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The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program: A Qualitative Study of Persistence of Hispanic Students at Bellevue University

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The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program: A Qualitative Study of Persistence

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By

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The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program: A Qualitative Study of Persistence
of Hispanic Students at Bellevue University

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The purpose of this case study was to determine the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on the persistence of the Hispanic students who participated. Previous research on Hispanic student persistence has focused on the reasons why students do not persist and more recent research has been conducted on programs and retention efforts, colleges and universities are implementing on their campuses. This study researched a specific program, The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, designed to provide financial, academic and other needed resources to help Hispanic students persist to graduation. The researcher believes this study was important because it provided an overview of how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program is affecting students both on campus and in their community.

Eight interviews were conducted, with eligible students, in person. Students eligible for the study were current students or recent graduates of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program and had attained at least junior or senior status as of the fall of 2009, as defined by Bellevue University. Research questions were based on the four components of the program and the affect the program had on the student's life, outside of Bellevue University. The four components of the program were: financial aid, academic advising, the scholarship aid, and the Professional Enrichment Program.

The results of the study were broken into five components with an additional section that provided other themes that were derived from the interviews. The five components were: (a) financial aid counseling, (b) academic advising, (c) scholarship aid, (d) Professional Enrichment Program, and (e) the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program beyond Bellevue University. Other themes that were derived from the interviews were: class format, deciding on a college, higher education class, campus resources, and a sense of community on-campus.

The research found that the scholarship, provided by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, was the primary motivating factor for students to attend Bellevue University and persist in college. The interviewed students also commented on how the scholarship had given them the opportunity to attend college, even though that opportunity had seemed out of reach.

The interviewed students also commented on their academic advising experience, campus resources, and feeling a sense of community on-campus as other campus related areas that were affected by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. Finally, students provided examples of how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program impacted their connection to their South Omaha community through volunteer and employment opportunities.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The 2010 Census will likely show the Hispanic population surpassing the

African-American cohort and becoming the largest minority population in the United

States (U.S. Census). However, Hispanic's are not participating in higher education at

the same rate as their increased population status (American Council on Education, 2007,

p. 2). The Hispanic student has a variety of issues that may prevent them from persisting

in college. Hispanic students are more likely to come from lower economic means than

their Caucasian peers (Zurita, 2004, p. 302). They are more likely to be first-generation

students (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 40) and less likely than their African-American or

Caucasian peers to be academically prepared for college (Brown, Santiago and Lopez,

2003, p. 41).

Bellevue University, a private, Midwestern university, is using the South Omaha

Community Scholarship Program, a scholarship and support program, to counteract some

of those issues and help Hispanic students persist to graduation.

Located just to the north of the main Bellevue University campus, the South

Omaha community has long been a diverse community that has attracted a variety of

immigrant populations. Today the South Omaha community is home to a large Hispanic,

Spanish-speaking population.

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program began in 2001 as a way to

help students, in the largely Hispanic area of South Omaha, reach their educational goals,

and persist to graduation. The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program provides

financial assistance through donor-based scholarships and student financial aid. The

South Omaha Community Scholarship Program also provides additional resources such as bi-lingual financial aid counseling, academic advising, and a Professional Enrichment Program.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on the persistence of the Hispanic students who participated. Students accepted into the scholarship program received additional services, including: bi-lingual financial aid advising, bi-lingual advising support, a scholarship and required participation in an enrichment program.   Interviews were conducted with eight students, who had either graduated from Bellevue University or had junior or senior status as of the fall of 2009.

Definition of Terms

A list of terms, used in this study, is defined below. The definitions are based of the most recent research found.

Educational Attainment: Pascarella and Terenzini defined educational attainment as "the number of years of schooling completed or degrees earned" (2005, p. 373).

First-Generation Student: Zalaquett defined a first-generation student as the first student in their family to attend college (2006, p. 40). Engle and Tinto defined first-generation students as those whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree (2008, p. 2).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI's): Santiago (2008) defined HSI's as "public or private nonprofit degree-granting colleges with enrollments of 25% or more Hispanic undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment" (p. 3).

Hispanic and Latino: According to Brown, Santiago and Lopez (2003), the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" can be used interchangeably (p. 41). Brown et al. (2003) stated that both terms "refer to a group of Americans who share a language and common cultural origins but who come from diverse nations and backgrounds with distinctive histories, and socio-economic and political experiences" (p. 41).

Low-income status: Engle and Tinto defined low-income status as "having a family income below $25,000" (2008, p. 2).

Persistence/Persister: According to Hagedorn, "a student who enrolls in college and remains enrolled until degree completion is a persister" (2004, p. 2).

Retention: Hagedorn defined retention as "retention is staying in school until completion of a degree" (2004, p. 4).

Bellevue University, The South Omaha Community and The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program

Bellevue University. Bellevue University is a private, Midwestern university located in Bellevue, Nebraska. Bellevue University provides learning in a variety of formats, including in-class locations throughout Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, Missouri and Kansas, and online. Programs are offered in both a traditional and accelerated formats (Bellevue University, 2009, p. 20).

Bellevue University reported to IPEDS an enrollment of 8,278 students in 2008 (2009, p. 24). Of the 8,278 students enrolled in Bellevue University in 2008, 526 of them identified themselves as Hispanic, while 5,606 identified themselves as Caucasian (non-Hispanic) (p. 42).

South Omaha Community. The Omaha Chamber of Commerce indicated that the South Omaha community was "initially incorporated as a city in 1886 and was primarily dependent on the cattle industry" (2010). The Omaha Chamber of Commerce also noted that South Omaha was annexed by the city of Omaha 29 years later.

According to the Bellevue University's Institutional Profile, the South Omaha community has historically been a "destination for new immigrants, most recently from Spanish-speaking countries" (2009, p. 47). The Omaha Chamber of Commerce (2010) pointed out that the South Omaha community diversity has attracted several ethnic groups over its long history, including: Irish, Polish, Czech, Lithuanian, Italian, Latino, and Sudanese. The institutional profile noted that the South Omaha community is "home to a rich mix of Latino and other working families" (p. 47). The South Omaha community is located just north of the Bellevue University main campus.

South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. Bellevue University started the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program in 2001 to better serve students from the South Omaha community. According to the Bellevue University Institutional Profile, the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program was started to "recruit more students from the South Omaha community and enable them to earn college degrees and improve their lives while helping educate the work force and strengthen the local economy" (2009, p. 47).

The Bellevue University Admissions department and The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program Project Specialist recruited students from the South Omaha community for the program. Students were contacted through South Omaha community high schools and from recruiting events in the area. Students also were

referred to The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program by local leaders and by word-of-mouth.

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program provided financial assistance to students from the South Omaha community through donor-based scholarships and other need-based financial means (Bellevue University, 2009, p. 47). The 2009 scholarship total was approximately $350,000. Students had to live within a certain zip code and apply to the program, in order to be considered. Eligible students must have met Bellevue University admissions requirements and provided two references. The South Omaha Community Scholarship was awarded to students on an annual basis and the scholarship amount a student received is based on his/her GPA.

In addition to financial support, students had access to all Bellevue University support services, including tutoring and advising. Students also received bi-lingual financial aid counseling.

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program also required students to participate in the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) and enroll in a freshman level course that focused on success in higher education. Participation in PEP and the freshmen course were both implemented later in the program's history to help increase the persistence of the scholarship students.

PEP is a three-year program that focused on the following areas: career assessment, choosing a major to support career goals, using the Library, study skills, time management and learning styles. Attendance in PEP was required in order to maintain the student's scholarship.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 provided the purpose of the study, as well as a list of defined terms, that will be used throughout this study. Chapter 1 also included an overview of Bellevue University, The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program and the South Omaha Community.

Chapter 2 is focused on the latest research conducted in student retention and the persistence of Hispanic students in higher education. Chapter 2 will also provided information on what institutions can do to help retain Hispanic students, as well as information on the state and federal legislation that relates to Hispanic students in college.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on the persistence of the Hispanic students who participated. This chapter provides a review of the current literature in student persistence, with an emphasis on the Hispanic student population.

Student Retention in Higher Education

Retention Statistics. Student retention is a topic that impacts higher education, regardless of the student or type of institution the student attends. According to a report produced by the National Center for Education Statistics (2010), "fifty-seven percent of first-time students seeking a bachelor's degree and attending a 4-year institution full time in 2001-02 completed a bachelor's degree at that institution within 6 years" (p. 16).

While the students defined as solely first-time students have a 57% graduation rate, over 6 years, those defined as both low-income and first-generation have a much lower graduation rate than 57%. Engle and Tinto (2008) noted that students in the low-income, first-generation grouping have an 11% graduation rate after 6 years (p. 2).

Graduation rates based on a student's race also varied. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), the graduation rates for students attending 4-year, Title IV institutions in 2007 were shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Graduation Rates for Students Attending a 4-Year, Title IV Institution in 2007

	Total	Caucasian, Non-Hispanic	Black, Non-Hispanic	Hispanic	Asian/ Pacific Islander	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Race/ Ethnicity Unknown	Nonresident Alien
Overall	57.3%	60.3%	41.5%	48.3%	66.5%	39.5%	50.1%	59.3%
Public	53.5%	56.2%	38.4%	43.1%	63.4%	34.9%	53.0%	53.1%
Private, Not-for-Profit	63.7%	66.6%	45.0%	57.0%	74.4%	46.4%	59.4%	67.0%
Private, For-Profit	43.7%	52.2%	40.3%	46.0%	48.5%	49.3%	25.7%	36.3%

Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2007)

Theories. A significant amount of research has been conducted on why students leave college before graduation. One of the early researchers on this topic, Alexander Astin provided groundbreaking research on student retention when he developed the input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model in the 1970's (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) called the I-E-O model "a conceptual and methodological guide to the study of college effects" (p. 53).

I-E-O stands for inputs, environment and outcomes. Inputs referred to the demographic characteristics, family backgrounds and academic and social experiences that a student brings to college. Environment encompassed culture, experiences, people, programs and policies a student experiences while in college. Finally, outcomes were what the student left with after college, including his or her values, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors (Astin, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Astin (1970) was

also responsible for providing his theory of involvement, which focused on student development through participation.

According to Metz (2004), "although Astin's groundbreaking research of access and persistence provided a framework for future researchers, Tinto is most often cited and associated with student persistence research" (p. 191). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) noted that "Tinto has given a more explicit, longitudinal, and interactional model of institutional impact that is similar to Astin's in its underlying dynamics but specifically seeks to explain the college student withdrawal process" (p. 54). Tinto's theory focused on the academic and social components of the university and how the student integrates him or herself into those components (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1975). Tinto theorized that when a student goes to college, he or she comes with "a variety of patterns of personal, family and academic characteristics and skills" and that these skills include "initial dispositions and intentions with respect to college attendance and personal goals" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). The student's intentions, characteristics and skills are then "modified and reformulated on a continuing basis through a longitudinal series of interactions between the individual and the structures and members of the academic and social systems of the institution" (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, p. 54). The student's interactions with the academic and social systems effect the student's integration into the systems, either positively or negatively. The more positive the experiences, the more likely a student will be integrated into the systems. Negative experiences are likely to lead to less or no integration into the system, making persistence more difficult or unlikely (p. 54).

