ACADEMIC EXPERIENCES OF FORMER AVID HISPANIC STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

ERIN FOGLEMAN

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Momma, you never gave up on me. Thank you for pushing me to realize my inner strength, for ignoring the scattered mess of articles, and for listening to me for hours on end. Rob, you never stopped encouraging me. Thank you for listening to me complain and for shutting me up with your pep talks. Daddy, you supported me and continued believing in me. Thank you for all your words of wisdom. Rose, you always knew when I needed a hug, and you never complained about tagging along to my classes or study groups. Thank you for not allowing me to quit. You will travel many paths in life, and I promise to always walk with you. I challenge you to learn everything you can and to push the boundaries of understanding.

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Abstract

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STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Erin Fogleman, Ph.D.

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Supervising Professor: Jeanne Gerlach

As a response to the underrepresentation of Hispanic students within four-year higher education institutions (Boden, 2011; Tinto, 2012), this study sought to better understand a) how first-year Hispanic students managed and maintained success and b) how strategies learned in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) impacted that success. AVID is a college-readiness system that aims to close the educational achievement gap through improving the college access and academic skills among underrepresented students. Results gleaned from this in-depth, qualitative examination of four male and four female Hispanic participants reveal five attributes to a successful first-year. Those attributes are 1) participate in rigorous courses while in high school, 2) participate in AVID for five or more years, 3) establish at least one system of support, 4) develop cognitive and non-cognitive skills necessary for navigating the complexities of the academic experience, and 5) create effective time management strategies. Using Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, this study reveals that participants have developed their cultural capital through a) embodying successful academic and non-academic habits, b) strengthening their ability to sustain academic conversations with
peers, and c) increasing their chances of attaining institutional credentials. Because of this increased cultural capital among participants, this study concludes that developing cultural capital is improving participants’ level of higher education success.
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Chapter 1

Design of the Study

1.1 Introduction

The policy initiative No Child Left Behind (NCLB) of 2001 has brought to the forefront of our educational system the need to improve the college- and career-readiness skills of America’s disadvantaged students and to hold schools accountable for making adequate yearly progress with these students ([No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002]). A recent reauthorization of NCLB has placed even more emphasis on improving the college- and career-readiness of America’s youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). This reauthorization urges K-12 and postsecondary institutions to create meaningful partnerships in order to address the escalating first-year remedial course participation in postsecondary education.

With this reauthorization of NCLB, the current educational statistics and literature on Hispanic students, in particular, indicates that Hispanic student enrollment in higher education is increasing (Snyder & Dillow, 2012c). However, a problem continues to exist with these students remaining underrepresented in public, four-year higher education institutions (Boden, 2011; Tinto, 2012). As a result, this underrepresentation with “[America’s] fastest growing population” (Brown & Lopez, 2013) “will ultimately jeopardize [America’s] standing as a world power in an increasingly competitive and knowledge-based global economy that is highly dependent on skills in mathematics, science, and technology” (Valverde, 2008, p. xi).

To ensure successful careers in mathematics, science, and technology, a strong foundation in the middle and secondary schools core subjects must prepare students for college curricula. Also, in order to be successful in all subjects, students must demonstrate competency in literacy. The development of literacy skills that translate
across all academic discourses is vital for a student’s success in higher education (Reucker, 2013). In particular, if Hispanic students are academically unable to perform more successfully in the higher education system, they will discover more difficulty in attaining credentialed-necessary positions in future job markets in order to sustain themselves economically (Murdoch, White, Hoque, Pecotte, You, & Balkan, 2003; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). As a result, U. S. educational institutions are presented with the challenge of adapting to meet Hispanic students in their institutions in order for students to attain the necessary college degrees for future career choices (Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009). Valverde, Arispe y Acevedo, and Perez (2008) explain that systemic changes in our higher education systems are necessary in order to uphold our country’s economic and institutional vitality and to ensure that the Hispanic community is competitive in the American job market.

Hispanic students “trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico…Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures” (Office of Management and Budget, 1997, October). In 2012, Hispanics accounted for 38.2% of all individuals living in the state of Texas (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013a) making Texas the state with the second largest population of Hispanics, second only to California (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012, September). More specifically, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio are nationally ranked within the top 10 urban areas with the largest population of Hispanics (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2012, September). In addition, Hispanic students account for 48% of Texas K-12 schools (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013). Considering that 49% of all Texas births in 2010 were to Hispanic mothers (Pew Hispanic Center, 2013), the Hispanic population in Texas K-12 schools will continue to increase, thereby leading educational leaders and administrators to continuously evaluate what is and is not working for this growing majority of students.
Situated in a North Central Texas junior high school, Hispanic students constitute a large portion of the students I teach (Hispanic/Latino 39%, White 27%, Black 24%, Asian 4%, Two or more races 5%, Other 0%). (The terms Hispanic and Latino/a will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.) In addition, my students are considered low socio-economic due to their parents’ level of “education, income, and occupation” (American Psychological Association, 2014). These students are all enrolled in Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an educational reform system that focuses on improving access to higher education institutions for primarily minority students. As the AVID coordinator and elective teacher, my responsibilities include working with seventh and eighth grade students on developing appropriate college-readiness skills. A college-ready student is one who does not need remedial courses upon enrolling in a postsecondary institution (Conley, 2012). AVID’s mission, therefore, is to prepare students for college by holding them to high expectations and the academic and social skills necessary to succeed in college level classes (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.c).

