peers." He stated, "I haven't really hated school before, but I was lazy and didn't really want to do my homework and stuff, but my parents, like, have always been there for me. They motivated me to keep going." When asked what type of support his parents provided, whether academic, emotional, or financial, Gabriel said,

> Probably all of the above. Mostly emotional though…because sometimes I was riding like a roller coaster, that's a teenager's life. Yeah, they would encourage me to stay in school and do my homework, even though they weren't that involved…they wouldn't

check my grades every day…'cause…my dad has two jobs and my mom…she tries her best too but she also has a job…but like I just see in them…just give their effort, like, sacrifice…helps me, like see, "Oh wow, they really love me," so I have to show that I can do my part.

Oliver also credited his parents for influencing him to go to college:

It was implied through my parents and my family, they never, "If you go to college," it was a matter of, "When you go to college." And it was never, "Oh, if you make it," it was, "You were gonna make it, and when you do, you'll do something great."

It is evident from these responses that familial support impacted all of the participants.

Cultural expectations. Gabriel was asked if identifying as Hispanic or Latino influenced his experience, and he said that, at the university that he attends, diversity is important, and "representing the Latino culture…makes me feel like I'm part of the school, 'cause that's what the school is about, you know, diversity." In fact, one thing he liked about Latinos in Action was the opportunity to be involved in performing Latin dances, and he felt it was one way to keep students involved in the program. Therefore, it appears that participation in Latinos in Action helped with his cultural identification.

A factor that influenced Felix to go to college was that "expectations for us are pretty low in the United States, they just think of us as janitors," and that, "I just didn't want to be seen like I'm just a little Mexican that will not get anywhere in his life and…I wanted to prove the stereotypes wrong."

Walter expressed similar sentiments, saying that being identified as Latino influenced him in that he wanted to prove the stereotype wrong. He said,

It's influenced me in the way that like a lot of Latinos now days…like they drop out or they just…don't graduate and things like that and what influenced me is that once you get that stereotype going on of people not thinking you can do good and so…it's more like proving them wrong.

Trying to change the stereotype that people have of Latinos, especially a female Latina, was also a motivation for Miriam. She said that she has heard many times, "Oh, you're 19, you're not pregnant?" and added, "So that would be one of those things that I would definitely want to change. And not only that, they would just underestimate you when you're different." Furthermore, she said, "Like being a Latino girl, just a minority, it gave me more of a…desire to change the stereotype that they had for me as a Latino student." A further example of trying to change the stereotype was that she had always wanted to study medicine. About this she said, "And they would be like, 'Oh, Latino, girl. She wants to be a doctor.' And hearing that from people, it just kinda made me wanna fight for it, and be able to show them that I can actually do it."

Sophie was also motivated to change the expectations for Latino students. Particularly, she wanted to help improve the rate of college enrollment for Latino students.

Personal characteristics. A variable that Gabriel seemed to feel was important to educational achievement was the individual variation in effort one put into school. When asked why he thought some of his friends did not graduate from high school or go to college, he said it was probably because they did not put sufficient effort into it. He said, "Most students that were in the program…I know they're graduating this year so I think that helped them…stay in school. But the other ones that didn't graduate, probably because they didn't put that much effort into it." He said that sometimes students are not involved enough in school, and "I think it's just like

slacking off sometimes that interferes with them going to school. But…people that are actually in the program, the program is really good and it will help them."

Felix thought that one reason some students did not graduate from high school or go to college was because "they wanted to interact with other people and just hang out…that's probably a big problem I see in high school like to this day." He went on to say that a "lot of Latinos would just go and just talk to each other and eat lunch and they would not do any work at all."

Attitude was something that Walter mentioned as important in educational attainment. Some of his LIA peers did not graduate from high school or go to college because, in his opinion, "They just never changed their attitude, like they got into it and things like that but then they just kind of let it go by and like 'yeah whatever' type thing."

Miriam always wanted to be involved in school, even before she got into Latinos in Action. Thus, when she joined LIA, she found, "For me it was just another course…but after…I got to know some…people there it became more than that." Through LIA, she was able to serve her community and be surrounded by students who had similar goals.

A review of the interview with Oliver revealed that personality characteristics appeared to be an important influence on his educational attainment. He started to think about college when he was in the fifth or sixth grade, and he was always interested in some activity that might lead him to attend college, like cooking or working with animals like a veterinarian. He described himself as always being highly motivated, "Like in high school, I always told everyone, 'Wouldn't it be cool if we could have like ten classes, not just eight?'" He added, "I always wanted to stay after school for an extra hour or two and learn whatever I could and take

college credit classes while I was free in high school." One way to describe Oliver would be self-motivated.

Personal characteristics such as those mentioned above motivated students to become involved in such programs as Latinos in Action and push themselves to succeed. While students were influenced by factors outside of Latinos in Action, the program did influence participants in a number of ways.

Influence of Latinos in Action. While Latinos in Action impacted the decision to graduate from high school and attend college for all of the participants, it did so in different ways for each of them. The following is a description of how the program influenced each of the participants.

Based on quotations in his interview, it becomes apparent that although Gabriel received much support from his parents, they could only do so much. He said that Latinos in Action helped him stay involved in school, and without it, "I wouldn't have the same motivation." He believes he would still have graduated, but not with the same motivation. He further said, "I would have probably not had the same opportunities I have now if I had not entered that program."

Gabriel said that LIA changed his mindset. For example, it helped him get more motivated in school and be involved in different programs in college. He further said that Latinos in Action helped some of his friends graduate from high school. Gabriel believes that LIA would be helpful to other students in that it encourages them to keep going to school. It would be especially helpful for those students that "aren't really sure they want to go to college, that could probably be something that could teach them right, that program just really helps them."

Latinos in Action may have influenced some students more than others. Felix said that his participation in LIA influenced his decision to go to college, but "not greatly." However, he did say that being in Latinos in Action gave him long term friends that had a positive influence on him. Although Felix did not directly emphasize Latinos in Action as the reason he went to college, he did say that seeing positive examples of people he could relate to influenced his decisions. Since this is a big part of what occurs in Latinos in Action, Felix's statement is an indication of the helpfulness of the program. He said that he had a Latinos in Action teacher who talked to him a lot about college. Although he had already decided on his own that he wanted to go to college, his teacher in Latinos in Action provided reinforcement for it.

Walter said that although he thinks he would still have gone to college had he not participated in the program, without the peer support within the LIA program, "I don't think we would have…pushed each other as much. I wouldn't have been as competitive." This reinforcement helped him achieve a higher grade point average, complete applications, and compete for scholarships. Furthermore, LIA required students to maintain a minimum GPA, which gave them a competitive edge on college applications.

In general, Walter thought Latinos in Action was a good program. One of the things he gained from the program was to think differently. "You don't always think about the present," he said, "you think…more towards the future." The part of the program in which they tutored younger students also helped in this respect, since those students would ask them about the college application process. This also helped the younger ones stay more focused in school and "be more into going to college as they would start talking about what college are you going to apply for and what they've been doing and what scholarships they applied for and things like

that." Latinos in Action also helped the students in "trying to get everything done," and provided tutors for classes in which they were struggling.