Metz (2004) indicated that Tinto developed his theory to help "understand the longitudinal process of student persistence, and the underlying premise to his research included investigating why behaviors occurred and the effects of these behaviors on student persistence" (p. 193). Tinto is credited with providing research that "continues to be prevalent in much of the literature on student departure" (Metz, 2004, p. 193).

Chickering and Gamson also provided what Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt (2005) called the "best-known set of engagement indicators" in the "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" (p. 8). The seven principles included "student-faculty contact, cooperation among students, active learning, prompt feedback, time on task, high expectations, and respect for diverse talents and ways of learning" (p. 8).

Kuh et al. (2005) noted that "institutional environments that are perceived by students as inclusive and affirming and where expectations for performance are clearly communicated and se at reasonably high levels" are also important to student engagement (p. 8).

Kuh et al. (2005) has studied 20 institutions of higher education that they determined are strong-performing, based on the schools' graduation rate and National Survey for Student Engagement (NSSE) scores. The 20 institutions share 6 qualities that foster student engagement: "a living mission and lived educational philosophy; an unshakeable focus on student learning; environments adapted for education enrichment; clearly marked pathways to student success; an improvement oriented ethos; and shared responsibility for education quality and student success" (p. 24).

Student Engagement. Tinto (1990) acknowledged, in his student departure theory, the role student engagement plays in retention when he stated, "students are more

likely to stay in schools that involve them as valued members of the institution" (p. 5).

Tinto went on to say, "the frequency and quality of contact with faculty, staff and other students have repeatedly been shown to be independent predictors of student persistence" (p. 5).

Astin (1985) also acknowledged the impact of student involvement on persistence when he proposed his theory of involvement. Astin noted that the theory "can be stated simply: Students learn by becoming involved" (p. 133).

Kuh et al. (2005) pointed out that student engagement in higher education has "two key components that contribute to student success" (p. 9). The first component is the "amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other activities that lead to the experiences and outcomes that constitute student success" (p. 9). The second component of student engagement is "the ways the institution allocates resources and organizes learning opportunities and services to induce students to participate in and benefit from such activities" (p. 9).

The Hispanic Cohort

Hispanic/Latino. According to Brown et al. (2003), the terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" can be used interchangeably (p. 41). Brown et al. (2003) stated that both terms "refer to a group of Americans who share a language and common cultural origins but who come from diverse nations and backgrounds with distinctive histories, and socio-economic and political experiences" (p. 41). In the United States, the largest Hispanic groups are Mexican-Americans, Puerto Ricans and Cuban-Americans (p. 41). The Hispanic population is a diverse one. Longerbeam indicated that the Hispanic population can have "differences in ethnicity, socioeconomic status, language, and national origin"

(2004, p. 539). She noted that Hispanics often find ethnicity is the primary aspect of their identity, while race is secondary (p. 539).

Hispanic Representation in the United States and in Education. The 2000 U.S Census data indicated that Hispanic's made up 12.6% of the national population, while the African-American cohort made up 12.7%. The projections for 2050 forecast that while the percentage of the population that African-American's comprise will rise almost 2 percentage points, those who identify themselves as Hispanic will nearly double to 24.4% (U.S. Census). The 2010 Census is expected to show Hispanic's clearly surpassing African-American's as the largest minority group in the country (U.S. Census).

The shift in demographics to the Hispanic base will be reflected in the high school graduate population. According to an October, 2009 policy paper available on the American Council on Education (p. 4) website, "higher education leaders are on the cusp of a seismic shift reflected in the demographics of the students they will be called upon to educate". The paper reported that "minority students will account for practically all of the growth among high school graduates over the next decade, with Hispanic graduates alone almost completely offsetting the decrease in white, non-Hispanic graduates" (2009, p. 4).

The impact of an increased minority population is already being seen in higher education. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the percentage of Caucasians enrolled in higher education dropped from 77.5% in 1990 to 68% in 2000. In contrast, the minority representation in higher education rose in the same time period. In 1990, 9% of those attending postsecondary institutions identified themselves as African-

American, 5.6% as Hispanic, 4% as Asian and .7% as American Indian. The 2000 U.S. Department of Education numbers showed that the number of African-Americans attending postsecondary institutions increased to 13%, Hispanics to 12%, Asians to 6% and American Indians to 1%. The overall minority enrollment increased to 32% in 2000 from 19.5% in 1990 (Seidman, 2005, p. 7).

The increase in Hispanic representation in the overall U.S. population, isn't necessarily translating into an increased higher education participation rate for Hispanic students. The American Council on Education (ACE) released a 2007 report on minority representation in higher education. The report showed that Hispanic students were not participating in higher education at a rate that is consistent with their increased population status. In fact, the participation rate for Hispanic college students "showed little improvement between 1993-95 and 2003-05" (2007, p.3). ACE attributed the little change in the rate due to the "result of the growth in the number of Hispanics aged 18 to 24 who were enrolled in higher education not increasing as fast as the growth of the general Hispanic population" (p. 3).

Hispanic students are also not as likely to graduate from college as the Caucasian students. Ten percent of the Hispanic Americans between the ages of 24 and 64 hold a 4-year college degree (Oseguera, Locks & Vega, 2009, p. 23). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), the Hispanic graduation rate for full-time, first-year students in 2007 was 48.3% for 4-year institutions and 29.8% for 2-year institutions (p. 11). The Caucasian, non-Hispanic rate for the same time period was 60.3% for 4-year institutions and 32.1% for 2-year institutions (p. 11).

Persistence/Retention Issues

  First-Generation Students. There are varying definitions of what constitutes a first-generation student in higher education. Zalaquett defines a first-generation student as the first student in their family to attend college (2006, p. 40). Engle and Tinto define first-generation students as those whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree (2008, p. 2).

  Zalaquett noted that Hispanic students tend to be the first in their families to attend college (2006, p. 40). Multiple issues can arise with being a first-generation student. One issue is having a lack of general knowledge of how higher education works. Zalaquett (2006) indicated that "parents often want to support the educational aspirations of their children, but providing academic help is a very challenging task for them" (p. 40). Zalaquett went on to point out that "students who are first-generation, low-socioeconomic-level students frequently make all of the decisions about their educational future themselves, with little adult guidance" (p. 40). Not having that knowledge base from their parents can lead to misinformation or a lack of information about financial aid options, what classes a student should take, or how to even apply for college (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 39).

  First-Generation and Low-Income Students. Engle and Tinto conducted research on students who are identified as being both first-generation and low-income college students. Based on data from the National Center for Education Statistics' Beginning Postsecondary Study, Engle and Tinto determined that "low-income, first-generation students were nearly four times more likely to leave higher education after the first year than student who had neither risk factor" (2008, p. 2). Engle and Tinto also

found that after six years, only 11% of first-generation, low-income college students had earned a degree, compared with a 55% graduation rate for their more advantaged peers (p. 2).

Engle and Tinto (2008, p. 8) also found their cohort of first-generation and low-income students to more likely have the following characteristics, than their more advantaged peer cohort:

- be older,

- be female,

- have a disability,

- come from minority backgrounds,

- be non-native English speakers and to have been born outside of the U.S.,

- have dependent children and to be single parents,

- have earned a high school equivalency diploma, and

- be financial independent from their parents.

Financial Resources. Hispanic students are more likely to come from lower economic means than Caucasian students. Zurita (2004) noted, "as a result of the Latino population's lower educational and occupational levels as a group, the financial burden of college is a larger problem for Latino families." A 1999 statistic showed that only 23.3% of Hispanic full-time, year-round workers earned $35,000 or more per year, compared to 49.3% of all Caucasian workers (p. 302).

Hispanic students may find that navigating the American student financial aid world to be a confusing and difficult one. Olive and White (2007) indicated that Hispanic students and their families often overestimate the cost of a college education

(p. 24). As a result, they may be more likely to not even pursue advanced education at all, because they have already determined that it is financially unattainable. This theory is supported by Brown et al. (2003) when they indicated that many Hispanic families were limiting their student's educational options because of the perceived "sticker price" of higher education (p. 42). This issue has lead more students into community colleges, where they may or may not transfer to a four-year educational institution after completing the necessary courses (p. 42).

Parental Assistance/Expectations. . In a 2006 study of successful Hispanic students, Zalaquett noted, "the importance of parent involvement in Latino student's education has been identified repeatedly as a critical factor contributing to school success" (p. 40). However, Hispanic parents may be unable to assist their child with navigating through college because of a lack of experience with the U.S. higher education system. The parents themselves may also have a low level of education, have migrant worker status or be a new immigrant to the United States. Zalaquett (2006) cited Trueba and Delgado-Gaitan that often times Hispanic parents want to help their children succeed in school but do not have the resources or knowledge base to aid in this success (p. 40). Hispanic parents, especially those who have recently immigrated to the United States, may also not understand the need for continuing education beyond high school. Their experiences in their country of origin may have been such that higher education was either unattainable or unnecessary (p. 40).

A language barrier can also impede the parent's ability to assist their child in making educational decisions. Hispanic students, especially those who are first-generation college students, are more likely to speak Spanish in their home (Zalaquett,

2006, p. 36). The students themselves may also have a lower proficiency in English, making it even more difficult to successfully navigate through the higher education system.

Parents and students of Hispanic origin may also have different collegiate expectations than their peers. One example would be the student's desire to attend college away from home. While conducting research on 10 students, at a selective, large, state university, Zurita found that 6 of her 10 interviewees had parents who supported their decision to go to college but not necessarily their decision to attend school away from home and live on campus (2004, p. 312). Zurita quoted research conducted by Hurtado et al. in 1996, saying, that for Hispanic students "maintaining family relationships and support is among the most important aspects of transition that facilitates their adjustment to college" (p. 312).

Torres also discussed the idea of different parental expectations, especially between Hispanic and Caucasian families, when she touched on the hesitation some Hispanic families, had of their children adopting "American norms" (2003, p. 5). She continues by saying, "this parental expectation is especially true for Latinas, who are often expected to maintain a more protected lifestyle than males" (p. 5).

The difference in parental collegiate expectations, between Hispanic and Caucasian parents, was also evident in how parents participated in their student's college experience. The study conducted by Zurita (2004) found that 6 of the 10 students interviewed indicated that their parents' did not visit them at college (p. 313). They found this to be different than their fellow Caucasian students whose parents visited at least once during the semester (p. 313). Zurita provided two reasons for why this may be

the case. First, was a lack of understanding by Hispanic parents that visiting their child at

school, was a societal norm, that other parents were doing (p. 313). Zurita also attributed

it to Hispanic parents not understanding the need for their child to attend school away

from home (p. 312).