Part of the AVID curriculum involves goal setting and reflection, which lead to lengthy classroom discussions and opportunities for the development of college-readiness skills. Many times my students will describe their perfect future, and college is a common theme. Students explain that their answer to securing a better life for themselves and their family is attaining a college degree. For example, my students believe that this will afford them a higher paying job, the option of medical benefits, and the pride of achieving part of the American dream. If my students are determined to develop the skills necessary to surpass their parents’ educationally, it is my responsibility as their AVID teacher to facilitate each student’s step in the process of becoming college-ready. This study is the result of my getting to know and understand each student’s
challenges and aspirations of attaining a college degree. A passion for guiding AVID students’ into fulfilling their dream of a college education has led me to study the Hispanic population and the specific academic and social necessities for this particular group.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Unlike national statistics of college enrollment (White 64%, Hispanic 11%, Black 11.5%, Asian/Pacific Islander 6.6%, two or more races 1.5%, Other 5.4%) (Snyder & Dillow, 2012c) Hispanics have a larger presence in Texas higher education institutions (White 45.1%, Hispanic 30.7%, Black 13.6%, Asian/Pacific Islander 5.4%, Two or more races 1%, Other 3.2%) (Snyder & Dillow, 2012b). In spite of this high Hispanic concentration in Texas as compared to the nation, they remain an underrepresented population within our postsecondary institutions. When examining demographic data on the percentages of degree completion, Hispanic students are not graduating at a rate comparable to their peers. Nationally fewer Hispanic students (8.5%) are graduating with a bachelor’s degree than Whites (70.8%) and Blacks (10%) (Snyder & Dillow, 2012a). In particular, Hispanic students in Texas higher education institutions are experiencing a higher rate of success when compared to the overall national rate of higher educational success (19.7%); however, they are greatly surpassed by their White peers (60.6%) (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2013).
Table 1.1 Enrollment and Degree Completion Statistics in Public Higher Education Institutions

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Enrollment (%)</th>
<th>Degree Completion (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>U. S.</td>
<td>Texas</td>
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<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two or more races</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
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* Asian only
As evident in the table above, the rate at which Hispanic students are graduating from colleges in Texas is neither equal nor closely proportionate to their initial enrollment in higher education. Data found in Table 1 a) indicates a major achievement gap between Hispanic and White students in higher education (Whites 60.6% and Hispanic 19.7%) and b) exposes the difficulties that Hispanic students are experiencing in attaining a college degree. Moreover, the U. S. Department of Education predicts that the national college going rate for Hispanics will increase 46% by 2020 due to Hispanic immigration, migration, and birth rates reported in the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau data (Hussar & Bailey, 2011). With this increase in Hispanic students in higher education institutions comes the burden of finding ways to improve the retention and the degree completion rates of these students. Consequently, a higher percentage of Hispanic students should translate to a higher percentage of degree completers.

“Given the current socioeconomic differentials among racial/ethnic groups, [a] growing diversity presents a major challenge to Texas” (Murdoch, White, Hoque, Pecotte, You, & Balkan, 2003, p. 223). Murdoch et al. (2003) explains that the future of Texas rests on the non-Anglos, and how they will change in the coming years. In conclusion, if the percentage of Hispanics categorized as having lower educational levels (i.e. high school diploma or less) does not change, the labor force in Texas will be a majority of uneducated workers. As a result of this urgency, institutions should “translate the culture of academe into frameworks that are understood by and work for Latino students” (Ortiz, 2004, p. 97). It is these frameworks, which represent the foundations upon which Hispanic students develop their identity—relationships with family and community are critical. Including this cultural framework response will then provide greater understanding of opportunities for Hispanics to attain the necessary level of education. In light of the preceding information, Texas higher education institutions are placed in a
unique position to more effectively partner with Hispanic students in order to improve their college retention as the Hispanic postsecondary population continues to rise.

1.3 Background

In looking for ways to more effectively educate future college-going Hispanic students to ensure success in higher education, attention must also be turned to programs that focus on underrepresented students. TRIO, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs (GEAR UP), and Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) are college preparatory programs funded through the federal government. Each entity individually works toward changing the landscape of these underrepresented students’ aspirations of higher education. TRIO is a compilation of numerous federal grant programs focused on improving the education of minority, first-generation, and low-income students [U.S. Department of Education, 2015]. Each of the TRIO programs was developed by the federal government as initiatives to create change in the educational outlook for many of America’s students. Based on university campuses and agencies within the community, program staff work with K-12 students on developing a foundational knowledge of college, as well as support higher education students in their quest for a degree.

GEAR UP is also a federally funded program that specifically works with middle and high school students [U.S. Department of Education, 2014]. By design GEAR UP is structured as a separate entity within a school to help low-income students have access to postsecondary opportunities through counseling services and scholarships. Research indicates that GEAR UP and AVID positively impacts the postsecondary aspirations of participants (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009). These participants credited the early introduction to college life and experience with rigorous coursework as strengthening
their preparation for college. The greater the number of opportunities students connected with collegiate experience translated into more students choosing to enroll in college.

Similar to TRIO and GEAR UP, AVID’s mission is to support and challenge minority students for an educational future beyond K-12 education. However, AVID is unique from these two programs in that a) it was founded by a high school teacher as a response to the low achievements of minority students within her school, b) it is built as a schoolwide reform model for all students to succeed not just low-income, minority students, and c) it is a year-long class that students attend each day (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.c). Through high expectations and a rigorous academic program AVID “holds students accountable to the highest standards [and] provides academic and social support” (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.c). AVID elective teachers work with students daily to develop effective collaboration skills, reading and writing skills, as well as organization and note-taking skills. Due to the overwhelming success of minority students in the AVID elective class, the popularity of AVID has grown exponentially and can be found in the K-12 and higher education systems of 46 states and 16 countries (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.c).

The AVID college-readiness system is structured around eleven essentials—Student Recruitment, Voluntary Participation, The AVID Elective Class, Rigor, Organization, Writing and Reading, Inquiry and Collaboration, Tutorials, Data Collection and Analysis, School and District Resources, and Site Team (McGinnis, Mettler, & Schiro, 2014). These essentials are the principals that local AVID programs follow throughout the year. To ensure that local AVID sites are most effective, each site follows a certification process of presenting evidence to district leaders of having followed program essentials. It is then determined if the local AVID site remains certified.
Within a school, the AVID team recruits students who are individually determined to succeed and have the ability to remain in honors level coursework with the AVID support structure (McGinnis, Mettler, & Schiro, 2014). These students have demonstrated their success by maintaining passing grades in their academic coursework as well as passing standardized tests. In addition to a student’s academic potential, AVID focuses on students who fit any or all of the following criteria: first-generation to college, low-income, single-parent home, and traditionally underrepresented population. A student with any special circumstances that would prevent him or her to succeed academically or have access to postsecondary institutions can be selected as an AVID student.