According to Walter, one of the essences of the success of Latinos in Action was that it made doing well cool. He further stated, "So when you see someone graduating or…when you see yourself somewhere that you wouldn't think you would have been or something like that it kind of changes you."

In spite of all the support she received from her parents, Miriam also gave much credit for her educational attainments to Latinos in Action. She said that once she got into the program, "I actually became interested in going to the colleges and learning about 'em…trying to decide where I wanted to go and…what were my options about, like, financial aid, or anything." She went on to explain that her parents wanted to help her, but did not know how. She said that through Latinos in Action, she received a scholarship for leadership, and "I don't think I could have gone to college without it." Her LIA peers and teachers also kept her motivated, and it was helpful to be with peers who had the same goal of wanting to go to college.

Miriam said that, although she had always done service and been involved in school, when she got into Latinos in Action, it became more than just another course; it became an extended family for her. The program, she said, "Helped me grow as a person." Her parents had always emphasized the importance of education; they would tell her, "Study, study, study." Latinos in Action added service and culture to education. She said, "After I was in LIA, I learned you cannot always be, just study and that will get you somewhere."

Latinos in Action also provided opportunities to network, and helped students know where they were coming from. For example, when Miriam first got into LIA, she told her teacher that she did not really know why she had signed up for the course, except that she wanted

to serve. She explained to her teacher that she had goals but needed some guidance in being able to reach them. She said that LIA provided that guidance. For example, although she knew she wanted to go to college, "After a while I noticed this is not as easy as I thought it could be, and I got tons of support from my peers."

Latinos in Action had a great influence on Miriam. She said, "LIA just kind of influenced me in every single way, like, in the way I think and the way that now I behave…it just did make a change in my life." She later said that without Latinos in Action, "I would definitely not be the person that I am today."

The LIA teachers provided by the program also had a great influence on the students. When Sophie was asked who most supported her in actually getting into college, she said, "I guess like my LIA teacher. She had a lot of belief in me." Later in the interview, she reiterated that participation in Latinos in Action influenced her decision to go to college, "Because I want to change those statistics of how many Latinos go to college." She feels she still would have gone to college had she not participated in the program, but was glad she was in Latinos in Action in high school. Sophie loved the LIA program. She enjoyed being able to be with fellow Latinos, going to the elementary school to tutor young students, and being a role model for others. Another helpful aspect of Latinos in Action, according to Sophie, was that those who are not in it "don't get informed of all the opportunities there are out there."

For a number of the students, there was a limit to how much their parents could help them. Latinos in Action helped fill that gap. Oliver, for example, said, "They did what they can, with like middle school and elementary school education, 'cause my mom didn't pass elementary school, she got to the second grade." Concerning his father he said,

He went to high school but he didn't graduate, I don't know if he got a diploma, I'm not

entirely sure what he did, I know he got a little bit further than middle school but he

never went to college and he didn't finish high school, he got a certificate for electrician,

sprinkler, and landscaping, and started doing landscaping, but that was it.

Oliver went on to say that Latinos in Action influenced him "big time," especially through

college students speaking to his high school class. Through their advice, he learned to be patient

with school, to study, and to keep practicing. It was also very helpful to learn about

scholarships, and in general, finding information about college through the LIA program.

> ***Comparison of the influence of Latinos in Action to other factors.*** All of the students

who were interviewed discussed factors aside from Latinos in Action that influenced them in

their educational attainment. The factor that was most discussed was familial support. Most of

the interviewees talked about the motivation they received from their parents, including the

encouragement to do their homework, stay in school, and go to college. Parents provided

academic, emotional, and financial support. The students were also influenced by the example

set by their parents through the hard work they did, sometimes in the face of a lack of education

or English language ability.

> Cultural expectations were discussed as a factor in educational attainment but mostly as a

negative stereotype that the LIA students wanted to overcome or prove wrong. The perception

of the students tended to be that other people think that Latinos often drop out of high school, do

not attend college, and have careers such as janitors. One participant, Gabriel, talked about how

being Latino helped him feel a part of things at his university, since diversity is emphasized

there.

Personal characteristics were mentioned as another factor in students' educational attainment. Some of them perceived that a reason some of their peers did not graduate from high school or go to college was a lack of effort, a desire to just hang out with friends, or a general attitude that caused them to focus on the present rather than the future. For one student, Miriam, service was something that was always important to her, and she always strived to be involved in school. For Oliver, there was always an interest in education and in working hard.

Despite the importance of the above-mentioned factors, all of the interviewees said that Latinos in Action influenced them. Even though parents could provide motivation, encouragement, and an example, Latinos in Action provided specific help and services. These included educational opportunities, such as being able to receive college credit, getting tutoring for classes they were struggling in, and going to elementary schools to help younger students, which helped the LIA participants benefit from being role models and learning leadership skills. In their LIA classes, students learned about the details of how to apply for college and what scholarships were available. Latinos in Action also helped the students be involved in their schools.

Although all of the interviewees said that they wanted to graduate from high school and go to college anyway, Latinos in Action provided additional motivation in that direction. This came partly from their teachers but more so from their peers, who challenged and pushed other participants to do well in school and motivated each other to go to college. It seemed very influential to be around other students who were similar to them and who were having the same struggles and goals that they had. In addition to this, LIA provided opportunities for networking with others.

Some of the interviewees talked about how Latinos in Action helped shape them and changed their mindset to make them more oriented towards the future. Miriam, for example, mentioned how LIA influenced how she thought and everything. Oliver said that LIA helped bring out his true self. Gabriel talked about how the program helped build his self-esteem, while Sophie said that it helped her realize that she could succeed. According to Walter, apparently as a result of being in LIA, doing well in school became a "cool" thing. One student, Miriam, referred to the students in Latinos in Action as her "second family."

Response from the program director. Much of what the student participants said about the influence of the Latinos in Action program was reinforced by comments by Dr. Enriquez. He said that sometimes it could be a parent who influences a student to go to college. However, Latino students tend to start thinking about college later than Caucasian students do. He said that Caucasian students generally start thinking about college by the fifth or sixth grade, while Latino students do not tend to start thinking about college until the ninth or tenth grade. This is because it's "not on their radar," said Dr. Enriquez, since their parents are not talking about it, and their siblings probably did not go to college. Dr. Enriquez also said that something needs to ignite an interest in college, and this is where Latinos in Action plays a part.

According to Dr. Enriquez, an important influence in making the decision to attend college is an "institutional agent," somebody from within the school who takes interest in the students and sparks a desire for college. He said, "Kids need confidence in themselves, to see themselves at the college level and there is a possibility." Sometimes, he said, it can be an "aha" moment of "I don't want to continue this cycle, I don't want to do what my mom or parents did (like with Felix, for example)." However, usually somebody else needs to spark that moment.

Dr. Enriquez said that Latinos in Action influences students' decisions to go to college partly through the institutional agent, but what is most influential is positive peer pressure. He feels that peer pressure and "peer connectivity" is much stronger than anything else. Students often say to each other, "You know what, let's all go together, let's do this, it's fun, it's productive." This peer influence was also cited by several of the student interviewees as a reason Latinos in Action was so influential for them.