      Cultural Expectations. Hispanic students may also find it difficult to reconcile

what their culture of origin tells them to do with that of the majority culture found on

their campus. This can be especially difficult for first-generation or newly immigrated

students who may find parental pressure to maintain key parts of their culture of origin,

while also trying to reconcile their new existence in the United States. As noted

previously, Torres (2003) pointed out that parental pressure can be especially difficult for

Hispanic females who are "often expected to maintain a more protected lifestyle than

males" (p. 5). While interviewing community college faculty, Cejda and Hoover (2009)

provided stories from faculty who indicated that Hispanic females often had pressure

from their families to pursue the option of marriage and children rather than higher

education. Hispanic families often expected females to remain at home until they were

married, leaving the option of going away to school an unlikely one (Torres, 2003, p. 5).

      As mentioned previously, Hispanic students often are very committed to their

family, not only the immediate family, but also their extended family. This commitment

can prevent a student from enrolling in college or persisting through college if they are

contributing to the financial well-being of the family. Hispanic students may find that

although their parents recognize the need for a higher education, that obligation to help

the family financially supersedes their pursuit of a degree (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 40). As a

result the student may be more likely to work full or part-time then his/her peers.

Working full or part-time leaves the student with less time to deal with education obligations, such as studying, and may be a factor in a student's decision to either not attend college or to leave before graduation.

Academic Preparation. Hispanic students may not be as prepared as African-Americans or Caucasians to attend college. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2000, the high school dropout rate for Hispanic students was around 30% (Brown et al., 2003, p. 41). That rate was double the dropout rate for African-Americans and three times higher than that of Caucasian students (p. 41).

Acosta (1996) conducted a study on Hispanic student underachievement in high school, in the mid-1990's. The study found that many of the high school students were not adequately advised creating a group of students who are not prepared to take college exams or enter college prepared for the work (Olive & White, 2007, p. 24).

Career and Educational Goals. Another barrier to Hispanic student persistence is a lack of career and educational goals. Tinto noted in 1987 (Zurita, 2004) that "the higher the level of one's educational or occupational goals, the greater the likelihood of college completion" (p. 303). The lack of strong goals can be due to an uncertainty of one's collegiate options (p. 303).

Learning Styles. Once students are in the college classroom, they may feel out of their element because of the type of learning they prefer. When Cejda and Hoover (2009) interviewed community college faculty, the faculty reported that Hispanic students tended to be social learners (p. 18). They preferred to work in a group setting as opposed to individually, were more open to group discussions, and enjoyed building relationships. It can be difficult for a Hispanic student in a classroom where social

learning is never or rarely an option and they are forced to compete with other students instead of collaborate (p. 18).

Campus Climate. Another barrier to student persistence is the feeling of alienation a student may experience on college campuses that are predominately Caucasian or have little representation of themselves in the faculty. Even with Hispanic educational advances and a higher percentage of representation in the population, most faculty is Caucasian and Hispanic students may feel a lack of connection to their professors because of that.

Research conducted on experiences of Mexican-American students who attended largely Caucasian universities, indicated that "Latino students as an aggregate also interpreted the culture or climate of predominantly Caucasian colleges and universities as alienating, isolating, hostile and unsupportive" (Gonzalez, 2002, p. 194). Gonzalez followed two Mexican-American students, attending a predominately Caucasian university over the course of two years and presented their stories, largely through interviews he conducted (p. 196). Both students felt alienated by a lack of other Mexican-American or Hispanic students represented in their classes, either as students or faculty, and a lack of Hispanic cultural references, both in-class and on-campus (p. 203, p. 208). Gonzalez used the words alienated and marginalized consistently in his research to convey the experiences of the two students he studied.

Cultural Acculturation. Hispanic students may also struggle with determining to what extent they should acculturate into the majority culture. This is especially true for Hispanic students who do not attend school in areas with high concentrations of other Hispanic students. Torres (2003) conducted research on acculturation for Hispanic

students by comparing students who resided in a critical mass of other Hispanic students, with those who do not (p. 4). She found that students who attend college in non-critical mass areas are more likely to be acculturated to the Caucasian population, but that the students still held levels of ethnic pride consistent with their counterparts in critical mass areas (p. 4). So even though students have taken on more of the characteristics of the dominate culture, they still hold true to their ethnicity.

Academic Expectations. Students of a minority population, such as Hispanic students, may also enter college with a preconceived notion that they will fail academically. Olive and White (2007) paraphrased Mina et al. (2004, p. 80) when they suggested that "unlike their peers, minority students progress through our nation's education system with the societal expectation that they will fail" (p. 24). Students of Hispanic origin may especially feel a sense of being unwanted in higher education. Debates and changes in higher education policies, specifically those dealing with affirmative action in Hispanic dense states such as California and Texas, may present a sense of hostility to Hispanic students considering a move into higher education. These messages especially impact first-generation college students, who do not have the knowledge base to recognize that the message being provided doesn't necessarily translate into a hostile educational environment beyond high school (Brown et al., 2003, p. 43).

What Can colleges do to Help Hispanic Students Succeed?

Language Barrier. Colleges and universities could assist Hispanic families, who have language barriers, by providing information in Spanish. A translated Spanish option would be especially helpful with regard to financial aspects of higher education (Olive &

White, 2007, p. 24). If providing information in the Hispanic student's language of origin is not a possibility, educational institutions can still help students persist by thoroughly explaining the financial aid process and terms. Uniformed students who are first-generation or new immigrants will likely find the process confusing. Alleviating their concerns and fears from the onset will enable the student to continue on without the financial concerns they may otherwise had.

Financial Aid. As mentioned previously, financial issues were one of the biggest reasons that Hispanic students do not persist to college graduation. According to a 2005 report on Hispanic students and financial aid, Santiago and Cunningham noted that a

> higher proportion of Latino students, both dependent and independent, had relatively low family incomes compared to all undergraduates. Almost 25% of dependent Latinos had incomes under $40,000 and 25% of independent Latino undergraduates had incomes under $20,000, compared to about 16% and 21%, respectively, of all undergraduates. (p. 5)

Santiago and Cunningham's report also said that "almost 80% of Latino undergraduates applied for financial aid in 2003-2004. Only African-American and American Indian students applied at higher rates than Latinos" (p. 6). Santiago also reported that in the 2003-2004 academic year, only 63% of Hispanic students received some form of financial aid for college (p. 6).

Financial aid departments that assist students, and their families, with the financial aid process, are more likely to see a successful college student. Providing financial aid information to high school juniors may also help increase the number of Hispanic students who attend colleges and universities and aid in battling attrition once they arrive (Olive & White, 2007, p. 25).

Campus Connections. Higher education institutions would also benefit student

persistence by providing activities and opportunities on campus for Hispanic families.

Olive and White suggested that "college admission and student support services

personnel should strive to connect to Latino/families" (2007, p. 26). The connection

between family and college staff will enable both the student and their family to have a

support system on campus.

Olive and White (2007) also suggested that the campus connection to the

Hispanic family should extend beyond just the initial admission process (p. 25). Offering

Hispanic families the opportunity to participate in on-campus programs and services

throughout the student's education will help the student maintain a sense of connection to

his/her family and help the family connect to the campus.

K-12 Impact. Brown et al. (2003) suggested that educating K-12 administrators

on the needs of Hispanic students and increasing academic expectations of Hispanic

students at the K-12 level would help better prepare students for their higher education

experience (p. 45).

Educational Partnerships. Four-year institutions may find partnerships with

local schools and community colleges helpful to Hispanic students who may transition

through all three types of schools. In a report providing information on campus practices

that work at HSI's, Santiago (2008) noted that

> engaging 'feeder' high schools, community colleges, public universities and
> community-based organizations already investing in students can increase Latino
> student preparation, access and persistence to degree completion. Latino students
> tend to enroll in colleges in their own community, so there is a rich opportunity to
> align educational services in the K-16 pathway to better support students. (p. 4)

Santiago (2008) provided one model that brought together K-12 schools, a local

community college and a university in El Paso, Texas. The El Paso Learning

collaborative was a program between local K-12 feeder schools, the El Paso Community

College and the University of Texas at El Paso that was

> working to align their curriculum and to ease transitions so that students do not
> get lost, and for the past decade have used resources from the National Science
> Foundation to provide summer programs and tuition support for students
> transferring to programs in science, engineering and mathematics. (p. 4)

Campus Climate and Policies. Hispanic student success on campus was more

likely to be determined by the student's campus climate than the student's high school

GPA or ACT scores (Longerbeam, 2004, p. 539). Educational institutions would benefit

from analyzing the original environment of minority students and then expressing

minority values back to students on campus. In terms of Hispanic students, this may

include providing speakers of Hispanic origin or on Hispanic related topics, presenting

Hispanic art or providing all-campus cultural activities that celebrate the Hispanic culture

(Torres, 2003, p. 6). Santiago (2008) noted in her study of 12 Hispanic-serving

institutions (HSI's) that these schools reconsidered "their traditional provisions of student

support services, academic programs, community outreach and measures of success"

(p. 5).

Torres (2003) also suggested reevaluating retention policies on campus that may

actually hinder minority persistence. She provided the example of an on-campus housing

policy that required first-year students to reside in residential housing. This requirement

may actually deter Hispanic students, especially females, who have a cultural tradition of

residing at home with the family.

Institutions may also help students persist by promoting diversity training for faculty. While studying first-generation Hispanics and their relationship to community college faculty, Cejda and Hoover (2009) noted that engagement between faculty and students is the best indicator of persistence amongst Hispanic students (p. 20).

One HSI, El Camino College established a course on campus for faculty to learn how to pronounce non-English student names correctly. The course helped the faculty in two ways, it made it easier for an instructor to call on a student in class and it made the faculty aware of demographic shifts in the student population (Santiago, 2008, p. 17).

Faculty isn't the only group on campus that could help Hispanic students persist. Student affairs professionals can focus efforts and financial support on multicultural programming and training that aids their campus in creating a culturally aware environment. Some institutions provide an office that focuses specifically on multicultural students and issues.

Twelve higher education institutions, that have the distinction of being Hispanic-serving institutions, helped Hispanic student persistence by "developing a culture of evidence" (Santiago, 2008, p. 15). Santiago noted that each institution "engaged in some form of institutional diagnosis to determine how to improve both overall student academic achievement and efforts that increased Latino student success" (p. 15).

Academic Advising. In Santiago's (2008) study of 12 HSI's, all 12 institutions "invested resources to improve academic advising programs with Latino students" (p. 14). One example from the study was the Title V-Strengthening Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) Program at the CUNY-Borough of Manhattan Community College campus (p. 15). The program began in 2004 and focused on a "new academic

advisement model aimed at making students more dynamic decision makers and developing an electronic advisement system to improve the delivery of guidance and support" (p. 15).

According to Santiago (2008), the "Title V project changed the culture and the way liberal arts academic advisement was carried out in the college by expanding the recruitment of students, increasing the number of faculty participants and creating a support system for the faculty who joined the program" (p. 15). The one and two-semester persistence rates were higher for both the general population of students who participated in the Title V project versus those who did not. The Latino cohort also saw a higher one and two-semester persistence rate, when compared with the Latino students who did not participate in the Title V project at CUNY- Borough of Manhattan Community College.