Meeting once each day for the duration of an entire class period AVID students are exposed to a multitude of strategies that support them in reading and writing, inquiry and collaboration, and organization. Rather than teaching a specific content, the AVID curriculum is designed to instruct students on how to incorporate academic strategies across all content areas. Critical reading, note taking, higher level questioning, collaborative discussion, problem solving, and project planning are all skills that AVID builds as a foundation for success. With the help of college tutors, students are steeped in collaborative problem-solving techniques. The purpose of these collaborative strategies is to develop students’ confidence in their own problem-solving ability so that they are able to independently work through academic problems on their own. College tutors in AVID classrooms also provide a vicarious experience of college life for the AVID students. The rapport built between the tutors and the students is critical because the tutor serves the important role of mentor and an example of academic success. As further exposure to college life, AVID requires all sites to expose students to a college campus. As the first exposure to college for most AVID students, the university campus
visit provides students the opportunity to see college through their own lens—dormitories, classrooms, eateries, and recreation facilities. Another key component of each AVID program is the AVID site team, who deliver AVID principles into all classrooms within the school. This process supports AVID belief of ensuring the academic success for all students. Through on-campus professional development focused upon the AVID activities and beliefs, all students are exposed to research-based academic strategies that promote individual success.

As a result of AVID’s specific educational success with Hispanic K-12 students (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.a), AVID strategies are one focus of this study. Playing a pivotal role in the success of these students is AVID’s unique structure—immersing students in an academic climate for an entire class period. The atmosphere of the class is built on high academic expectations, as well as a safe learning environment. Students are taught strategies to succeed and are supported emotionally to develop the necessary confidence.

1.4 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the first-year college experiences of former AVID Hispanic students in a public, four-year higher education institution in the state of Texas. Further, this study discovered how a small group of male and female Hispanic students have remained successful throughout their first-year of college. Success in this case was measured when a participant enrolled for a second consecutive year at the same university. By studying successful Hispanic students this study furthers the research on Hispanic persistence and inform K-16 practitioners on the effective practices used by successful male and female Hispanic college students. The study of successful students provides both researchers and practitioners a glimpse into the unique challenges and paths taken to overcome those challenges (Cavasos,
Johnson, & Sparrow, 2010; Zalaquett, 2006). Consequently, the factors influencing the success of these students may lead to improving the success of other students.

Combining participants’ lived experiences and their conceptualizations of those lived experiences afford rich textual descriptions (Creswell, 2009; Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007). It is from a reflective analysis of those descriptions that an understanding is made of how participants are able to persist into their second year of college. Reflective analysis is a process in which “the researcher relies primarily on intuition and judgment” to make sense of the data thereby adding to the depth of understanding the data (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, p. 472). However, the researcher is continuously aware of any potential bias that may interfere with the interpretation of data (Creswell, 2009). The intended outcome was to add to the body of research on the higher education success of Hispanic students and the AVID college-readiness system.

Moreover, this study gathered more information on the academic experiences of former AVID Hispanic students that persist into their second year of the same public, four-year university. In addition, the social experiences of students were examined for the sole purpose of how social aspects of campus life correspond with a successful academic life. Research indicates that social experiences play a pivotal role in the success of students during their first-year of college (Maestas, Vaquera, Zehr, 2007). From time management decisions (Kitsantas, Winsler, & Huie, 2008) to feeling a sense of belonging (Hurtado, Han, Saenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna, 2007), first-year students are vulnerable on a college campus. Therefore, combining the academic and social experiences of first-year Hispanic students has provided insight into how each participate constructs their own success.

This examination of the first-year experiences of successful Hispanic students addresses the following research question:
1. What are the first-year experiences of former AVID Hispanic students within a four-year higher education institution?

In order to fully understand the various aspects of a successful first-year experience, the following sub-questions were examined:

a. What are the academic experiences of these students?

b. What strategies do these students attribute to their success?

c. What are the social experiences of these students as pertaining to their academic environment?

d. What part, if any, did AVID play in these students’ success?

1.5 Significance of the Study

With evidence showing Hispanic students in Texas are not completing undergraduate degrees at a rate comparable to their White peers (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2013), this study sheds light on what practices and programs are critical to successful Hispanic college students in their first-year of a higher education institution. More specifically, this study has examined AVID’s influence on the freshman academic experience in higher education through the words of each participant. The national AVID Center’s data shows evidence that AVID Hispanic students are entering college more prepared and at a higher rate than non-AVID Hispanic students (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.a). However, more studies are needed to describe whether or not the strategies of AVID learned in high school are assisting students during their initial year of postsecondary education. Given AVID’s success in preparing K-12 students for college, this study further investigated the success of former AVID graduates currently pursuing degrees in higher education.
1.6 Theoretical Framework

As an underrepresented population in higher education institutions, Hispanic students typically lack the knowledge of understanding the many facets of higher education and, therefore, rely on others to assist them in developing that knowledge (Farmer-Hinton, 2008). As a result, research indicates that underrepresented students benefit when K-12 institutions help them develop a strong academic foundation and healthy understanding of how to access college (Boden, 2011; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn & Platt, 2011). Furthermore, Bourdieu (1986) claims the relationship between “the whole set of educational strategies and the system of reproduction strategies… [is] the best hidden and socially most determinant educational investment, namely, the domestic transmission of cultural capital” (p. 244). From this we can begin to understand that the theory of cultural capital concerns the combination of academic knowledge and family and social experiences. Because cultural capital develops slowly and has the ability to develop or extinguish inequities between individuals, capital can be understood as the embodiment of power (Bourdieu, 1986). In this sense, power constitutes the foundation at which an individual becomes an agent of change, whether for themselves personally or that of others. Moreover, institutions stand in a prime position to empower students with a means of attaining the cultural knowledge deemed necessary to access and succeed in a higher educational institution.