Another benefit that comes from participation in Latinos in Action, according to Dr. Enriquez, is the opportunity to serve and "give back," which helps their confidence grow. Miriam, in particular, talked about the importance that service had for her. Other students alluded to increases in self-esteem and self-confidence from LIA. Students are also in a class in which they have a chance to reflect, included through journal writing, which is when kids change because the reflection helps them see the bigger picture.

Dr. Enriquez said that the main reason students do not graduate from high school or go to college is because they do not have support from peers, an institutional agent, or parents. This reveals that while parental support can be influential, a program like Latinos in Action, where students can obtain support from both peers and an institutional agent, is essential, because the group says, "Yeah, you can."

A central reason why Latinos in Action is successful is because

We created a group, a class that kid's can say, "It's cool to be academic, Latino, and college bound." When you make something be cool in school or be something everybody wants to be part of, then things start to shift, that's how they start to think, "How can I get in there or how can I do better when I am in there?"

Therefore, the social factor may be the most influential part of LIA. Dr. Enriquez's comments about the cool factor also confirms what Walter had to say when he said that we should teach students that it is cool to be educated.

Another important factor for Latino students, in addition to the social factor, is linguistics. The students want to use their two languages, and be proud of it. It gives them an identity, "Who am I, and what role do I take in this community?" Dr. Enriquez believes that if students do not understand who they are and what identity they have, it is hard to help them understand their future. He said, "I guess we're in the business of hope. If you can't give a kid hope, if you can't teach him who he is and what role he plays in his community, then how is he ever going to figure out where he's headed?" The implication is that Latinos in Action can help supply the sense of identity and hope. This also indicates that cultural factors can be influential in educational attainment, and Dr. Enriquez believes that Latinos in Action can foster them.

Summary of responses to question four. Question number four asked, "How influential do students feel the LIA program was in relation/comparison to other factors, such as familial support and cultural expectations?" All six of the students believed that support from their parents was very important academically, emotionally, and financially. Five of the students talked about cultural expectations, especially the desire to overcome negative stereotypes, although one student said that being Latino helped him feel a part of the university he attends, since the university emphasizes diversity. Personal characteristics were mentioned by five of the students as being influential to achievement. These included effort, attitude, priorities (such as wanting to hang out with friends instead of do school work), work ethic, and an orientation to want to do service. All of the students said that Latinos in Action was an important influence on them because it provided specifics on how to apply to college and obtain scholarships. While

students' parents were not always able to provide specific academic help, LIA could provide the needed academic help through teachers and tutors. Students could receive tutoring through the program as well as be tutors themselves. The program also provided motivation and a future orientation.

Dr. Enriquez agreed that parents can influence students to go to college, but for Latinos, they tend not to talk about it as much as do Caucasian parents. What most students need is somebody within the school to ignite the interest in college. It could be an institutional agent, but the strongest influence is peer pressure. One of the principal reasons for the success of Latinos in Action was that it makes it "cool" (a term also used both by Walter and Dr. Enriquez) to be academic, Latino, and college-bound. He also said that LIA provides a chance to serve, which helps students' confidence grow. As did most of the students, Dr. Enriquez mentioned the importance of cultural factor, but with a different emphasis, in that students have a chance to use their two languages and to be proud of it. Finally, Dr. Enriquez said that LIA gives students hope.

Research Question 5: How can the program be improved?

This is the research question that yielded the least amount of information of the five questions. This is likely due to the overall positive attitudes that the interviewees have towards the Latinos in Action program. In fact, one of the interviewees, Walter, said that he would not change anything about the program, that "it was a good experience overall." Another interviewee, Oliver, did not address the question. At any rate, the suggestions that were given indicated the appreciation that the participants have for the program and their desire to make it better for future students. Due to the smaller quantity of responses, no unifying themes were identified. Instead, each participant offered his or her particular idea for program improvement.

Included within this document is a list of suggestions for program improvement (see Appendix E).

Responses from the student interviews. When asked for suggestions for improvement of the program, Gabriel commented that they should continue to include programs inside of Latinos in Action, such as dancing. He believes that activities like dancing helped students stay involved in the overall program. Gabriel went on to talk about how dancing was a fun part of school, since Latinos love dancing, and that it is part of their culture.

Gabriel also talked about the need to try to get the students to stay more involved in school, to attend class regularly, and to emphasize the rewards that will result. He said, "I know a lot of my friends were in it just to be with their friends…and didn't really pay attention to what they were doing." It was helpful, he said, to tell the students about people who were in the program and how it helped them. He added, "Hopefully, that will make them not sluff (i.e., not skip class)."

Another suggestion to improve the program would be to spend more time talking about what happens once students are in college. Felix thought the students spent a little too much time in the elementary schools. He said that he would have enjoyed more time in class learning about college, "'Cause even still, like right now when I entered college, I didn't exactly know what everything I was supposed to do…like payments and tuition and stuff like that, are…things I had to learn by myself." He would have liked to have a day in high school, with the Latinos in Action program, dedicated to explaining those types of college issues.

Another way to improve the program would be to extend it into all of the colleges, providing continuity. Miriam talked about how some colleges had a Latinos in Action program, but that the University of Utah did not, so she started one there. Through her interview, it was

also suggested that more should be done to publicize the program in the high schools, so that more students can gain access to it. Miriam said, "Some people don't even know about it, and I believe, truly think that they need to inform people what it is and how it works, because I honestly think it's one of the best programs a high school could have." She would like to see Latinos in Action extended to high schools that do not currently have it, and get the word out towards getting people informed. She thinks that is a way to get support from additional people. To put it in her words she said, "We really need to get the word out there, and work towards…getting people informed and…having that support from them, from everyone that…we could."

A specific observation that Miriam had was that some of the Latinos in Action classes were getting to have too many students in them. She stated that this was happening in the high school that she had attended, and that this caused problems. It was suggested that the coordinators should either stick to a certain number of students, or else increase the number of teachers. In referring specifically to her high school, Miriam said, "They just need to work together and, I mean, we're gonna make sure that happens."

A suggestion from Sophie was that the coordinators should make efforts to have greater diversity among the Latino students in the program. She believed it was disadvantageous to have students from just one or a couple of countries that gave limited perspectives. "I feel that in a place that has a lot of ethnicities around I think it thrives more like that…we could get different aspects from each kind of Latino population or community."

Another idea was to have Latinos in Action students from the colleges and universities go to the high schools and talk to the students about how to get into college. They could explain

that they themselves had done it, and therefore the current high school students could also do it. Sophie and other Latinos in Action students from her college are planning to do this.

Response from the program director. Dr. Enriquez reported that there is a lot of room for improvement in the Latinos in Action program. His responses focused more on enhancing the structure of the program. In order to make such improvements, he feels he will need more help from other people. About this he said,

> It's just been difficult because as we grow, the demands grow and it's harder to do the things you really want to do. So I think one of the things that could make it better is more manpower so I'm able to do the things I need to do.

The following includes the specific suggestions for improvement that Dr. Enriquez would like to see.