South Texas College, an HSI, developed what they call a "case management approach to student advising" (Santiago, 2008, p. 14). South Texas College certified 21 case-managers to work with students who were attending college for the first time. The case-managers met with the students on at least three separate occasions during the first semester. The first session occurred before the first day of class and focused on registration. The second session occurred in the first six weeks of class and the objective was to discuss class attendance and support services. The third session focused on academic follow-up, and assisted students with registering for classes for the next semester (p. 14).

South Texas College found the program to be so beneficial that it expanded it to all of its students and ended up certifying more than 300 faculty and staff in case-

management facilitation. The initial group consisted of 479 students and South Texas College noticed an increase in the retention rates and course grades of those students.

Developmental Education. In a study of 12 Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI's), Santiago (2008) found that all of the colleges provided some type of remedial coursework. Developmental or remedial courses often are not for credit and likely add to the amount of time it takes a student to complete a degree.

Santiago (2008) noted that at all but one of the six community colleges studied, a majority of the enrolled students were entered into some type of remedial education and in "four of the six public universities between 35 and 70% of entering students required remediation" (p. 11).

Regardless of the additional time students in remedial courses must commit to complete their degree, or the additional costs that an institution commits to provide remedial courses, Santiago (2008) saw a benefit for both the student and institution.

> The possibility of attaining a degree becomes ever more daunting and remote for some students, and providing remedial work places an enormous strain on institutional resources. Nonetheless, remediation is a vital and positive resource for many college students, especially Latino students who are frequently the first in their family to enroll in college and may have attended high schools with insufficient resources to provide a rigorous college preparation education. (p. 11)

Mentoring and Programming. Longerbeam (2004, p. 540) indicated that providing basic life skill training, orientation programs and on-campus mentoring also aided in Hispanic student persistence. Financial issues are a consistent reason why Hispanic students do not graduate from college, so providing some type of financial management program or orientation early on in a student's college career could help prevent students from dropping out. Castellanos and Gloria (2007, p. 391) believed that a formal mentorship program between faculty and students helps with Hispanic student

persistence. They indicated that when Hispanic students are more likely to have

reservations about approaching faculty on their own and requesting a mentoring

relationship because they are unsure of the process and expectations. Colleges that

provide the mentoring process formally alleviate the unknown for the student, increasing

the likelihood of a successful mentoring relationship.

Including students in a mentoring program before college can also help increase

matriculation to college graduation for Hispanic students. Zalaquett (2006) referenced

research conducted by Laden (1999) and Wade (2003), indicating that mentoring

provided to Hispanic students as they transition from high school to college can play a

critical role in the student's collegiate success (p. 44).

Kuh et al. (2005) noted that successful colleges, involved in their research,

usually provided "high-quality programs for underserved students" (p. 253). One college

has a summer Bridge Program that connected minority students with other students of

color and a faculty advisor.   Another institution brought in minority students interested

in science and math and provided them with a free, three week summer program where

the student's took a calculus and physics course.

California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSU-Dominguez Hills), an HSI,

implemented the Latinas Juntas program, Latinas Juntas means "Latina women together"

(Santiago, 2008, p. 13). Latinas Juntas is a one day program developed by CSU-

Dominguez Hills faculty, which brought faculty and students together to participate in

small and large group exercises focusing on: personal responsibility, their culture and

how it relates to their academic life, personal development and celebrating their culture

(p. 13).

El Camino College, also an HSI, provided The First Year Experience Program for new students who are coming to college directly from high school (Santiago, 2008, p. 12). The program included over 3,900 students, who took advantage of "academic and student services including first year learning communities; linked developmental and transfer classes; supplemental instruction; peer and faculty mentors; intensive orientations; hands-on instruction using El Camino College technology; intensive academic, financial aid and career counseling; freshmen interest groups and community service learning" (Santiago, 2008, p. 12). El Camino College reported that the student cohort that participated in The First Year Experience Program had a 10-30% higher persistence and pass rate than the comparative group of new students, who did not participate (p. 12).

Hispanic Representation in Faculty and Staff. Beyond training, higher education institutions should mirror their student population in the composite of their faculty and staff. Faculty and staff of Hispanic origin should establish and maintain connections with Hispanic students through a variety of methods including: on-campus meetings, attending multicultural events, maintaining a presence on campus and acting as a resource for Hispanic students (Zurita, 2004, p. 321).

State and Federal Legislation

State Legislation. Educational institutions are not the only ones trying to increase the number of Hispanic students graduating from college, some states have passed legislation that acknowledged the Hispanic presence and made it easier for those students to attend higher education institutions. California and Texas both passed legislation that allowed students to enroll as residents as long as they attended a state high

school for at least three years (Brown et al., 2003, p. 43). This legislation allowed the students to enroll regardless of their residency status (p, 43). As a result, the cost of a degree in both states becomes more affordable for those students who fall within the legislated guidelines (43).

      Federal Legislation. Federal legislation also aided Hispanic, and other minority students, in persisting in college. Federally funded programs such as GEAR UP and TRIO helped minority students graduate from high school, enroll in college and persist to graduation by providing initiatives that support student success (Brown et al., 2003, p. 43). Also, Title V - The Developing Hispanic-serving institutions (HSI's) was enacted by the federal government in 1998 (Brown et al., 2003, p. 43). HSI's "are accredited, nonprofit institutions of higher education that enroll a quarter or more Hispanic undergraduate full-time-equivalent (FTE) students" (Brown et al., 2003, p. 44). There were 252 HSI's in 2006. They were located in 16 states and "educated almost half of all Hispanic undergraduates in the United States" in 2006 (Santiago, 2008, p. 3).

Conclusion

      Chapter 2 provided an overview of student retention theories in higher education. The literature review also included information on the Hispanic representation in the United States and higher education and the retention issues that are specific to the Hispanic cohort. Chapter 2 also touched on the role higher education and the state and federal governments can play in Hispanic student persistence. .

      Chapter 3 will provide information on how the study of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program was conducted. An overview of the demographics of

the interviewed students, the study research questions and how the data was collected and

analyzed will also be discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on the persistence of the Hispanic students who participated. Chapter 3 provides the methodology, research questions and limitations of the study. The population and sample used in this research will be discussed and an overview of the demographics of the sample will be provided.

Methodology

The stories of eight Hispanic students enrolled in Bellevue University were analyzed for this project. All of the interviewed students were accepted into and participated in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program.

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program was a need-based program intended to increase the number of minority and/or low-income students who attend the university. Students needed to reside in a qualifying zip code and have a high school cumulative GPA of 2.5 or above. To apply, students completed an application and provided a letter of recommendation from a high school guidance counselor, an employer, sponsor, instructor or community advocate.

Students accepted into the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program were provided a scholarship at the university. Scholarship amounts were based on the student's cumulative GPA, so dollar amounts varied by student.

Research Questions

The grand tour research question for this project was: What was the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on Hispanic student persistence at

Bellevue University? Additional research questions were broken into five categories.

The five categories focused on the services provided to the participating students in the

South Omaha Community Scholarship Program.

The additional research questions were:

RQ1   What impact did the bi-lingual financial aid advising have on the student's

educational experience?

RQ2   What impact did the bi-lingual academic advising have on the student's

educational experience?

RQ3   What impact did the scholarship have on the student's ability to persist?

RQ4   What impact did the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) have on the

student's ability to persist?

RQ5   What impact did the South Omaha Project have on the student's life

beyond Bellevue University?

General data were also collected on the participants, including their name, age,

ethnicity, home language, parental educational level, American generation, grade level at

the university and expected graduation date. This information was collected and used to

give the researcher a profile of the student's participating.

Population and Sample

A purposeful, criteria-based technique (Creswell, 1998) was used as students were

identified to participate in this study based on their admittance to the South Omaha

Community Scholarship Program and their class level (pp. 118 -119). The students

selected to participate in this study either were currently attending or had attended

Bellevue University and had participated in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. Students were to have junior or senior status in the fall of 2009.

A list of eligible students was provided by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. Fifty-six student names were included on that list. Twenty-eight of the 56 students were contacted to participate in this study. Initially, nine students agreed to be interviewed, with one student deciding not to proceed prior to the interview. Eight interviews were conducted.

Demographics

Eight students were interviewed for this study. Seven of the eight students were women. All of the students, except one, worked outside of the home. Five students were married and six of them had children.

Seven of the eight students interviewed were born outside of the United States, their countries of origin included: Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. All of the students were bi-lingual in both Spanish and English and all were raised in homes where Spanish was the primary language spoken.

All of the students participating in this research study were to graduate between the spring of 2010 and the summer of 2011. Only one of the students reported having a parent who graduated from college in the United States, two others had a parent who graduated from college outside of the United States. Four of the students reported having at least one parent with only an elementary-level education.

Hispanic students tend to begin their college careers at community colleges and the students interviewed in this study, reinforced that trend. One student had an Associate's degree from a local community college. Three of the interviewed students

started at a local community college and left before earning an Associate's degree. One student started at Bellevue University right out of high school, but she dropped out after getting pregnant and later returned to finish her degree. Another student attended three other 4-year institutions and then transferred to Bellevue University. Another student started at Bellevue University right after high school and persisted, without stopping out, until graduation. Finally, the eighth student received her GED, upon moving to the United States, and then began her college career at Bellevue University.

Data Collection

Students, identified in the sample, were initially contacted via an email asking them to participate in the study. Those who responded were scheduled for a one time interview at their convenience. The interviews were in-person, semi-structured and audio-taped (Creswell, 1998, p. 121). Locations for the interviews were determined based on the student's schedule and ability to visit the university's main campus. One student was interviewed at a library near her place of employment. Another student was interviewed at a local coffee shop. A third student was interviewed at Bellevue University's library. The remaining five students were interviewed in an office, in the Learning Center on Bellevue University's main campus.

The interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes and were audio-taped, with the student's permission, and the interviewer also took field notes. All interviews were transcribed and the students were provided an alias in both the transcription and the reported data.

Analysis

Case study protocol was used to analyze the data. Creswell defined case studies as a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher "explores in depth a program, event, activity, process of one or more individuals" (2009, p. 13).

Once the data was transcribed, an initial reading of the transcripts occurred. After the initial reading was completed, the data were coded. Creswell (2009) described coding as "the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information" (p. 186).

When coding was completed and themes identified, the information was used to provide an interpretation of the research. The themes were matched with the five sub-question categories: (a) financial aid advising, (b) academic advising, (c) scholarship, (d) Professional Enrichment Program, and (e) the impact on the student's life beyond Bellevue University. An additional sixth category was included that encompassed the themes that did not match the five sub-question categories.

Limitations

One limitation of this research was that the participating students represented a small group of Hispanic students who had persisted to their junior or senior year at this four-year institution. Thus, the results cannot be generalized to the entire Hispanic student population at Bellevue University. Also, students who did not persist to their junior or senior year, as of the fall of 2009, were not included in the sample. As a result, the perspective of the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on those who did not persist past 60 credit hours was not identified. A third limitation of the

research was that seven of the eight interviewed students were female. As a result, a very limited male perspective is presented.