In order to become an agent of change and build power through cultural capital, Bourdieu (1986) explains that there are three structural components—embodied state, objectified state, and institutionalized state. Each of these states works continuously and in unison to exemplify a hidden curriculum that catapults an individual to a certain level of acquired cultural capital (Moore, 2012). The embodied state involves the development of
the internal being, or “habitus,” through situations where an individual is positioned with others that possess more cultural awareness (Bourdieu, 1986). Repeated experiences of such build one’s “habitus,” which are those dispositions acquired in life causing individuals to act as they do. Next, the objectified state develops as an individual gains culture by way of transmission, whether through gifts or an understanding of an object’s deeper meaning. However, the symbolic nature of understanding and gaining the ability to make use of these gifts demonstrates a significant growth in cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Lastly, the institutionalized state arises as an individual acquires academic credentials (Bourdieu, 1986). These academic credentials provide the path to establishing one’s self in the labor market and gaining the position around others with potentially more cultural capital. Because of the academic institution’s power to situate an individual into a new, and perhaps better, economic position, it is considered the most important state of acquiring cultural capital (Moore, 2012).

The significance of the combination of embodied, objectified, and institutionalized states rests in its continuous development of an individual’s cultural capital (Moore, 2012). When examining the higher education experiences of former AVID Hispanic students, this study has discovered how each of these states within the cultural capital framework played in developing successful Hispanic students. As this theory recognizes that the educational institution has a place in developing cultural capital, the intent of this study was also to further investigate whether AVID plays a role in developing a participant’s non-economic form of power.

1.7 Conclusion

National data reflects an unbalanced proportion of ethnicity among students in higher education institutions. Hispanic students, especially, are underrepresented when considering their increase in population, both nationally and in the state of Texas.
Presented as a moral (Valverde, Arispe y Acevedo, & Perez, 2008) and financial (Murdoch, White, Hoque, Pecotte, You, & Balkan, 2003; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2009) problem for our educational system and our country, policy makers and researchers alike are continuously searching for answers and implementing programs in order to close the achievement gap for underrepresented populations. As a result, this study attempted to provide insight on how a small group of former AVID Hispanic students are constructing their own success in a public, four-year higher education institution in the state of Texas.

The next chapter synthesizes the existing body of literature focused on Hispanic students and their first-year experience in a public, 4-year institution. Multiple subsections within the review of literature are presented in order to fully describe the first-year experience as pertaining to this study—academic experiences, strategies used, and social experiences. Chapter three includes the methodological details in completing this research study—research design, participant description, site selection, data collection, and data analysis. Results are then discussed in chapter four using thick, rich descriptions so that an accurate presentation of participants’ first-year experience is provided. This chapter is structured similar to chapter two in order to show whether or not participants’ experiences align with current research. Finally, chapter five presents limitations of this study and recommendations for future research based on a thorough analysis of participant interviews.
Chapter 2
Review of Literature

2.1 Introduction

The following chapter synthesizes the body of research on first-year Hispanic students and their academic and social experiences that may lead to potential success in higher education. Because evidence suggests that the knowledge and skills that students bring to postsecondary is directly related to their academic outcomes, the first section elaborates on the pre-college development of students. Subsequently, a section on the AVID College Readiness System is presented in order to show how a select group of students prepare for college success. Finally, sections on academic and social experiences create a foundation of which this study aims to investigate. Throughout this examination, specific gaps in the literature are explored.

2.2 Pre-College Development and College-Readiness

Becoming college-ready is a nationwide initiative and a focus of the K-12 educational system. This literature review begins by examining the pre-college development of Hispanic students. An examination is necessary because a significant amount of research indicates that the knowledge and skills students develop prior to college predicts their level of success in higher education (Conley, 2012; Contreras, 2011; Porter & Polikoff, 2012). College-ready means that a student has acquired the prerequisite skills to be successful with college-level coursework. To become college-ready, students need to be exposed to rich and worthwhile academic experiences, which provide a foundation for future academic growth. Research indicates a variety of factors contributing to the development of college-ready students. Those factors are explored throughout this
section for the purpose of better understanding what contributes to the academic success of Hispanic students, in particular.

As a leading researcher of college-readiness, Conley (2007a; 2007b) explains that many students are graduating high school ill prepared for the expectations of college professors, thus causing high enrollment in remedial courses. One such reason is the many variations existing between student demands in secondary and post-secondary academic institutions—work load, depth of reasoning, analytical ability, and work ethic. In an effort to close this institutional gap of expectations and practice, Conley (2007a) suggests that high schools should increase their level of academic expectations, structure course syllabi similar to college, and institute a pre-college seminar for senior students. When exposed to this type of academically rich environment, students improve their academic behaviors. A key piece of developing college-ready students focuses not only on cognitive behaviors, but on the development of non-cognitive behaviors as well. “Goal-driven behaviors, persistence, study skills, and self-monitoring” (Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011, p. 385) are four actions that measure college-readiness. Researchers deemed it necessary to incorporate these non-cognitive behaviors into course syllabi and expectations because they greatly improved participants’ college-readiness. In addition, Lombardi, Seburn, and Conley (2011) suggest schools place added attention on the Hispanic population since data within their study showed weakness among this population of students in developing these important non-cognitive skills.

Another contributing factor of high school experience on postsecondary success is the participation in rigorous coursework (Ishitani, 2006; Porter & Polikoff, 2012). Ishitani (2006) used large, national data sets to statistically show that the academic achievement level of first-generation college students has a direct impact on their success in a postsecondary institution. The higher students rank academically in their
high school graduating class, the higher their chances of graduating from college (Ishitani, 2006). Secondly, in a meta-analysis of literature on college-readiness indicators, Porter and Polikoff (2012) conclude that “college preparatory courses… with mathematics courses being the strongest predictors” (p. 400) prepare students the most for the rigors of college. By successfully completing Advanced Placement (AP) courses, especially in math, students are improving their chances at having a successful first-year of college. In sum, the level which students are academically prepared for the rigors of college has a significant impact on their postsecondary experiences (Porter & Polikoff, 2012).