First, Dr. Enriquez would like to see more test preparation within the program. "I'd love to see more ACT prep within the curriculum, standardized testing preparation," he said. One way such test preparation could be included within the program would be to connect with other programs that focus on this. A number of programs offer these services to students free of charge such as Brigham Young University's (BYU) Teens ACT, which offers ACT and college preparation courses to under-privileged students, as well as courses for parents, and does not require a minimum GPA (http://www.teens-act.org/).

Dr. Enriquez would also like to find more ways to involve parents. When asked how thinks Latinos in Action can foster parental involvement, he said, "You know, I think one of the main things is we have to catch them young, when the kids are in junior high, that's when I should be getting parental involvement." Thus, perhaps the coordinators of Latinos in Action could seek ways to include the parents of students that join the junior program in junior high

school. One way this could be done would be to hold orientation nights when the students first join, where parents could come with their children and receive direction on how to promote academic and social success within the home. This suggestion was also related to Miriam's plight when she talked about how difficult it was to involve parents, but yet how important parental involvement is. She suggested working as a group, a team, to go to the homes of the students and talk to the parents there.

Another aspect that Dr. Enriquez thinks the program needs is more data gathering and data analysis. "I need more manpower to be able to collect data from the various schools and put it together in analysis form," he said. Data collection and data analysis will allow the coordinators of LIA not only to determine how effective the program is to prove its usefulness, but also areas of the program that can be improved. From such recommendations the program could be enhanced to reach more students, more effectively.

Finally, he would like to see more science, arts, and sports infused into the program. While none of the students mentioned these suggestions directly, one of the students did suggest including more activities, such as dance. However, expanding the program to include more academic classes and sports would almost make the program a self-contained unit within the high schools. While this may be beneficial for some students, others may benefit more from mixing with students from various cultures and backgrounds.

Summary of responses to question five. Question number five asked, "How can the program be improved?" The general conclusion from the students seemed to be that they felt quite positive about the program and really want it to continue to be available for additional students. Although there were some specific aspects that could be improved, their suggestions

tended to be relatively minor adjustments or additions. These included more activities, a greater focus on college information, and more classes.

The ideas for program improvements that were given by the students and Dr. Enriquez showed the difference of perspective from that of program participants and program director. The only similar suggestion was that of Gabriel who said that adding more dance to the program would be beneficial, which ties in with Dr. Enriquez's desire for more arts and sports to be infused into the program. Dr. Enriquez's suggestions for program improvement were more focused on shaping the structure of the program, such as including greater test preparation and parental involvement, while the students' responses generally dealt with enhancing already existing program structures, such as more college information, dance, teachers, and ethnicity.

Discussion

This study produced many interesting findings on the effect of Latinos in Action and the experience of Latinos in secondary education in the Utah in general. In this section the author interprets the results, places the findings in context, considers the implications of the study, includes study limitations, and comments on direction for possible future research.

Interpretation of Results

In determining the effectiveness of the program based on the students' perceptions, it is imperative to first return to the goals of the program. Latinos in Action seeks to retain Latino students through high school to college, encourage education majors, help students engage in academics and activities, improve academic achievement for younger students, attain 100% graduation rates for its participants, build college applications and scholarships, and obtain greater understanding between teachers and students.

Overall, the program appears to be effective in these areas based on responses from the students. Latinos in Action does appear to help students graduate from high school and attend college through a number of supports, including positive peer support, an LIA teacher, and a focus on the future. Other supports included opportunities for service, scholarships, role models, guest speakers, and tutoring services. While the majority of the participants in this study were planning to attend college even before joining Latinos in Action, the program helped solidify their decision. Due to the relatively small number of participants, it could not be determined whether the program helped encourage education majors. However, it has encouraged one of the participants, who is currently studying Culinary Arts, to switch his major to Secondary Math Education and continue as an LIA teacher at his former high school. Furthermore, through the program, students were able to stay involved in school and learn about scholarships and how to

apply for college. They were also able to tutor younger students and help them improve their academic achievement. Unfortunately, it was not determined what percentage of LIA students graduate from high school per year, but Dr. Enriquez did say that 85% of the participants enroll in college after high school. This would indicate that the high school graduation rate is much higher. Finally, while not every interviewee had a positive relationship with his or her teacher at the elementary school, students did appear to build close and lasting relationships with their LIA teachers.

Latinos in Action also appears to help students develop personally and become better citizens in their communities. For example, the service learning aspect of the program helped students understand that there is more to life than academics. Before Latinos in Action, Miriam had her focus on studying. However, the program taught her the importance of culture and service in addition to academics. She later explained, "LIA just kind of influenced me in every single way, like, in the way I think and the way that now I behave...I can't even explain, but, it just did make a change in my life." This is important because it helps students see that they can make vital contributions to their community, which will increase their feelings of self-worth. Another bi-product is that members of the community, including the school community, may gain a greater appreciation of the Latino culture and individuals, and the stereotypes that they may have can be diminished.

One of the differences between the students' responses and those from Dr. Enriquez was the types of support emphasized by each and the language that they used. Students tended to emphasize support from parents, teachers, and peers, whereas Dr. Enriquez, while he did discuss the importance of parent support, said that the peer relationships were the most influential, with teachers also being important. Both the students and Dr. Enriquez also talked about procedural

supports, such as academic support and service learning. There were differences in the language and words used by the students and Dr. Enriquez to describe the various forms of support. We can see this in the way that each talked about how teachers can support students. Miriam, for example, discussed the intimate friendship she built with her LIA teacher when she said, "I would go to her, and, even emotionally, in my personal life, anything, she would always be there for me." Later she indicated that her LIA teacher became more than just a teacher, but more like a friend. On the other hand, Dr. Enriquez referred to the teachers as an "institutional agent" who can have a positive influence on students as they "connect" them to their schools. Furthermore, when the students talked about their LIA teachers they tended to use emotional and relational terms, such as "friend" and "trust." The language used by Dr. Enriquez tended to be more academic, such as using the term "coaching" to describe what teachers can do for students. Likewise, when talking about the peer influence, the students used terms such as "friends" and "second family," but Dr. Enriquez used phrases such as "peer connectivity." As students go through college, they may begin to acquire this academic language, which will help them as they write resumes, research reports, and interview for jobs in the future.

Perhaps one of the most important findings of the study can best be summed up by the words of Oliver: "I honestly didn't know where to apply, who to ask, what to do, what the process was before Latinos in Action and honestly I thought I'm not going to be able to go to colleges." While it is true that all of the participants made the decision that they wanted to go to college before joining the program, it was not until they joined Latinos in Action that they learned about *how* they could get there. Miriam also talked about how Latinos in Action helped provide her the way to go to college:

I didn't know what I was gonna go to college for, how I was gonna get the money to go to college, or anything like that. So, uhm, once I got to LIA...one of my scholarships was just for leadership...I don't think I could've gone to college without it.

Latinos in Action taught the students how to apply to college, how to fund their education, and how to pick a path to follow. Without such support, many of the students felt they would not have been able to go to college. Therefore, students need more than a mere desire to go to college but they also need the resources to be able to get there, which LIA provided.