Conclusion

Chapter 3 provided information an overview of how the study of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program was conducted, demographic information on the interviewed students, the study research questions and how the data was collected and analyzed. Chapter 3 also focused on the limitations of the research study.

Chapter 4 will include the findings of this study. The findings will include how financial aid counseling, academic advising, scholarship aid and the Professional Enrichment Program impacted the student's ability to persist at Bellevue University. Chapter 4 will also focus on how the student's life was affected, by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, outside of Bellevue University.

Chapter 4

Findings

The goal of this research was to determine what impact the South Omaha

Community Scholarship Program had on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue

University.   This chapter provides the findings of the study.

Research Questions

Grand Tour Research Question. What was the impact of the South Omaha

Community Scholarship Program on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue

University?

Sub-Questions

RQ1   What impact did the bi-lingual financial aid advising have on the student's

        educational experience?

RQ2   What impact did the bi-lingual academic advising have on the student's

        educational experience?

RQ3   What impact did the scholarship have on the student's ability to persist?

RQ4   What impact did the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) have on the

        student's ability to persist?

RQ5   What impact did the South Omaha Project have on the student's life

        beyond Bellevue University?

Financial Aid Counseling

Research Question: What impact did the bi-lingual financial aid advising have on

the student's educational experience?

Financial aid counseling at Bellevue University was provided through the financial aid department. However, South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students could receive bi-lingual assistance from the financial aid office.

Three of the eight students interviewed utilized the financial aid department at Bellevue University to supplement their scholarship. The five students who did not apply for financial aid indicated that they were either able to pay the remaining costs or they received a scholarship in a dollar amount that covered their tuition. One student indicated that she took only the number of classes in a term that her scholarship covered. Another said that she did not apply for financial aid because, "it was pretty convenient with the financial support that was given, and anything that wasn't covered, I was able to afford." Another student did not apply for financial aid because she was in the process of becoming a United States citizen and she was unsure if her status qualified her for aid. She said the financial aid process in her situation seemed to "daunting."

Of the three students who accessed financial aid, only one student indicated that she received financial aid counseling in both Spanish and English. She went on to recall a session she had with a South Omaha Community Scholarship Program advisor who was helping her complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA). She said that switching between the two languages helped her clarify English words, on the form, that didn't make sense to her. When asked if her financial aid advising sessions were conducted in English or Spanish, she replied,

> you can say both, but mainly English, because there are some words that you know how to say in Spanish or just want to make sure I was doing everything right, we went with a little bit of both. But we did a little bit more of English because I didn't want to mess up. She would tell me a word in Spanish and I would be like, how do you translate that in English?

The student also commented on the session and the assistance she received by saying,

> I had never filed a FAFSA before and she kind of helped me with that, she sat with me and said, 'we are going to do this and we are going to do it today.' It was funny because she just helped me through, probably if she had not helped me, I would have quit like the first time. You know what? I don't want to go to college anymore. It's scary.

Academic Advising

Research Question: What impact did the bi-lingual academic advising have on the student's educational experience?

Academic advising in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program has been modified throughout the student experience. Initially students were advised by one, bi-lingual advisor working in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. That process changed in 2009 and South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students were assigned to the academic advisor in their major for advisement. This change in process eliminated the bi-lingual option for academic advising, but it provided students with consistent advising in their major, while also encouraging them to work on their English skills. However, when needed the students had a bi-lingual person in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program who could assist with any communication issues during the advising session.

The students interviewed in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had an advisor working for the program who spoke both Spanish and English. Four of the eight students interviewed indicated that their academic advising sessions with the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program advisor were conducted in both Spanish and English. Of the remaining four students, two of the eight students said that their

sessions were always conducted in Spanish and the remaining two said that they were always conducted in English.

The students who conducted academic advising sessions in just Spanish or Spanish and English did not believe that having the Spanish option necessarily helped their understanding during the academic advising session. One of the students said that she and the advisor just fell into speaking Spanish and didn't really think about it, but she did not have any issues when participating in advising sessions with her English speaking advisor. The other student who spoke Spanish in her advising sessions said that it was "convenient" having a Spanish-speaking advisor. Another student, who said that her advising sessions with the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program advisor were conducted in both languages, preferred having her advising sessions conducted in English because it helped her work on her English skills.

The interviewed students utilized their academic advisors or the Project Specialist in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program for questions and concerns regardless of the issue. One student indicated that when she had questions about anything she would contact the Project Specialist, she said, "every time I ran into something that the others couldn't fix, I would just run to them and they would help me." Six of the eight interviewed students indicated that having a person on campus, the Project Specialist or their academic advisor, made it much easier to navigate college life. One student said that she didn't see the need or the value in having a minor until she talked to the Project Specialist. She said, "I didn't know I could choose a minor. She (Project Specialist) and I had a conversation about it once she noticed that I was a few

credits from completing a minor. So I talked to my advisor and it didn't add any additional time to my time in school."

Scholarship

Research Question: What impact did the scholarship have on the student's ability to persist?

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program provided a scholarship based on the students' GPA. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the scholarship amounts that the interviewed students received.

Table 2

South Omaha Community Scholarship Program Scholarship Breakdown

GPA	Per Year
3.5 or above	$5,000
3.0 – 3.49	$4,000
2.5 – 2.99	$3,000

Source: The South Omaha Community College Scholarship Program

All eight of the students interviewed emphasized the importance of the scholarship offered in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program.   A majority of the students would not have been able to attend college without the scholarship. One student said, "before (the scholarship) I didn't have the money to pay for my classes. I had to pay my rent and bills and send money to Mexico."   A married student with children said, "I had always thought about going to college but the idea of affording a college education, it just didn't fit into my budget and I didn't think I would be able to afford it."

While discussing the scholarship, another student indicated the impact it had on her, "I never thought I would be able to attend the university. The scholarship changed my life." She went on to say that being able to pay for college seemed unattainable until she was accepted into the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program.

The remaining students may have been able to attend college without the scholarship offered in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, but it would have taken them longer to graduate and created a larger financial burden. When asked if she would be able to attend college without the scholarship assistance, one student said, "probably but I wouldn't have finished as soon as I did. It would have taken me a little bit more time since I would have to be paying on my own."

Another student said that the dollar amount of the scholarship being based on a student's GPA helped her study harder. She said, "it was also a big challenge for me because depending on my GPA, that's how much they would cover, so it will also not only give me the funds, but also make me study more to cover more."

Professional Enrichment Program

Research Question: What impact did the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) have on the student's ability to persist?

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program implemented a Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) as a requirement to receive the scholarship. PEP became a requirement in 2008 to provide South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students with a better chance of persisting. Prior to it being required, students could opt into the classes.

PEP was a series of workshops, conducted three of the four academic terms, over the course of three years. The curriculum was presented in the following three components:

Year One: Resources to help the student begin his/her academic program and develop a personal career profile. Topics included: Library use, plagiarism, study skills, stress/time management, learning styles, learning outcomes and a career self assessment.

Year Two: Students declared a major and developed a career action plan. Topics included: career exploration, defining career goals and selecting an academic major and career experience.

Year Three: Students participated in career preparation and received information on how to conduct a job search. Topics included: job search strategies, effective job interviewing strategies and techniques, succeeding on the job.

Depending on when they were accepted into the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, PEP was not a requirement for all of the interviewed students. Also, the curriculum evolved so even those students who did participate in PEP may not have experienced the curriculum noted above. Changes in the curriculum included expanding the offerings to include more career-centered items. The third year was added to help students with the job search.

One student did participate in the revised Professional Enrichment Program, indicating that he was in the first class to graduate from PEP.   He said that he found the experience to go beyond the curriculum. He said, "It helped build a sense of

achievement. I am coming from being shy to outspoken and more willing to participate with other people."

The student also discussed how participating in PEP helped him build a community within the university. He said, "it was kind of uncomfortable situation attending with these people I had never meet, it was a real life experience. I didn't know these people, it helped me become more confident talking with these people, performing whatever tasks we were asked to do, whether it was interviewing or critiquing other peoples' answers."

He said the career component of the curriculum helped him see the need for networking. "They helped us see the importance of knowing people and staying in touch with those people and keeping those networks up."

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program Beyond Bellevue University

Research Question: What impact did the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program have on the student's life beyond Bellevue University?

The Opportunity to Attend College. The impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program went beyond the student experience at Bellevue University. Several students commented on how the scholarship had given them an opportunity to attend college that seemed out of reach. One student, in particular, articulated the impact the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had on his life and his community. "I don't think I would have ever gone to college if it wasn't for this program. I think I would have been discouraged for the rest of my life and been like this is me, this is what I'm supposed to do." He went on to say, "I wanted to go to college, my dad started going to college, and that was one of the things I wanted to do as well.

Considering the fact that you are in the United States, I don't want to say that it is expected but the opportunity is a lot easier to get to then where I came from."

The Benefit of a College Education. Another student talked about how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program and her college education helped prepare her for the world outside the university. "I feel like I'm more prepared professionally. I'm also more engaged in the community, because I try to volunteer in South Omaha more often than I would before."

South Omaha Community. Several of the students commented on how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program has not only helped them feel a sense of community on campus but has also helped them to grow or maintain their relationship with the South Omaha neighborhood. The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program Project Specialist would email students with volunteer and employment opportunities in the South Omaha community. One student discussed how the emails from the Project Specialist helped her stay connected to the South Omaha community now that she has moved to a different part of the city. "I moved to north Omaha and actually those emails come in handy now since I'm not really like there, mainly I'm more north, but there is a lot more Latino population in the north now."

The same student also shared how the service learning opportunities had helped provide her and her children ideas on volunteering options in the community. She said, "Even my kids get to volunteer and do certain things and get involved because I would take them and its fun, because it's like the Latino community in a sense and my kids love that part of it. So we go and volunteer whenever we can." The student went on to say that she has used communications from the South Omaha Community Scholarship

Program to refer her friends and family to resources within the Hispanic community in Omaha.

Another student talked about how the program has helped her understand the importance of community involvement. "It kind of helped me understand getting involved, the recognition of what I was given and now I do want to do a lot of community service."

Cultural Expectations. A student noted that a lack of information and the expectation to attend college is impacting the Hispanic community in Omaha. He said,

> There is a lack of information, as far as, what students need to know. There is so much opportunity out there and not just in the South Omaha Community Program, but there are other programs at other universities, where they are willing to help minorities, like myself reach goals that we were never taught to reach.

The student went on to say,

> We were never brought up to go to college, even though my father started going to college, it wasn't something he put in our heads. We didn't grow up the idea that we were going to go to college at one point in our lives. There is a need, in my personal experience, for the Hispanic community to grow out of its old ways and its old way of thinking.

A second student talked about how in high school she didn't even consider going to college. She said, "I didn't know how to apply for scholarships and the idea of going to college didn't really seem important to me." A third student emphasized this point when she talked about working with youth in the community and how she would steer qualifying students to the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. When talking about the students she works with, she said, "they will say they want to go to college and I'll say, just look at BU because they have a good scholarship program, especially for Hispanic students who sometimes think they can't go to college. It just seems out of reach." She continued on by saying, "they say they need to work instead of going to

school, it's mostly the money that stands in the way. There are also a lot of young

parents, who think they don't have the time."