When participating in these rigorous, college-preparatory courses, research indicates that students benefit from an affirming space, which are classrooms that welcome culturally rich discussions (Cooper, 2012). Through witnessing five Latina students in various courses, Cooper (2012) observed different factors impacting each student’s level of academic engagement. Attending a high minority, high poverty high school in Los Angeles where only 24% of Latina/o students completed the necessary credits for college enrollment, the participants varied in their academic ability. However, those classrooms that celebrated and supported the Latina/o identity of minority students had the most impact on student engagement. Therefore, the most important factor in developing a strong academic identity among the participants was an affirming space. Discussions such as these allowed participants to build confidence in that they had something viable to contribute to the learning community. As a result, Cooper (2012) posits improvements in the academic engagement of Latina students make them more productive in a challenging environment. This positive experience leads Latina students to develop a stronger sense of belonging in an academic setting and to strengthen their chance at success.
Part of creating affirming learning spaces is to foster a climate of high expectations and to provide a supportive structure for students to succeed and have the opportunity to access postsecondary institutions (Reddick et al., 2011). Through numerous focus groups with mostly Latino/a students, participants revealed that support structures were most beneficial when established early on in high school. Support structures include “counselors, teachers, and administrators” (Reddick et al., 2011, p. 611); college-bound student mentors; relationships with local colleges; and parental involvement in establishing college goals. Even though participants were motivated to achieve academically, they express the importance of accountability. When held accountable for their success and provided the necessary capital of navigating the complexities of postsecondary access, participants felt college was possible.

Mentorship, while preparing for college, benefits students in accessing postsecondary institutions. Radcliffe and Bos (2011) conducted a longitudinal study with a high percentage of Hispanic students on the value of college students mentoring middle and high school students on various aspects of college access and college campus life. Various activities such as college field trips, college student panels, academic tutorial sessions, and college life discussions were incorporated in meetings between students and mentors. Findings indicated that participants developed a positive perception of college and set appropriate goals necessary to be able to attend college. In addition, Ahn (2010) explains that mentorship from a network of individuals—college “students, professors, and other institutional agents”, provides high school students a larger source of knowledge in accessing college (pg. 839). Each mentor shares their own resources (personal, advising, and professional), which provides a bridge for the student in connecting with other mentors for further navigation of college. These mentoring
situations are key for minority students, who most often lack the necessary information of how to access postsecondary institutions.

Another key piece in students becoming college-ready is enriching the parent’s knowledge of college so that they can in turn support their child in the transition to college and the experiences once in college (Haro, 2004). Cabrera and La Nasa (2001) accentuate this concept with their study using roughly 15,000 participants from the National Education Longitudinal Study database. They discovered that when low-socioeconomic parents are involved in the educational process and educated on college access and transition, students have a more improved chance at entering a postsecondary institution. Furthermore, parents are likely to view postsecondary education more positively when they understand there are financial benefits in attaining a college degree. Similarly, Auerbach (2007) posits Latino parents benefit from culturally relevant programs that encourage parents to advocate for their child’s educational success. By learning how best to support their child in the educational process, parents became more affirmed in their unique and purposeful position as supporter.

Even though this large body of research provides numerous strategies in how to develop successful students for postsecondary learning, an achievement gap between Hispanics and Whites still exists in postsecondary enrollment and degree completion. Throughout this section on the pre-college development of Hispanic students, the literature explains the importance of developing college-ready students so that the transition into a rigorous college environment is smoother and more attainable. Researchers call for further evidence on the achievement of students with high academic behaviors (Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011) and more accurate measures that predict postsecondary success (Boden, 2011) among minority students. One such program that has a proven track record in developing academically successful high school Hispanic
students is the AVID college-readiness system. The next section presents research on the effectiveness of AVID in instituting the factors researchers suggest create college-ready students.

2.3 AVID: A College-Readiness System

College preparatory support programs such as AVID are aimed at supporting students with the skills and determination needed to succeed academically (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009) so that students are college-ready as outlined in the previous section. With AVID’s support, high school students are “taught to self-advocate, encouraged to take responsibility for their education, and exposed to various strategies for effectively collaborating and interacting with” (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 213) key personnel within an educational institution. These relationships provide AVID students with the tools to navigate difficult educational experiences. AVID also purposefully builds the cultural knowledge of college for parents (Bernhardt, 2013) by including them in discussions of course selection and college preparation. This inclusion of family strengthens the external support systems for students. Parents gain a better understanding of their student’s academic experiences. In turn, students are empowered by developing a college-going atmosphere at home. Bernhardt (2013) explains in a meta-analysis that AVID’s focus on “the whole child” is a critical piece of developing the necessary cultural capital students need in accessing higher education (p. 219). AVID not only instructs students on the necessary skills to be academically successful (i.e. note-taking, reading and writing), but there is also a focus on building the student’s academic identity, a sense of community, parental knowledge of college, and a network of resources. Consequently, AVID acts “to positively influence the academic and social lives of students traditionally underrepresented in higher education” (Bernhardt, 2013, p. 218).
Reddick, Welton, Alsandor, Denyszyn, and Platt (2011) provide additional evidence that students benefit from the mentorship of adults and peers within the AVID elective class. Through focus group interviews with 21 participants, researchers discovered that motivation to attain educational goals improves and academic aspirations grow as a result of strong mentorships. Mentorship within this study included peers, school personnel, college students, and parents. Consequently, AVID provides traditionally underrepresented students the necessary system of support to excel during high school (Bernhardt, 2013; Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008; Hubbard, & Ottoson, 1997; Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996). Students are required to maintain rigorous courses and are provided academic support to excel academically. In a study of 139 Hispanic students in South Texas, Lozano, Watt, and Huerta (2009) found participation in advanced Math courses had a significant effect on the college preparedness of Hispanic students. Therefore, requiring students to enroll in advanced coursework is vital in developing college-ready AVID students. Remaining consistent with the literature, AVID maintains the holistic approach of educating parents with the knowledge they need to support their students. While it is documented that AVID is successful in developing college-ready high school students, it is necessary to examine the limited literature, which discusses the extent to which AVID students are successful once enrolled in college.