This researcher believes that there are several underlying principles that explain why Latinos in Action appears to be effective in achieving its goals. There seems to be an enculturation into education, which probably happens for several reasons. First, LIA constantly emphasizes the importance of applying oneself to academics and to not just think about graduating from high school, but to think farther ahead to college. Second, students obtain a peer group of similar students who are striving for the same goals. Third, when students have the chance to tutor other students, including those in elementary school, they start to internalize the importance of education for themselves. When someone acts in a certain way, one's attitude changes to conform to the behavior.

Another underlying principle that may make LIA effective is that of relationships. The relationship with the LIA teacher is crucial, because people are more motivated to change in response to another person's influence when they like that person and they perceive that the other person likes them. Perhaps such a teacher can be just as influential as someone whom they see as similar to themselves. When teachers are not seen as being similar to the students, such as Latino teachers, they can still be influential as long as they truly care about the students. In fact, at least some of the interviewees did not seem to make a great distinction between a caring

Caucasian teacher and a Latino teacher. Relationships with peers can be influential for the same

reasons. As some of the participants said, Latinos in Action became like a second family.

Students may have desired to work hard, graduate from high school, and go on to college

because peers that they cared about, and they knew cared about them, were counting on them,

and they did not want to let them down. No matter what terms or phraseology were used, all of

the students described a social connectivity, which appeared frequently throughout the interviews

and across all areas that were discussed.

A final factor that seemed to be important in the lives of the participants was that of

cultural identity, or "cultural identity enhancement." While some students flatly stated that there

were no cultural issues that they had to face in high school or through the Latinos in Action

program, cultural identity was an underlying theme for all of them. One student who did directly

discuss his cultural identity was Gabriel, who said that being able to represent the Latino culture

makes him feel like he is a part of the college, since his college emphasizes diversity. He is also

very interested in Latino dances, which he feels is a big part of the Latinos in Action program.

Some students were actually trying to escape what they perceived were negative stereotypes of

their culture, such as the expectation that Latinos tend not to be high achievers and that they have

lower skilled jobs, such as janitors. Some students (Felix, Walter, Miriam, and Sophie) wanted

to prove the stereotypes wrong or wanted to change the statistics of how many Latinos go to

college. For these students, Latinos in Action was a place where they could accomplish this.

Furthermore, Miriam discussed at length her desire to get parents of Latino students to be more

involved and supportive and her resulting frustration, the implication being that she wants to

uplift her fellow Latinos with Latinos in Action being the program to accomplish this. Sophie

explicitly talked about how she wanted to have a class in which she could be around fellow

Latinos, and she seemed to be proud of the fact that she could speak two languages and switch

back and forth easily between the two. Cultural identity also was implied in some of the

responses of Oliver when he talked about a Latino teacher he admired. Finally, Dr. Enriquez

discussed the cultural identity that is enhanced within Latinos in Action. As he said, "It's cool to

be academic, Latino, and college bound." He further stated that in the program, the students

learn to want to use their two languages and they are proud of it. The LIA program gives them

an identity of, "Who am I and what role do I take in this community?"

Comparison of Results to Findings in the Literature

Much of what was found in this study fits with what previous researchers have found in

regards to helping Latino high school students succeed. Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007)

talked about the importance of offering courses and activities geared to meet the needs and the

interests of the students. They also talked about the importance of positive peer relationships,

which was found to greatly influence the participants in this study and is regarded as a big part of

the Latino culture. The Latino Coalition of Hillsborough County (2000) found four major

factors that contribute to Latino student success, including personal motivation to succeed,

supportive parents, supportive teachers, and student involvement in extracurricular activities.

The students in the present context mentioned each of these factors as influences to their success.

Fisher and Griggs (1994) found self-confidence to be an important attribute in successful

students, which Latinos in Action specifically helped develop in Sophie. Finally, Yosso (2006)

talked about the importance of having peer support and role models whom the students see as

similar to them, which was confirmed in Felix's interview.

There are also several other connections between what was found in the literature and

what students reported through the interviews. First, Vélez and Saenz (2001) found that

Mexican-American students tend to have the highest dropout rates. Three out of the six participants interviewed in this study were born in Mexico, while a fourth has identified himself as Mexican-American. Furthermore, Dr. Enriquez reported that the program was developed particularly for Latino students in the western region of the United States, many of whom tend to be Mexican-American (J. Enriquez, personal communication, February 28, 2011). Therefore, Latinos in Action may be targeting the students who are at the greatest risk for dropping out of high school.

Further connections can be made. For example, Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) found that early school failure might lead to low feelings of self-efficacy and chances for success. Latinos in Action students go into the elementary schools and tutor students who are struggling academically. This might lead to greater opportunities for success while students are still young. Furthermore, Latinos in Action seeks to diminish failure for its participants. The authors also talked about the importance of positive school climates. Both Dr. Enriquez and Walter encouraged students and leaders to teach kids that the "cool" thing now is to do well in school and to be educated.

Carpenter and Ramirez (2007) found that students who had siblings who dropped out of high school experienced high frequency drop out rates. Felix, specifically, talked about an older sister who dropped out of high school. He reported that witnessing how difficult her life was ended up motivating him more to graduate from high school and go to college. Perhaps being involved in the program helped him overcome this barrier, considering this was a significant difference between his high school experience and hers. Oliver, likewise, witnessed the bad example of his cousins who did not earn their high school diplomas but instead had to earn an alternative diploma, which encouraged him to work harder to graduate.

A number of studies found that while many Latino students desire to go to college, they often cite a lack of financial support as one of the main reasons they feel they cannot go (Haro, Guillermo, & Gonzales, 1994; Sirin et al., 2004; Venerable, 1982). Many of the students interviewed for this study were also unsure about whether or not they would be able to go to college without such support. Latinos in Action provided scholarships for students, announced other scholarships, and taught students about how to apply for financial aid. Miriam, for example, got a scholarship for leadership through the program, without which, she said, "I don't think I could've gone to college."

The literature discussed the importance of having positive role models. Not only do students need to have positive role models that they can emulate, but they also need opportunities to be role models for others (Fisher & Griggs, 1994). However, it is important that students have role models whom they see as similar to themselves (Yosso, 2006). Latinos in Action provides role models for the students through their teachers, guest speakers, and their peers. Furthermore, they are given opportunities to be role models for younger students as they go into the elementary schools to tutor the children. Oliver recognized the impact he was having on the younger students, which helped him to live a better life so that he could provide a positive example. He said,

> It was just kind of interesting...how much influence you have on the kids whether you
> lead them to a good path or a bad path...they see you as an example...your decisions
> impact them too...the kids are always watching. Their minds are like sponges, they
> absorb everything little thing.

Latinos in Action also provided opportunities for students to see examples of people whom they regarded as similar to themselves. Felix, for example, said, "For me it was...seeing an example

of someone that was like me...you just get more motivated to see someone their own age and living the same struggles they do, they have and then going to college."

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) argued that qualitative research has the benefit of being geared towards practitioners. They suggested that individuals, such as teachers, who have direct contact with clients, such as students, could use the results of qualitative research to be more effective in the classroom. The current findings are meant to be useful for those in the field who have direct contact with Latino students and the aim to help these students succeed. Specifically, it can be useful for those working within the Latinos in Action program to understand the significance of the program in the students' lives and learn about ideas for program improvement. It can also be helpful for individuals seeking to develop similar programs nationwide.