Other Themes from the Study

  Class Format. Students also commented on how Bellevue University's class

formats helped them earn a degree. Bellevue University offered classes both online and

face-to-face. The university also offered classes in a traditional term-based setting and

through an accelerated program format. Students taking the accelerated format were

registered for all classes in the major for 40 weeks, and the students moved from class to

class. Students were required to enter the accelerated program with an Associate's

degree or 60 credits. Any additional electives and the Kirkpatrick Signature Series,

Bellevue University's capstone course, that all students had to take to graduate, were

usually completed after the major program of study.

  Two of the eight students interviewed, completed their degree, or were working

towards a degree, in an accelerated program. One working mother said,

> I would go to school and basically I did the accelerated program because that is
> the only program I could do. I tried going to college at other places, but I
> couldn't do it. My typical day would be work, go home, cook, do homework and
> then Wednesday go to class. Beside the scholarship, the flexibility of the
> accelerated program is why I attended Bellevue. They offered great classes here
> and there but I couldn't afford that because I had to work full time, I can't take off
> work.

  Deciding on a College. One of the interviewed students was looking at various

colleges in the Omaha area after high school but decided to attend Bellevue University

because of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. She said that the college

selection process, out of high school, was "intimidating." She continued,

> I liked the idea of having a small school. I remember going to meetings where
> you go to different schools. I was just amazed at how big it was, me personally, I

like smaller. I also liked the idea of having a Latino connection at Bellevue. It made the decision more comfortable.

Higher Education Course. Students were also required to take a success in higher education course that focused on time management, study skills, learning styles and campus resources. The course was offered to all students at Bellevue University.

The higher education success course became a requirement for South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students in 2007. While PEP was not taken for credit, students did earn credit for the success in higher education course and could use it as an elective.

One of the interviewed students did take the success in higher education course. The class was geared toward a freshman population and the interviewed student took it in her last year so she didn't find it as relevant as she might have as a freshman. She had also attended other institutions prior to coming to Bellevue University so the topics, such as test taking, studying and sleeping habits, were not as relevant to her as it might be to students who are just entering college.

Campus Resources. All of the students talked about the importance of other resources on campus in relation to their success in college. Nearly all of the students accessed the Writing Center on campus, to assist them with their essays and capstone project. All of the students said that they used the Library on a regular basis and many used tutoring when they had difficulty with a class. The Career Center was also consistently used by the students. Seven of the eight interviewed students were working and they accessed the Career Center to help them with their resumes and to find other jobs. Consistently the students mentioned that the Career Center helped them formulate career goals and provided information on potential jobs for different majors. When asked

how they found out about these resources, the interviewed students had two consistent responses; they were either referred by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program or through their instructors.

One student used her bi-lingual skills to help her earn credit outside the classroom. When discussing taking additional classes to earn her teaching endorsement in Spanish, the student said,

> the 12 credit hours I have in Spanish, and that is the maximum amount the teaching program will take, are from the CLEP test I took at Bellevue. I was able to get 12 credit hours by taking the CLEP test. It helped me graduate earlier than I thought I would.

A second student also used her ability to speak two languages and earned 12 credit hours through CLEP tests. The student indicated that her scholarship paid for the CLEP tests and it saved her at least one term of college.

While talking about campus resources, one student indicated that she preferred to contact resources, such as the Library, in person instead of looking up items online. She said that being able to actually go to the Library and "visit with a person helps her better understand what they are saying," because she is not a native English speaker. She indicated that being in college has helped her work on her English skills both in-class and while visiting departments on campus.

A Sense of Community On-Campus. Students also talked about their participation on campus through the Multicultural Club and a Latina Conference that was held at Bellevue University on an annual basis. One student discussed how her involvement with the planning of the Latina Conference helped her engage with her fellow students.

Students also commented on how being a member of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had helped them build a community on campus and become engaged with other students. When referring to the students in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, one student said, "The students I know in the same scholarship, we have met at several community events they have, especially at the Latina conference. We see each other in class and we stick together." Another student commented on the community built amongst students in the program when she said, "I had a couple of friends that actually did it and you get close, basically you have someone there you can always talk to besides your counselors."

Conclusion

Chapter 4 focused on the results of the interviews with eight students who had or were participating in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. All eight students expressed the impact that the scholarship had on their ability to not only attend college, but also persist to their junior year and beyond. The students also shared how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program has not only impacted their ability to attend Bellevue University, but they also touched on the impact it had on their life beyond BU. One student discussed how college seemed impossible without the financial and academic support of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program.

Chapter 5 will recap the findings of the research study. Chapter 5 will also provide a discussion of the interview results and literature review, as well as present recommendations for further research.

Chapter 5

The goal of this research project was to determine what impact the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue University. The findings were divided into four components, the student impact on the South Omaha Community, and other themes that emerged from the interviews. Chapter 5 will provide a summary of the research findings, a discussion of the findings, a conclusion and will offer suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Eight students were interviewed for this study. Seven of the eight students were women. All of the students, except one, worked outside of the home. Five students were married and six of them had children.

Seven of the eight students interviewed were born outside of the United States, their countries of origin included: Honduras, Mexico, Peru, and Venezuela. All of the students were bi-lingual in both Spanish and English and all were raised in homes where Spanish was the primary language spoken.

All of the students participating in this research study were to graduate between the spring of 2010 and the summer of 2011. Only one of the students reported having a parent who graduated from college in the United States, two others had a parent who graduated from college outside of the United States. Four of the students reported having at least one parent with only an elementary-level education.

One student had an Associate's degree from a local community college. Three of the interviewed students started at a local community college and left before earning an Associate's degree. One student started at Bellevue University right out of high school,

but she dropped out after getting pregnant and later returned to finish her degree. Another student attended three other 4-year institutions and then transferred to Bellevue University. Another student started at Bellevue University right after high school and persisted, without stopping out, until graduation. Finally, the eighth student received her GED, upon moving to the United States, and then began her college career at Bellevue University.

The grand tour research question for this project was: What was the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue University? The answer varied from student to student, but a consistent theme that emerged was the impact the scholarship portion of the program had on the student's ability to persist. All eight students emphasized the importance of the scholarship, provided by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. One student said, "I never thought I would be able to attend the university. The scholarship changed my life."

Additional research questions were broken into five categories. The five categories focused on the services provided to the participating students in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program.

The first sub-question was: What impact did the bi-lingual financial aid advising have on the student's educational experience? Students, who utilized the financial aid department at Bellevue University, had the option to receive counseling from someone who spoke both Spanish and English. Three of the eight students had contact with the financial aid department during their time at Bellevue University. The remaining students either did not need additional funds beyond their scholarship, or paid for the difference on their own.

Of the three students who applied for financial aid, only one student received financial aid counseling in both Spanish and English. The student received counseling from the Project Specialist in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. The primary focus of their session was to help the student complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FASFA) and the student indicated that discussing the process between the two languages helped her clarify terms in the FASFA.

The second sub-question was: What impact did the bi-lingual academic advising have on the student's educational experience? Six of the eight students interviewed said that their academic advising sessions were conducted in either Spanish and English or just Spanish. Even though a majority of the students conducted academic advising with at least some Spanish spoken, they all agreed that having this bi-lingual option did not necessarily help their understanding during the session. One student indicated that she defaulted to the Spanish language because she and the Project Specialist were both Spanish speakers. Another student said that having a Spanish speaking advisor was "convenient." A third student said that she preferred to conduct her advising sessions in English, because it helped her work on her English skills.

The students noted that having the Project Specialist as a resource on campus was really more important. One student said, "every time I ran into something that the others couldn't fix, I would just run to them and they would help me."

The third sub-question was: What impact did the scholarship have on the student's ability to persist? All eight students stated that the scholarship was the primary motivating factor for them to not only attend college but also persist to their current status. A majority of the students interviewed would not have been able to attend college

without the scholarship. One student said, "I had always thought about going to college but the idea of affording a college education, it just didn't fit into my budget and I didn't think I would be able to afford it."

The remaining students may have still been able to attend college without the scholarship, provided by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, but it would have likely taken them longer. One student, when asked if she thought she would have been able to complete college without the scholarship, said, "probably but I wouldn't have finished as soon as I did. It would have taken me a little bit more time since I would have to be paying on my own."

The fourth sub-question was: What impact did the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) have on the student's ability to persist? Only one of the eight students interviewed participated in PEP. The other seven students had entered the program prior to PEP being a requirement to receive the scholarship.

The student who participated in PEP indicated that his experience was a positive one. He did not attribute PEP to his persisting in college, but he did learn some skills that have helped him in his life and in his future job search. When discussing his experience, he said, "it was kind of an uncomfortable situation, attending with these people I had never met, it was a real life experience. I didn't know these people. It helped me become more confident talking with these people, performing whatever tasks we were asked to do."

The focus of the PEP curriculum was campus resources, creating a career plan and providing the student with interviewing and job searching skills. The student, who attended PEP, discussed how they reinforced the idea of networking. He said, "They

helped us see the importance of knowing people and staying in touch with those people and keeping those networks up."

The fifth sub-question was: What impact did the South Omaha Project have on the student's life beyond Bellevue University? The students provided a variety of responses to the final sub-question. A few consistent themes that emerged from the interviews were the opportunity to attend college, the connection to the South Omaha community, and cultural expectations within the Hispanic community.

During the course of the interviews, several of the students commented on how the scholarship provided them with the opportunity to attend college. One student articulated this point when he said, "I don't think I would have ever gone to college if it wasn't for this program. I think I would have been discouraged for the rest of my life and been like this is me, this is what I'm supposed to do."

Almost all of the students commented on how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program made them more engaged in the South Omaha community. One student talked about how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program Project Specialist would provide the students with service learning opportunities, through email, in the South Omaha community. The student said, "even my kids get to volunteer and do certain things and get involved because I would take them and its fun, because it's like the Latino community in a sense and my kids love that part of it." Another student, when discussing her connection with the South Omaha community, said, "it kind of helped me understand getting involved, the recognition of what I was given and now I do want to do a lot of community service."

A few students touched on the cultural expectations of Hispanics and college. One student said,

> we were never brought up to go to college, even though my father started going to college, it wasn't something he put in our heads. We didn't grow up with the idea that we were going to go to college at one point in our lives. There is a need, in my personal experience, for the Hispanic community to grow out of its old ways and its old way of thinking.

Another student talked about the cultural expectations when she discussed the community youth that she works with on a daily basis. She said that she would point out the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program to the Hispanic teenagers she works with but to most of them college "just seems out of reach."

Other Themes. There were other themes that emerged, from the interviews, that didn't fit into the sub-questions. A few of those themes focused on class formats that were offered to students, the decision to attend a certain college, a higher education course offered to students, the use of campus resources, and a sense of community on-campus.