By exceeding the national average in college entrance requirements and enrollment of Hispanic students, the AVID college readiness system deserves a closer look, specifically for the purpose of trying to improve Hispanic degree completion rates in Texas. Only 22% of non-AVID Hispanic students nationwide completed the necessary college entrance requirements, whereas 90% of AVID Hispanic students were successful in fulfilling college entrance requirements. Therefore, these AVID Hispanic students were
eligible to enroll in a higher education institution upon graduation. Large-scale data from the 2011-2012 school year showed that high school AVID students excelled when compared to non-AVID students throughout the nation (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.a). In addition, AVID students graduating high school in 2012 experienced a 76% acceptance rate into a four-year higher education institution (AVID: Decades of College Dreams, n.d.a).

Another key element of developing college-ready students within the AVID program is instruction on academic strategies. Huerta, Watt, and Reyes (2013) conducted a study using binary logistical regression with 85 participants and found that the aspects of the AVID elective class played a role in students’ perception of being college-ready. Of the participants in this study, 58% were on track to graduate from a postsecondary institution. AVID components included the elective teacher, college visits, participation in AP courses, four years of Math, and Cornell note-taking. As a result, researchers concluded that when K-12 institutions place added importance on these aspects of the AVID elective class, students are more likely to succeed.

Currently, most of the AVID research is focused on the academic success of K-12 students (Black, Little, McCoach, Purcell, & Siegle, 2008; Hubbard, & Ottoson, 1997; Mehan, Villanueva, Hubbard, & Lintz, 1996), the development of college-ready students (Bernhardt, 2013; Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009), and the ability to create school-wide reform (Hubbard, & Ottoson, 1997; Klar, & Brewer, 2013). Few studies show AVID is successful in preparing students for the transition into and success in postsecondary education (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011). These studies of former AVID students in postsecondary education focus on South Texas students in a Hispanic serving four-year institution and the local community college.
Studies on former AVID students in postsecondary institutions present a partial picture of how AVID impacts college success. Three studies conducted in South Texas are interrelated in that they each examine the progression of former AVID Hispanic students through postsecondary institutions. The first of which included 26 participants and discovered that a high rate of former AVID students successfully completed college credits in high school (Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010). This along with the application of specific strategies learned in the AVID elective class gave participants what the researchers deem “staying power.” Watt, Huerta, and Alkan (2011) further examine this “staying power;” however, they discovered that 36 of the 50 participants were placed in at least one remedial course upon entering college. Even though such a large number of participants required remediation, they remained “on track to graduate within six years” (Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011, p. 127). In a follow-up study with 85 participants, Huerta, Watt, and Reyes (2013) revealed the retention rates for former AVID Hispanic students in postsecondary improved. In addition, fewer participants were required to enroll in remedial courses. All three of these seminal studies on former AVID students in a Hispanic-serving higher education institution expose the elements of AVID that have a major effect on the academic success of students—Cornell notes, AVID teachers and peers, time management, organization, and collaborative study (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011).

Although the studies discussed in this section support the goals of AVID, additional in-depth qualitative research is needed to closely investigate the reasons why former AVID Hispanic students are exhibiting success. These studies do not present a complete picture of the postsecondary experiences of former AVID Hispanic students. The three seminal studies previously mentioned only represent a small portion of former AVID high school graduates in South Texas. It is this lack of an in depth qualitative
examination of former AVID Hispanic students that leads to the importance of this research study. The next section presents literature on the academic experiences of Hispanic students as a whole once enrolled in a higher education institution.

2.4 Academic Experiences of Hispanic Students in Higher Education

The persistence of first-year students in higher education is a continual focus and an area of concern that has prompted the development of a large body of research over the years (Bean, 1980; Leppel, 2001; Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Tinto, 1987, 2012). As a leading researcher in this field, Tinto (2012) calls for institutions to place added emphasis on first year classroom success especially for underrepresented students. Current research presented throughout this section suggests a number of academic factors influencing academic experiences and college persistence. The following list is specific to Hispanic students and include: self-efficacy and stress (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005), time management (Kitsanta, Winsler, & Huie, 2008), grade point average (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005; Kitsanta, Winsler, & Huie, 2008), familial support systems (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Colyar & Stich, 2010; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; Hurtado, Han, Saenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, & Cerna, 2007), on-campus academic support systems (Hurtado, & et al., 2007; Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013), and self-motivation (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004).

The significant dropout rate of college freshman led Reason, Terenzini, and Domingo (2006) to study student persistence by looking at the factors that either supported or hindered students during their first-year of college. Sanctioned by the Foundations of Excellence national research agenda of building an understanding of college persistence, this large scale, national study involved a cross-sectional design with thousands of participants, which included students as well as faculty. A thorough review of literature reveals seven effective components of persistence researchers call
“Foundational Dimensions.” These and other, more recent, components form the framework for understanding the main factors affecting first-year student persistence—“academic competence… a function… of student engagement in… the curriculum… the classroom… and the out-of-class activities” (Reason, Ternzini, & Domingo, 2006, p. 154).

Results from this multiple regression study revealed 10 significant factors influencing persistence (listed in order of significance)—student support, cognitive engagement, academic engagement, institutional challenge, faculty preparation, diverse interactions, peer environment/cognitive engagement, coherent first-year, out-of-class engagement, and faculty development. Considering these factors, the most important conclusions of this study are 1) the importance of a successful first year of college and 2) the importance of students coming to college with the academic and social background knowledge to support their academic competence and rate of persistence.