Finally, Rodríguez (2008) argued that meaningful student-teacher relationships are needed, as well as stimulating academic engagement. Latinos in Action appears to provide both of these supports for participants. Christle, Jolivette, and Nelson (2007) discussed in further detail what types of characteristics teachers must have in order to foster growth and retention, including the way they dress, supervise, and interact with students. The authors identified teachers as the most frequently encountered role models outside of the family, indicating that students observe their teachers and are greatly influenced by them. All of the students, in one way or another, discussed the influences their teachers, particularly their LIA teachers, had on them.

Implications of the Findings

There are a number of implications of the research findings. First, Dr. Enriquez suggested that he would like to increase parental involvement by catching students at a younger age. While Dr. Enriquez recognized a lack of parental involvement as having a negative impact

on students' decisions to graduate from high school and attend college, it was clearly noted as one of the most significant positive influences by the students that did go. Programs designed to support academic achievement amongst Latino students, and all students, should strive to include parents and encourage them to find ways to support their children at home.

There are also a number of other implications. This study confirmed, unfortunately, for a number of the schools in Utah, that there is a lack of Latino teachers who can serve as role models for students. While students recognized their LIA teachers as being big influences on them, most of their LIA teachers were actually Caucasian. Fortunately, many of the students talked about how close they were to their Caucasian LIA teachers, which indicates that as long as teachers build positive relationships with their students, they can still be helpful. Yet, as Yosso (2006) indicated, it is also important for students to have role models whom they see as similar to themselves. Therefore, it might be beneficial for Latinos in Action to encourage its participants to consider entering the field of education. It might also be helpful to actively recruit Latino students for teaching programs.

All of the students interviewed for the study indicated that they were planning to go to college prior to their involvement with the Latinos in Action program. However, it is impossible to determine whether they actually would have gone had they not participated in the program. Furthermore, because they were all planning to go college, they were considered low-risk students, meaning they were not at a high risk for dropping out of high school. Gabriel, for example, reported that he still would have graduated from high school had he not participated in Latinos in Action. However, Miriam talked about how there are too many students per teacher in the program and, as a result, only the students who are at the top of the class are being selected to participate. If a goal of Latinos in Action is to help students graduate from high school and go to

college, perhaps a method should be developed that would allow capable students, with lower GPAs, to join the program. This would put a focus on students who perhaps would not otherwise graduate from high school and go to college, but are capable of doing so and just need the additional support to get there, while the top students may be going anyway. Perhaps the coordinators should consider expanding the program so that the top students can join as well as students who want to join but do not have qualifying GPAs. This would allow the higher achieving students to act as role models and help the higher risk students. It was noted in the interviews that Latinos in Action provides tutors for students that need help. Perhaps high achieving LIA peers could tutor other LIA students.

Finally, many programs designed to help students graduate from high school and go to college focus on systematic supports, such as offering college preparation courses, academic tutors, and guidelines for applying for financial aid. While the participants of this research talked about the importance of such supports, the most influential forms of support mentioned were relational supports. All of the participants, in one way or another, mentioned the importance of the relationships they built with their peers, parents, and teachers. Therefore, when designing programs to help students succeed academically, it is important to include opportunities for relationship building. Such relationships can come from teachers and peers, but the relationships should be genuine and meaningful. It was also important for the students in this research to have examples of peers who they saw as similar to themselves. This includes peers of similar ages, and from similar backgrounds and cultures.

Personal Reflections

I have learned much personally from conducting this research. Perhaps one of the most important things I have learned from the research is the importance of having positive support

groups. The greatest support should come from the home. It was evident across all of the cases that all of the students had support from their parents. In fact, the majority of participants named their parents as having the greatest influence on their decisions to graduate from high school and attend college. Another necessary support group comes from positive peer relationships. All of the participants had friends that helped and supported them in high school. Being able to make friends with those that have similar goals and values is a key to student success.

Apart from parents, families, and peers, it is important for participants to have a teacher whom they can trust and look up to as a role model. Having such a teacher will allow students to build a relationship with someone who has gone to college and can help them academically and through the application process, a type of support that many parents are unable to provide for their children. Students may be unable to succeed and reach desired goals without such support. Within the schools, students need somebody who can encourage them and tell them that they can be successful. Other examples, besides teachers, can include counselors, administrators, aides, psychologists, or even parent volunteers.

Perhaps it may go without needing to be said, but students also need to stay involved in school. By joining a program, such as Latinos in Action, students can feel as if they are a part of their school, which researchers cite as an important aspect of student success. It is also important for students to feel confident in themselves, which can be increased by being role models for younger students.

I hope that the findings of this research will assist in the development of programs designed to assist high school Latino students. I also hope that readers will take what they have learned from the research and go forth to help others by implementing these factors in the schools and elsewhere.

Limitations

As with all research, this study contained a number of limitations. First of all, all of the participants included in the study were already planning to attend college before enrolling in Latinos in Action. This indicates that the program was not the sole, or the first, reason for their making that decision. Had the research been conducted with participants who were not originally firm in their decision to go to college, it would have been clearer to what extent the program influenced them.

Another limitation of the study was that all of the participants were recent high school graduates. This may have been because they were still excited about having participated in the program and were desirous to talk about their experiences, which were still fresh in their memories. It was the researcher's hope to gather narratives from students at various levels in their college education to account for possible skewed or biased memories. However, it may have also been advantageous for subjects to be recent graduates because the experience was fresh in their memories. Had the gap been bigger, they may have forgotten somewhat how much of an influence the program really had on their decisions to graduate from high school and attend college.

Social desirability may have also impacted this research. Each of the participants knew that the researcher was somehow affiliated with Latinos in Action. In addition, Dr. Enriquez assisted with the recruitment process by distributing a letter and making formal announcements to encourage research participation. Therefore, participants may have felt pressured to speak highly of the program and mention it as a significant influence on them. This may have also resulted in a biased account of the program and the students' decisions to graduate from high school and attend college. Furthermore, the researcher's own biases may have influenced the

direction of this research, such as the fact that he believed Latinos in Action was a major influence in their experiences, that families are important to student success, and that peers play a significant role in the direction that students take in their lives. However, Dr. Enriquez, who has also studied these issues, agreed with the findings, as was evident in the interview with him.

Another limitation of the study was that the interviewer was unable to reach student participants after the results were analyzed to verify whether the results were interpreted accurately and the findings ring true for them. Because of this limitation, additional data was collected, which verified much of what the participants said and added a measure of validity to the interpretation of the interviews. However, one of the participants responded after the interview transcript was sent to her to confirm that the transcript overall appeared accurate.

A final limitation of the research was that it was conducted with a small sample size. This makes it impossible to generalize the findings to a larger population. However, generalizability was not the main focus of this research. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explain, "When participants are known intimately as people, not merely as categorical representatives, categories fragment" (p. 141). Furthermore, as Merriam (2002) argued, this type of research can exhibit reader or user generalizability. This means that readers can determine the extent to which the findings can be applied to their specific setting. Fortunately, participants graduated from various high schools and, therefore, participated in different programs with different LIA teachers and at different years, which allowed for a more comprehensive view of the program. Furthermore, they were born in various locations and the study included members from each sex who are currently attending two different universities.