The interviewed students discussed how Bellevue University's variety of class formats helped them persist. A student, who is a working mother, said that the accelerated class format was the only way she would have been able to complete a degree. She said that the weekly class meeting and the flexibility of the program helped her to graduate.

Another student talked about how having a "Latino connection" in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program at Bellevue University, made her decision to attend college less intimidating. She said that in high school she looked at other schools and she knew that a small class size was important to her but having that built-in

connection with the Latino population and having a contact in the South Omaha

Community Scholarship program helped her make her decision.

All of the interviewed students discussed the importance of having access to

campus resources and how that access impacted their ability to persist. Nearly all of the

students accessed the campus Writing Center, for help with their papers and capstone

projects. All of the students also used the campus Library, while the Tutoring Center and

the Career Center were used by most of the students interviewed. Two students also used

their bi-lingual skills to earn college credit through CLEP tests. The scholarship paid for

the tests and the students indicated that it saved them up to a term of attending traditional

classes.

Students indicated that they felt more engaged with their fellow students by

participating in the Multicultural Club, on campus, and by volunteering with the Latina

Conference that is held on Bellevue University's campus every spring. Students also

commented on having a sense of community with fellow students who participated in the

South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. A student said, "the students I know in

the same scholarship, we have meet at several community events they have, especially at

the Latina conference. We see each other in class and we stick together."

Discussion

This section will discuss the findings of this study and will compare the findings

with the information provided in the literature review in Chapter 2.

Demographics

The 2000 U.S. Census data showed that the Hispanic cohort made up 12.6% of

the national population. The U.S. Census projections for 2050 forecast, that the Hispanic

cohort, will nearly double by then to 24.4% of the national population (U.S. Census). This shift in minority demographics will be reflected in the high school graduate population. An October, 2009 American Council on Education (ACE) policy paper stated, "higher education leaders are on the cusp of a seismic shift reflected in the demographics of the students they will be called upon to educate" (p. 4). The paper continued with, "minority students will account for practically all of the growth among high school graduates over the next decade, with Hispanic graduates alone almost completely offsetting the decrease in white, non-Hispanic graduates" (p.4).

However, the increase in Hispanic population was not necessarily translating into an increase in Hispanic participation in higher education. The American Council on Education (ACE) released a 2007 report on minority representation in higher education. The report showed that Hispanic students were not participating in higher education at a rate that is consistent with their increased population status. In fact, the participation rate for Hispanic college students "showed little improvement between 1993-95 and 2003-05" (p. 3). ACE attributed the little change in the rate due to the "result of the growth in the number of Hispanics aged 18 to 24 who were enrolled in higher education not increasing as fast as the growth of the general Hispanic population" (p. 3).

Not only were Hispanic students not enrolling in college at the same level as the increase in population, but they also were not as likely to graduate from college as Caucasian students. Ten percent of the Hispanic Americans between the ages of 24 and 64 hold a 4-year college degree (Oseguera, Locks & Vega, 2009, p. 23). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2007), the Hispanic graduation rate for full-time, first-year students in 2007 was 48.3% for 4-year institutions and 29.8% for 2-year

institutions (p. 11). The Caucasian, non-Hispanic rate for the same time period was

60.3% for 4-year institutions and 32.1% for 2-year institutions (p. 11).

Persistence Issues

    Financial Resources. A factor in Hispanic student persistence is the ability to

finance an education. Zurita (2004) noted, "as a result of the Latino population's lower

educational and occupational levels as a group, the financial burden of college is a larger

problem for Latino families" (p. 302). The research findings supported this concept. All

of the interviewed students commented on how a college degree would have been

impossible or much more difficult without the financial support of the scholarship.

    All eight of the students interviewed, in this study, expressed how important the

scholarship, they received from the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, was

to their ability to persist in college. A majority of the students indicated that they would

not have been able to even attend college, without the scholarship. One student said,

"before (the scholarship) I didn't have the money to pay for my classes. I had to pay my

rent and bills and send money to Mexico." Another student, who during the interview

discussed how financing a college education seemed unattainable, said, "I never thought I

would be able to attend the university. The scholarship changed my life." The remaining

students said that they may have been able to afford college at some point, without the

scholarship, but that it would have taken them longer to graduate and created a larger

financial burden.

    Cultural Experience in Higher Education and First-Generation Students.

Hispanic students often have a close connection with their family. However, their

parents may be unable to assist them with navigating through college because of a lack of

experience with the U.S. higher education system. The parents themselves may also have a low level of education, have migrant worker status or be a new immigrant to the United States. Zalaquett (2006) cited Trueba and Delgado-Gaitan when pointing out that often times Hispanic parents want to help their children succeed in school but do not have the resources or knowledge base to aid in this success (p. 40). Hispanic parents, especially those who have recently immigrated to the United States, may also not understand the need for continuing education beyond high school. Their experiences in their country of origin may have been such that higher education was either unattainable or unnecessary.

There are varying definitions of what constitutes a first-generation student in higher education. Zalaquett defined first-generation student as the first student in their family to attend college (2006, p. 40). Engle and Tinto defined first-generation students as those whose parents have not earned a bachelor's degree (2008, p. 2).

Zalaquett noted that Hispanic students tend to be the first in their families to attend college (2006, p. 40). Multiple issues can arise with being a first-generation student. One issue is having a lack of general knowledge of how higher education works. Zalaquett (2006) indicated that "parents often want to support the educational aspirations of their children, but providing academic help is a very challenging task for them" (p. 40).

Engle and Tinto conducted a study on first-generation, low-income students and they found that students who fall into both categories were "nearly four times more likely to leave higher education after the first year than a student who had neither risk factor" (2008, p. 2). Engle and Tinto cited a National Center for Education Statistic which shows

that students who are both first-generation and low-income have a six year graduation rate of 11% (p. 2).

The student's who participated in this study, were largely first-generation students and new immigrants to the United States. Seven of the eight students interviewed were born outside of the United States. Only one of the eight students had a parent who graduated from a higher education institution in the United States, while two had a parent who graduated from college outside of the U.S. Four of the eight students had at least one parent with an elementary-level education.

The interviewed students provided their thoughts on higher education and the Hispanic community during the course of the interviews. One student noted that there was a lack of both information and the expectation to attend college in the South Omaha Hispanic community that he lived in. He said,

> there is a lack of information, as far as, what students need to know. There is so much opportunity out there and not just in the South Omaha Community Program, but there are other programs at other universities, where they are willing to help minorities, like myself, reach goals that we were never taught to reach. We were never brought up to go to college, even though my father started going to college, it wasn't something he put in our heads.

Another student talked about how she did not even consider going to college until she was approached by the Project Specialist. She said, "I didn't know how to apply for scholarships and the idea of going to college didn't really seem important to me."

A student, who works with local youth, reiterated the lack of college expectations when she talked about advising the young people she works with to pursue educational options. She said, "They will say they want to go to college and I'll say, just look at BU because they have a good scholarship program, especially for Hispanic students who sometimes think they can't go to college. It just seems out of reach."

Alienation and Providing a Sense of Community On-Campus. Hispanic students may also feel a greater sense of alienation on a predominately non-Hispanic campus. Gonzalez (2002) noted this sense of alienation when he presented research on two Hispanic college students he studied over the course of two years (pp. 203, 208). The research indicated that "Latino students as an aggregate also interpreted the culture or climate of predominantly Caucasian colleges and universities as alienating, isolating, hostile and unsupportive" (p. 194).

While the students interviewed in the study, did not discuss sharing feelings of alienation and isolation, they did touch on how The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program helped them build a sense of community, on the predominately Caucasian, campus. This community building was largely done through participation in the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP), through on-campus clubs, community events and through the Latina conference planning. Every spring, Bellevue University hosted a Latina conference on-campus. Students from The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program volunteered their time to plan and implement the conference.

One student talked about the relationships she had built with her fellow South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students. "The students I know in the same scholarship, we have met at several community events they have, especially at the Latina conference. We see each other in class and we stick together."

Language Barrier. As the demographic information of this research clearly showed, most of the students in this research were first-generation college students in the United States. Zalaquett (2006, p. 36) noted that Hispanic students may have a lower proficiency in English, which may prevent them from completing their college education.

The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program attempted to address any language barriers by providing a resource for financial aid and academic advising assistance in Spanish, if needed. As one student noted, this bi-lingual option in her financial aid counseling may have been the difference in her continuing on to graduation. The student went on to comment on the session and the assistance she received by saying,

> I had never filed a FAFSA before and she (the Project Specialist) kind of helped me with that, she sat with me and said, 'we are going to do this and we are going to do it today.' It was funny because she just helped me through, probably if she had not helped me, I would have quit like the first time. You know what? I don't want to go to college anymore. It's scary.

The Student Impact on Their Community. The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program also assisted students in impacting their community. Students reported being kept informed, by the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program Project Specialist, on volunteer and employment opportunities in the South Omaha community. Zalaquett (2006) suggested that mentoring Hispanic students can play a critical role in college success. The interviewed students talked about, how having this scholarship opportunity, has helped them see the need to give back to their community.

One student shared how the service learning opportunities had helped provide her and her children ideas on volunteering options in the community. She said,

> even my kids get to volunteer and do certain things and get involved because I would take them and its fun, because it's like the Latino community in a sense and my kids love that part of it. So we go and volunteer whenever we can.

The student went on to say that she has used communications from the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program to refer her friends and family to resources within the Hispanic community in Omaha.

Another student talked about how the program has helped her understand the importance of community involvement. "It kind of helped me understand getting involved, the recognition of what I was given and now I do want to do a lot of community service."

Recommendations for Further Study

The goal of this research project was to determine what impact the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue University. The findings were divided into the five components within the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, the student impact on the South Omaha Community, and other themes that emerged from the interviews. Hispanic student persistence in higher education will continue to be an important topic of discussion and action, because of the impact that the Hispanic population growth will have on the United States and education.

Future research could focus on programs that are similar to the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) which is offered in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program. This study could be conducted again focusing on students who participated in all three years of programming in PEP at Bellevue University.

Another area of research that could be conducted would be to interview students who were admitted to the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program but did not persist to their junior year. The research could focus on why the students left, at what point they left the university, and if they persisted to graduation at another institution.

Conclusion

The 2010 Census is expected to show Hispanic's surpassing African-American's as the largest minority group in the United States (U.S. Census). The Hispanic population growth will be substantially felt in higher education. The American Council on Education noted, in a 2009 policy paper, that "minority students will account for practically all of the growth among high school graduates over the next decade, with Hispanic graduates alone almost completely offsetting the decrease in white, non-Hispanic graduates" (2009, p. 4).

As the Hispanic population increases in the United States, their participation in college and persistence to graduation, has not increased at the same rate (American Council on Education, 2007, p. 3). The reasons for this lack of persistence vary, but Hispanic students are more likely to come from lower economic means than Caucasian students (Zurita, 2004, p. 302), they are more likely to be first-generation students (Zalaquett, 2006, p. 40), and less likely to be prepared academically for college (Brown, Santiago and Lopez, 2003, p. 41).