Further research on academic engagement evolved Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) utilization of factor analysis and structural equation modeling with 107 first-year college student participants. The purpose of this study was to uncover the roles that “academic self-efficacy and stress” (p. 682) play in the academic success of students. Results from this study indicate that a high degree of self-efficacy reduces the amount of stress for students, as well as has a positive correlation to a higher GPA. Moreover, grades earned throughout each semester were directly related to student persistence throughout the first-year of college. Researchers, therefore, concluded that participants’ a) rate of persistence was directly correlated to achieving a satisfactory GPA, and b) level of belief in their academic ability strongly influenced their success (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005).

In addition to developing a high self-efficacy, the ability of students to successfully manage their time impacts their grade point average (Kitsanta, Winsler, &
Huie, 2008). Through questionnaires and cumulative GPA’s of 243 undergraduate students, researchers determined that effective time management has the most significant impact on participants’ GPA and persistence into their second year. As a result of poor time management skills, some participants dropped out after their first year of college. Researchers also examined the effect of self-efficacy on student persistence through the sophomore year. Even though self-efficacy did not match the long-term significance of time management in this study, it did predict success during the first-year of college. Researchers posit “self-efficacy may be important during the first year of studies when students are adapting to a new academic environment” (Kitsanta, Winsler, & Huie, 2008, p.61). Based on these findings, Kitsanta, Winsler, and Huie (2008) call for future research that focuses on these two factors of self-efficacy and time management as they may positively impact academic success in postsecondary institutions.

With a unique lens of examining students’ perceptions on college prior to their first semester, Colyar and Stich (2010) found that participants valued the support of friends and family. These researchers utilized discourse analysis to examine 172 essays written by 86 participants. Participants were enrolled in a 3-week, remedial summer bridge program aimed at introducing students to the necessary aspects for succeeding in a postsecondary institution. This program included academic and non-academic experiences. Students were able to witness the rigors and expectations of college-level courses, meet key campus personnel for navigating the college experience, and discover opportunities for on-campus involvement. In preparation for university life, participants felt it necessary to sustain a network of family and friends as motivators of their success. In addition, participants placed emphasis on being able to manage their academics through effective time management skills. Colyar and Stich (2010) concluded that the
academic identity development of students, especially remedial students, is critical in establishing a positive sense of self when transitioning to postsecondary life.

Another factor impacting academic success for students in a postsecondary institution includes student support systems. In a case study of two Hispanic students that attended and graduated from Stanford University, Cabrera and Padilla (2004) found that their participants “took advantage of social networks…, used familial support…, possessed a high level of intrinsic motivation…, and had a strong sense of their ability to overcome any challenge” (p. 168). This in-depth study established factors of success by focusing on two high-achieving, at-risk Hispanic students. These participants were considered at-risk because of their economic, cultural, and immigration status and represent a growing population of students entering higher education institutions. Cabrera and Padilla’s (2004) findings indicate that support systems are critical to their participants’ success. Both participants credit their mother as their guiding force in placing high importance on receiving an education. Secondly, both participants acknowledge that witnessing the struggles of their parents to work difficult jobs and make little money motivated them to work harder in school so that they could have a better chance at financial independence. Researchers posit familial support, as well as internal motivation as factors, which strengthened participants’ ability to persist and overcome various challenges.

Even though numerous research studies demonstrate that first year students benefit from strong familial support, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) also discovered that in spite of negative feedback from families, participants in this study were still successful. Participants felt as though it was a duty to be successful to show their family and community how college was beneficial. Because these participants were able to help their families overcome their negative feelings toward college, participants built a greater
sense of self in their academics. As first-generation students, these participants were proud to introduce the college culture to those closest to them. Over time participants remarked on significant changes within the families’ acceptance of higher education because younger siblings began developing their own collegiate goals (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Therefore, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) indicate that more research is needed to understand the coping strategies of minority students.

In addition to these factors, students benefit from developing relationships with university personnel. Musoba, Collazo, and Placide (2013) qualitatively examined 43 minority students and investigated those factors that assisted in their transition to a postsecondary campus within their first year. Using one-on-one and focus group interviews many participants revealed that involvement in their first-year experience course led to an increased interaction with their professor. Participants’ confidence grew as a result of forming a positive relationship with an on-campus employee that assisted them in navigating various situations even beyond their freshman year.

Hurtado, Han, Saenz, Espinosa, Cabrera, and Cerna (2007) quantitatively examined the factors influencing minority students in their transition to postsecondary. Researchers were specifically interested in participants’ sense of belonging and their level of academic and non-academic engagement. Longitudinal data yielded several factors impacting students. Familial support ranked high among participants. Participants credit family relationships and responsibilities as having a positive impact on their level of academic and social engagement, as well as their sense of belonging. Secondly, participants developed a heightened confidence when engaging with faculty. By communicating with advisors, professors, and teaching assistants, participants were able to better navigate their academic experiences. Most importantly, Hurtado et al. (2007) posit that cross-racial interactions had a positive correlation with improved sense
of belonging. Researchers also indicated that there is a positive connection between academic and social experiences in relation to a student’s sense of belonging. As a result, these researchers call for more studies focused on the impact of academic and social structures in students’ immediate environment. Hurtado et al. (2007) believe this type of research will provide critical data in examining “enrollment or climate trends” (p. 883) on individual campuses.

As these research studies suggest, success of first year students is determined by a myriad of factors, such as self-efficacy and stress, time management, grade point average, familial support systems, on-campus academic support systems, and self-motivation. Of these factors, first-generation college students rely most heavily on a combined familial and on-campus network of individuals in order to remain motivated and navigate the unknown academic waters of postsecondary education. Further research in this area may allow researchers to better understand how students maintain their level of academic success. Therefore the next section explores research on how social experiences effects student success.

2.5 Social Experiences and Their Impact on the Academic Success of Hispanic Students

Just as Kitsanta, Winsler, and Huie (2008) stress the importance of time management on the academic experiences within the first year, students must also manage their social experiences. A successful first year of college does not solely revolve around academics; however, research indicates that student engagement with the university plays a critical role in tandem with academics, especially for minority students (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008; Nunez, 2009; Oseguera, Locks, & Vega, 2008). The following section focuses on current research explaining how social experiences impact the persistence of Hispanic students in a postsecondary institution. These social experiences include on-campus activities (Arana, Castaneda-Sound,
Blanchard, & Aguilar, 2011), culturally rich experiences (Kuh, et al., 2008; Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013), sense of belonging (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Musoba, et al., 2013), living on campus (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007), and work priorities (Bozick, 2007).