While the sample size of this research was relatively small, there were a number of benefits to including a small sample size. For example, this method of research provided

personal detail of the experiences and effectiveness of the program in the lives of the students, which can be just as valuable as information obtained from a large sample size using statistical analyses. This type of data would have been unattainable with quantitative methods.

Suggestions for Future Research

In terms of future directions the research could take, one idea would be to follow up with participants a few years into college to learn about their experiences from now until then. By doing so, one could learn about ways to encourage and help students stay in and graduate from college. One could then determine if the same influences that were cited for high school students are also cited for college students. It would also be a good idea to include students in various levels of college education and students who had not considered attending college prior to participation in Latinos in Action, to get different perspectives of the program in regards to these factors. Another possible direction the research could take would be to conduct interviews with students who did not graduate from high school or attend college, to find out why. These interviews could then be compared against the interviews of those that did, and one would then be able to more certainly pinpoint the differences across the cases and know more fully where to place program emphases. Interviews could also be conducted with students without as supportive parents, such as students from single-parent homes or very low socio-economic situations, or who otherwise were highly at risk for failure, and discover whether the program could help these students overcome such obstacles.

In addition to the above suggestions for future research, a number of new questions have been generated as a result of the research. These include the following six questions: (a) Due to the large number of students applying to the program, recruiters have to limit the number of students they accept. As a result, only the students with the highest GPAs are being accepted

into the program. What effect would Latinos in Action have if they accepted a certain number of

bright and capable students with lower GPAs? (b) All of the students interviewed for this study

reported that they were already thinking about attending college before joining LIA. What effect

would Latinos in Action have on students who were not initially planning to attend college? (c)

How important is it to have Latino teachers, as opposed to non-Latino teachers who love the

culture and care about the students? (d) Would the participants respond in the same way had

they been provided the interview questions ahead of time and been given an opportunity to

consider their responses before the interviews as opposed to having to answer the questions

spontaneously? (e) It was reported that 85% of LIA students enroll in college. What is the

college graduation rate for former LIA students? (f) How can programs, such as Latinos in

Action, help students that come from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as those that have

minimal parental support or that come from low socio-economic backgrounds?

Conclusion

In conclusion, the purpose of this research was to explore students' experiences in the

Latinos in Action (LIA) program, with the goal of determining the way in which the program

impacted their goals to graduate from high school and attend college. Results from the study

indicated that the program influenced all of the participants' goals to graduate from high school

and attend college. Other influences on student success included parent support, positive peer

support, a supportive high school teacher, school involvement, and being a role model for

younger students. To better prepare students, participants suggested focusing more on college

applications and financial aid, as well as working with parents to facilitate a positive learning

environment in the home.

This study also found that having a desire to attend college is not necessarily enough to get there. Students also need to know how to get there, and find the resources necessary to do so. Latinos in Action provided this information and form of support for students. Without such support, many of the students felt they would not have been able to go to college.

There are a number of benefits to this research. One benefit is that readers can look across the data and see which pieces of the program consistently appeared to help students. Additionally, elements of the program can potentially be implemented into similar programs designed to help Latino students nationally. Furthermore, this method of research allows readers to understand what it was like to participate in the program, and what some participants really thought about the program. It also helps readers understand what other factors contributed to the participants' drive to graduate from high school and attend college, which can be used to help parents, teachers, and others in schools nationwide.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval Letter

Institutional Review Board
for Human Subjects

Brigham Young University
A-285 ASB Provo, Utah 84602
(801) 422-3841 / Fax: (801) 422-0620

January 27, 2012

Betty Ashbaker
120 MCKB
Campus Mail

Re: Exploring the Possibilities for High School Latino Students: A Narrative Inquiry of Latinos in Action

Dear   Johann Simonds

This is to inform you that Brigham Young University's IRB has approved the above research study.

The approval period is from 1-27-2012 to 1-26-2013. Your study number is X120031. Please be sure to reference this number in any correspondence with the IRB.

Continued approval is conditional upon your compliance with the following requirements.

1. A copy of the 'Informed Consent Document' approved as of 1-27-2012 is enclosed. No other consent form should be used. It must be signed by each subject prior to initiation of any protocol procedures. In addition, each subject must be given a copy of the signed consent form.

2. All protocol amendments and changes to approved research must be submitted to the IRB and not be implemented until approved by the IRB.

3. The enclosed recruitment advertisement has been approved. Advertisements, letters, Internet postings and any other media for subject recruitment must be submitted to IRB and approved prior to use.

4. A few months before this date we will send out a continuing review form. There will only be two reminders. Please fill this form out in a timely manner to ensure that there is not a lapse in your approval.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Sincerely,

Lane Fischer, PhD, Chair
Sandee M.P. Munoz, Administrator
Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects

Appendix B
Letter to Participants

<div align="right">

Jose Enriquez
665 W. Center Street
Orem, Utah 84057
(801) 404-0521
jenriquez@alpinedistrict.org
Mountain View High School
Assistant Principal
LIA Coordinator

</div>

To: Current and Past Participants of Latinos in Action

I have been informed of an opportunity for LIA students to participate in a research study being conducted by Johann Simonds, graduate student of School Psychology, and Betty Y. Ashbaker, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, at Brigham Young University, and approved by the IRB committee at BYU. The study will consist of a phone interview discussing your experience with Latinos in Action.
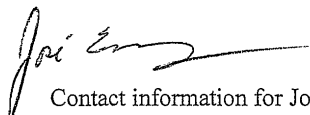
This research will greatly help us improve the LIA program and other programs designed to assist high school students. Although the research is not endorsed by LIA, LIA is serving as a conduit for the study.

I strongly encourage you to take the opportunity to help out with this research to better understand the purposes, goals, and effectiveness of the LIA program.

If you would like to participate, please contact Johann Simonds, information listed below, by February 29th, 2012, to let him know of your interest and to set up an interview.

Thank you,

Jose

Contact information for Johann Simonds:
Phone: 801-851-0973
Email: jpsimonds@gmail.com

Appendix C
Consent Form

Consent to be a Research Subject

Introduction

This research study is being conducted by Johann Simonds, graduate student of School Psychology, and Betty Y. Ashbaker, Ph.D., associate professor in the department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, at Brigham Young University to explore students' experiences in the Latinos in Action program, with the goal of determining the impact the program had on their goals to graduate from high school and attend college. You were invited to participate because you participated in Latinos in Action as a high school student and have made it to college. The researcher would like to hear about your experiences and learn more about the program.

Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

- You will be interviewed for approximately ninety (90) minutes about your experiences in the Latinos in Action program
- The interview will be audio recorded to ensure accuracy in reporting your statements
- The interview will take place over the phone or through video chat at a time convenient for you
- The researcher may contact you later to clarify your interview answers
- You will have the opportunity to read the summary of your responses for accuracy and clarification
- Total time commitment will be approximately three hours

Risks/Discomforts

There are minimal risks for participation in this study. You may, however, feel some discomfort when answering questions about personal experiences or when being audio recorded. In addition, you will be asked to give up of your time during the course of the interviews and study review. If you feel embarrassed about answering a particular question, you may choose to decline or excuse yourself from the study. Your name will not be released to the public; confidentiality and anonymity will be given high priority.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefits to you. It is hoped, however, that through your participation researchers may learn about what it is like to participate in the program. This research will also allow the researchers to hear and read personal accounts of the program, and to find influences to help others graduate from high school and go to college. These elements can then be used as guides for program improvement and the development of similar programs designed to help students succeed.

Confidentiality

Your name will not be released in any way. You will have the opportunity to select a pseudonym for yourself so as to keep confidentiality and anonymity. Additionally, the raw data used in the study will be collected, stored, and maintained by the primary investigator. Portions of the raw data may be shared with the co-investigator and chair of the research, Dr. Betty Ashbaker. Additional individuals who may have access to portions of the raw data include the two final members of the thesis committee, Dr. Timothy B. Smith and Dr. Ramona M. Cutri, at Brigham Young University. The data will be stored on the personal password protected computer of the primary investigator until it can be assured that the data will no longer be needed for analysis or interpretation, or until the committee decides that the files can be deleted. Likewise, audiotapes

Brigham Young University IRB
APPROVED
JAN 2 7 2012   JAN 2 6 2013

collected from interviews will be kept in the primary investigator's possession until the committee decides that the tapes are no longer needed, at which point the tapes will be destroyed and thrown away.

Participation

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time or refuse to participate entirely without jeopardy to your class status or standing with your university.

Questions about the Research

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Johann Simonds at (801) 851-0793, jpsimonds@gmail.com, or Dr. Betty Y. Ashbaker at (801) 422-8361, betty_ashbaker@byu.edu, for further information.

Questions about Your Rights as Research Participants

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant contact IRB Administrator at (801) 422-1461; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; irb@byu.edu.

Statement of Consent

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Name (Printed): _____ Signature_____ Date: _____

Appendix D
Phone Interview Script

Phone Interview with LIA Research Participant Script

Introduction of self:

Hello. Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. I am Johann Simonds, a graduate student of School Psychology at Brigham Young University. I am working under Betty Y. Ashbaker, Ph.D., who is an associate professor in the department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education at Brigham Young University, and is the chair for this research. I am a neutral third party of Latinos in Action, and I just want to know what helps and what does not help.

Before we proceed, you must agree to participate in the research study. I will read to you the consent form, after which you will be given the opportunity to provide your consent or decline to participate in the study. You will also be provided a copy of the consent form.

(Read Consent Form)

Do you give your consent to participate in this study? Thank you.

The phone interview will consist of some basic background questions, followed by questions to be answered in a narrative form. You may decline to answer any of the questions you choose to.

Introductory questions:

(Pre-Interview Questionnaire)

Name: _____   Date: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Preferred Method of Communication: _____

Gender: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Primary Language: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Year Graduated from High School: _____

Phone Interview with LIA Research Participant Script

Introduction of self:

Hello. Thank you for your interest in participating in this research study. I am Johann Simonds, a graduate student of School Psychology at Brigham Young University. I am working under Betty Y. Ashbaker, Ph.D., who is an associate professor in the department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education at Brigham Young University, and is the chair for this research. I am a neutral third party of Latinos in Action, and I just want to know what helps and what does not help.

Before we proceed, you must agree to participate in the research study. I will read to you the consent form, after which you will be given the opportunity to provide your consent or decline to participate in the study. You will also be provided a copy of the consent form.

(Read Consent Form)

Do you give your consent to participate in this study? Thank you.

The phone interview will consist of some basic background questions, followed by questions to be answered in a narrative form. You may decline to answer any of the questions you choose to.

Introductory questions:

(Pre-Interview Questionnaire)

Name: _____   Date: _____

Email Address: _____

Phone Number: _____

Preferred Method of Communication: _____

Gender: _____

Race/Ethnicity: _____

Primary Language: _____

Place of Birth: _____

Year Graduated from High School: _____

College: _____

College Class: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior, Graduate Student, Post-Graduate Student, Other _____

Major/Course of Study: _____

Length of Participation in the Latinos in Action (LIA) program: _____

What would you like your pseudonym to be for the study? _____

We will now begin with the narrative questions.

Your answers to the following questions should be personal narratives made up of your experience from Latinos in Action and any anecdotes from that time period.

"We know that there are a lot of Latino students who drop out of high school, and you have made it to college. We want to know what factors to consider so we can help even more students go to college. Your participation is completely voluntary and your answers will be kept confidential. Would you be willing to let me audiotape this interview? Do you have any questions before we begin?"

Are you ready to proceed with the interview questions?

> 1. When did you first start thinking about attending college?
>   a. How did you make that decision?
>   b. What influenced you to make the decision?
> 2. Who was it that most supported you in getting into college?
>   a. What was that person's role?
> 3. Tell me about your experience in the Latinos in Action program.
> 4. How do you feel about the Latinos in Action program?
> 5. What did you learn from your participation in Latinos in Action?
>   a. How would you say it has influenced/shaped you?
> 6. Did participation in Latinos in Action influence your decision to go to college? Explain.
> 7. Which components of the program were the most helpful for you?
>   a. Peer relationships, role models, service learning.
> 8. Are there any suggestions you would like to offer for program improvement?
> 9. What do you think would have happened if you had not participated in the LIA program?
> 10. What prevented you from dropping out of high school?
> 11. Thinking back to some of your LIA friends, why do you think that some of them did not graduate from high school or go to college?
>   a. What about your non-LIA friends?
> 12. What can be done to help others with their academic/career decisions?
> 13. Did you have a Latino teacher who particularly influenced you?
> 14. What kind of support did you have from your parents during high school?

a. E.g., academically, emotionally, financially?

15. I noticed that you identified yourself as _____. How do you think this may have influenced your experience?

16. Were there any cultural issues that you had to face in high school, or through the LIA program?

17. Is there anything else I haven't thought to ask you about that you think needs to be included in this study?

Thank you for your participation in our study. We will contact you when we have written the narrative of your report to provide you the opportunity to make any corrections and read what will be presented in the final research. Thank you, again.

Appendix E
Suggestions for Program Improvement

1. Find more ways to involve parents, such as catching students when they are younger.

2. Do more to publicize the program and get the word out. LIA graduates could go to the high schools and talk about the benefits of the program and college preparation.

3. Dedicate more time to explaining what happens once students are in college, such as how to pay tuition and sign up for classes.

4. Include more standardized test preparation. LIA coordinators could link with other programs already designed to help students prepare for such tests.

5. Encourage students to enter the field of education to provide positive role models for younger students within the schools.

6. Either increase the number of LIA teachers, or restrict the number of students being accepted into the program.

7. Find ways to include students with lower GPAs who might need the additional support more than those with a B average.

8. Include students from various Latino cultures and backgrounds to cultivate a greater perspective and appreciation for other values and ideas.

9. Continue to include activities within the program, such as dancing.

10. Continue to gather and analyze data to show program effectiveness and ideas for improvement.