This study focused on the The South Omaha Community Scholarship Program at Bellevue University. The program provided financial, academic and other support resources, to Hispanic students, admitted to the program. The students interviewed for this study provided an account of how their participation in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had impacted both their academic career and their life beyond Bellevue University.

The interviewed students expressed how the scholarship aid was their primary motivating factor to attend and persist in college. They also discussed the academic

advising support they received on campus, the community they built on-campus, through the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program, and the campus resources they utilized.

The students also provided an account of how the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program impacted their life beyond Bellevue University. Students talked about how the program gave them an opportunity to attend college, provided them with volunteer and employment opportunities in the South Omaha community and helped strengthen their connection to their local community.

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Appendix A

Research Questions

Research Questions

Grand Tour Research Question

What was the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue University?

Additional Research Questions

RQ1) What impact has the bi-lingual financial aid advising had on the student's educational experience?

RQ2) What impact has the bi-lingual academic advising had on the student's educational experience?

RQ3) What impact has the scholarship had on the student's ability to persist?

RQ4) What impact has the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) had on the student's ability to persist?

RQ5) What impact has the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had on the student's life beyond Bellevue University?

Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

List of interview questions:
-Tell me about yourself. Collect following information for comparison data:
-name

-age
-ethnicity
-home language
-parental education level
-American generation
-grade level
-expected graduation date

-Tell me about yourself.
-What interested you in attending Bellevue University?
-What other educational institutions did you look at when making a college decision?
-How did you find out about the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program?
-Why did you choose to participate in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program?

What is the impact of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program on Hispanic student persistence at Bellevue University?

RQ1) What impact has the bi-lingual financial aid advising had on the student's educational experience?

-Bellevue University offers financial aid counseling, to South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students, in both Spanish and English. During the course of your education at BU, have you received bi-lingual financial aid counseling? If so, could you talk about the effect that counseling has had on your understanding of your financial aid situation at BU?
-Have you received financial aid materials in both English and Spanish? Could you expand upon what type of materials you have received?
-Has having those bi-lingual financial aid materials and/or counseling helped you make financial decisions in regard to your education at BU? If so, could you talk about what information helped you make those decisions?
-Did the ability to receive bi-lingual financial aid counseling have any bearing on your decision to attend Bellevue University?
-Do you have any comments about your overall experience with financial aid process at BU? Have you found the process to be adequate?

RQ2) What impact has the bi-lingual academic advising had on the student's educational experience?

-Bellevue University offers academic advising, to South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students, in both Spanish and English. During the course of your time at BU,

have you received bi-lingual academic advising? If yes, could you talk about the influence the bi-lingual advising options have had on your academic advising sessions?
-Who has provided the bi-lingual academic advising at BU?   Do you consistently see the same person when you have advising needs?
-Has having academic advising options, in both Spanish and English, effected your ability to make academic decisions? Such as?
-Did the ability to receive bi-lingual academic advising have any bearing on whether you attended Bellevue University?
-Do you have any comments about your overall experience with the academic advising process at BU? Have you found the process to be adequate?

RQ3) What impact has the scholarship had on the student's ability to persist?

- South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students receive financial assistance through a scholarship. What role did the scholarship play in your decision to attend Bellevue University?
-Would you be able to attend BU without the scholarship?

RQ4) What impact has the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) had on the student's ability to persist?

Bellevue University requires South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students to participate in the PEP program.   Would you please talk about the topics in PEP that you have found to be beneficial to your education at BU? What areas of the program have you enjoyed?
-Could you talk about any topics that have been less beneficial? What areas have you found to be less effective?
- South Omaha Community Scholarship Program students attend PEP together throughout the program. Would you talk about what it has been like to have your class of South Omaha Project students in the same PEP class?   Have you been able to build relationships with other South Omaha Project students at BU because of the program?

RQ5) What impact has the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had on the student's life beyond Bellevue University?

-We have focused on the influence the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program has had on your life at BU. Could you talk about its effect beyond Bellevue University? Has being a member of the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program influenced other areas of your life? If so, how?
-Have you noticed any type of effect that your participation in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program has had on your family? Has your participation in the South Omaha Community Scholarship Program had any effect on your community? If so, could you provide examples?

Appendix C

University of Nebraska Lincoln Internal Review Board Approval

University of Nebraska
Lincoln

March 22, 2010

Tracy McTavish
Department of Educational Administration
7305 Wyoming St Omaha, NE 68122

Richard Hoover
Department of Educational Administration
119 TEAC UNL 68588-0360

IRB Number: 20100310734EP
Project ID: 10734
Project Title: South Omaha Project

Dear Tracy:

This letter is to officially notify you of the approval of your project by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects. It is the Board's opinion that you have provided adequate safeguards for the rights and welfare of the participants in this study based on the information provided. Your proposal is in compliance with this institution's Federal Wide Assurance 00002258 and the DHHS Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects (45 CFR 46).

Your stamped and approved informed consent form has been uploaded to NUgrant (Informed_Consent_Form-Approved.pdf file). Please use this form to make copies to distribute to participants. If changes need to be made, please submit the revised informed consent form to the IRB for approval prior to using it.

Date of EP Review: 03/18/2010

You are authorized to implement this study as of the Date of Final Approval: 03/22/2010. This approval is Valid Until: 03/21/2011.

We wish to remind you that the principal investigator is responsible for reporting to this Board any of the following events within 48 hours of the event:
* Any serious event (including on-site and off-site adverse events, injuries, side effects, deaths, or other problems) which in the opinion of the local investigator was unanticipated, involved risk to subjects or others, and was possibly related to the research procedures;
* Any serious accidental or unintentional change to the IRB-approved protocol that involves risk or has the potential to recur;
* Any publication in the literature, safety monitoring report, interim result or other finding that indicates an unexpected change to the risk/benefit ratio of the research;
* Any breach in confidentiality or compromise in data privacy related to the subject or others; or
* Any complaint of a subject that indicates an unanticipated risk or that cannot be resolved by the research staff.

For projects which continue beyond one year from the starting date, the IRB will request continuing review and update of the research project. Your study will be due for continuing review as indicated above. The investigator must also advise the Board when this study is finished or discontinued by completing the enclosed Protocol Final Report form and returning it to the Institutional Review Board.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB office at 472-6965.

Sincerely,
{Mario's Signature}
Mario Scalora, Ph.D.
Chair for the IRB

Appendix D

Letter of Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Identification of Project: South Omaha Research

Purpose of the Research:

The purpose of this study is to determine the impact of the South Omaha Project on the persistence, at Bellevue University, of the Hispanic studies who participate. Students accepted into the scholarship program receive additional services, including: bi-lingual financial aid advising, bi-lingual advising support, a scholarship and required participation in an enrichment program.

Procedures:

Participation in this research project will take approximately 60 minutes of your time. An interview will be conducted by Tracy McTavish Mlady in the Academic Services office. The interview will be audio taped with your permission.

Risks and/or Discomforts:

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this research.

Benefits:

The benefit of this study is to determine what is working in terms of student persistence in the South Omaha Project. This study will also help identify areas of improvement. The South Omaha Project can use this information to make changes to their program to better serve their students.

Confidentiality:

You will be identified by an alias in this research project. You may be quoted in the research project and any quotes may be attributed to your alias. The raw interview data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the investigator's home office and will be seen by only the investigator during the study. The audio tapes will be erased after transcription. The data will be stored for three years after the study is completed and then destroyed. The thesis will be provided to Bellevue University and the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. There is the potential that the research could be used in a conference

presentation in the future, however, only your alias would be identified in the presentation.

Compensation:

There will be no compensation for participating in this research.

Opportunity to Ask Questions:

If at any point before or during this study, you have questions regarding this research project, you have the right to have those questions answered.   Please also contact Tracy McTavish Mlady or Dr. Richard Hoover if you want to voice concerns or complaints about the research. Tracy McTavish Mlady may be reached by office phone, (402) 557-7023, or after hours, (402) 650-9207. Dr. Hoover may be reached at his office, (402) 472-3058.

Please contact the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Institutional Review Board at (402) 472-6965 for the following reasons:
- you wish to talk to someone other than the research staff to obtain answers to questions about your rights as a research participant
- to voice concerns or complaints about the research
- to provide input concerning the research process
- in the event the study staff could not be reached,

Freedom to Withdraw:

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without harming your relationship with the researchers, Bellevue University or the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, or in any other way receive a penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Participation in this study does not affect your South Omaha Project scholarship.

Consent, Right to Receive a Copy:

You are voluntarily making a decision whether or not to participate in this research study. Your signature certifies that you have decided to participate having read and understood the information presented. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep.

_____   Check if you agree to be audio taped during the interview.

Signature of Participant:

_____
Signature of Research Participant

_____
Date

Name and Phone number of investigator(s)
Tracy McTavish Mlady, Principal Investigator
Office: (402) 557-7023
Dr. Richard Hoover, Secondary Investigator and Thesis Adviser
Office (402) 472-3058
_____

_____

Appendix E

Initial Email Contact to Selected Students

Tracy McTavish Mlady
Email to Selected Students

Email Title:
South Omaha Project

Email:
Dear (Insert Student Name):

You have been selected to participate in a thesis research project regarding the South Omaha Project. The purpose of this research is to determine the impact the South Omaha Project has had on your educational experience at Bellevue University.

If you agree to participate, I will need approximately 60 minutes of your time to conduct an audio taped interview. Your decision on whether or not to participate in no way affects your South Omaha scholarship.

Please contact me by replying to this email or by phone at 557-7023.   I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

Thank you for your time.

Tracy McTavish Mlady

Appendix F

Phone Script for Establishing an Interview

Tracy McTavish Mlady
Phone Script

Hello (Insert Student Name),

I am contacting you to set up an interview for the South Omaha Project research I am conducting. As I indicated in my previous email, you were selected to participate based on your admittance to the South Omaha Project. Just to reiterate, your participation has no bearing on your status in the project. You can decide not to participate in the interview at any time.

I would like to schedule an hour to conduct an interview regarding your experience in the South Omaha Project. When would it be convenient for you to meet?

We can either meet in my office in the Learning Center or off-campus. Which would you prefer? (If student would like to meet off-campus, ask location. If student doesn't have a preference, suggest the coffee shop across the street).

Do you have any questions for me? If not, I will see you at (include date and time) at (include location). Thank you.

Appendix G

Research Coding

Research Coding

<u>Five Research Questions</u>

FA = Financial Aid Counseling

    RQ1   What impact did the bi-lingual financial aid advising have on the student's

educational experience?

AA = Academic Advising

    RQ2   What impact did the bi-lingual academic advising have on the student's

educational experience?

S = Scholarship

    RQ3   What impact did the scholarship have on the student's ability to persist?

PEP = Professional Enrichment Program

    RQ4   What impact did the Professional Enrichment Program (PEP) have on the

student's ability to persist?

SL = Student Life beyond Bellevue University

    RQ5   What impact did the South Omaha Project have on the student's life

beyond Bellevue University?

OT = Other Themes

    Class Format

    Deciding on a College

    Higher Education Course

    Campus Resources

    A Sense of Community On-Campus