Arana, Castaneda-Sound, Blanchard, and Aguilar (2011) suggest that students benefit from interaction with all on-campus activities. Finding the right balance between academics and extra-curricular activities as a college student is critical. In a qualitative study involving Hispanic students, participants were emotionally connected to the institution through culturally rich events and faculty support on-campus. As a result, participants were more likely to persist into their next semester. Although this study adds to the body of research on the successful path of Hispanic students, researchers highlight the need for more investigative studies (Arana, et al., 2011).

In addition to the previous study, Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) discovered in a large, national study that students engaging in meaningful campus activities were more likely to persist at a postsecondary institution. Considering that college students bring with them a cultural identity to the university campus, institutions are encouraged to provide meaningful cultural-specific experiences for their students (Kuh et al., 2008; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Minority students are more likely to experience a separation from the college culture because of their lack of familial college experiences. For this reason, minority students need increased involvement with quality cultural connections on campus. These connections help to validate a student’s belief of belonging in postsecondary education. The results of this study lead researchers to believe that further research should focus on the cultural influences on minority student persistence.
One such qualitative study of minority and first-year student retention, Musoba, Collazo, and Placide (2013) examined the perceptions’ of 43 postsecondary students. Researchers were concerned with investigating “key concerns… [and] what institutional factors helped [students] adapt and negotiate the new environment” (Musoba, Collazo, & Placide, 2013, p. 359). One-on-one and focus group interviews revealed that when students joined an extra curricular organization on the university campus their sense of belonging increased. These researchers found the increased involvement, whether cultural or leadership organizations, was similar to that of a familial experience for participants. One particular participant explained that because she engaged in a university organization she felt like people cared for her, which led to her sense of belonging on that campus.

In a qualitative case study of two Mexican-American students Cabrera and Padilla’s (2004) findings indicate that students benefit from living on campus. Both participants “lived in Stanford’s Chicano themed residence hall during their freshman year” (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004, p. 165), which provided both a sense of belonging and an easier transition into the relative social experiences of on-campus life. Because they were surrounded by a familiar culture of home within their residence hall, participants were able to share their experiences knowing that others could relate to them. However, one participant did become frustrated with some students within the residence hall due to her increasing passion for the struggles of the Latino population. Therefore, as a result of the university’s cultural-specific organizations, she was able to discover a more supportive network of individuals sharing her views and desires to make a difference for other Latinos. Living on-campus positions students to have a higher level of engagement both socially and academically (LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007). In a quantitative study of the connection between on-campus living and student engagement, LaNasa, Olson,
and Alleman (2007) examined over 700 first-year students living on-campus. Findings show that on-campus students are more likely to engage in campus activities and demonstrate more academic effort than their off-campus counterparts.

However, once minority students have entered into a higher education institution, they face a different set of challenges. Challenges such as outside work priorities, residing with parents, or the combination of the two, have a negative effect on college persistence (Bozick, 2007). Using longitudinal data with approximately 10,000 students, Bozick (2007) discovered that students living at home, as well as, those living with their parents and extending themselves beyond 20 hours in the work place, have a higher risk of dropping out of college compared to those living on campus and working less than 20 hours per week. As a result of the choices students and their families make concerning outside workload, students will sometimes enroll in higher education institutions as part-time students in order to help support their family’s financial needs. However, when enrolling part time, students place an added strain on their chances for success (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005) as this impedes time spent on-campus in academic classes and building key relationships.

Researchers provide us with a foundation for understanding first year student experiences given these social factors such as sense of belonging, work priorities, living on-campus, time management, and cultural-rich experiences. In a review of literature on Latino/a postsecondary retention, Oseguera, Locka, and Vega (2008) reveal that institutions need to place added emphasis on including more multicultural-rich opportunities for students. A result of these efforts could prove to Latino/a students that the institution is committed to their postsecondary experience. Therefore, living on-campus not only provides time to interact with other students and university faculty and
staff, but allows students to grow educationally within their own framework of understanding this new world of higher education and opportunity.

2.6 Conclusion

This literature review presents key indicators that provide the necessary foundation for a nontraditional student to be successful in a postsecondary institution. These indicators include 1) participating in academically rich high school coursework and AVID’s college-readiness support system and 2) demonstrating positive academic and social engagement experiences. When all these elements come together the assumption can be made that Hispanic students can be successful and complete a higher education degree. However, national statistics tells us that Hispanic students are not graduating at a rate comparable to their peers. Even though there is a large body of research on Hispanic students and their secondary and postsecondary educational experiences, a gap exists in telling the story of how former AVID Hispanic students are successful in college. As a result, this study explores how eight participants navigate their successful experiences using AVID strategies throughout their first year and into their second year of college.

Since persistence leads to success in higher education, college-readiness is a focus of K-12 schools. When Hispanic students are able to acclimate to the college environment and feel a sense of belonging, the potential for persistence is heightened (Cooper, 2012). Therefore, this study adds to the literature by focusing on specific AVID strategies used by successful former AVID, Hispanic students. Furthermore, this study discovers how Hispanic students’ college-readiness preparation through the AVID college-readiness system helps students integrate to the higher education academic culture. Explicitly, AVID’s mission is to prepare students for a successful transition into and through a four-year university. Studies have shown that AVID students are entering
four-year institutions more successfully than their peers, however there are few studies with limited reliability to show that former AVID students are persisting into their second year. Given that there is limited qualitative research describing what these students are experiencing during their first year, this current study addresses support for indicators of persistence into AVID graduates second year of a postsecondary institution.
Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In an effort to add to the literature on Hispanic persistence and the AVID college readiness system, this study focuses on former AVID students finishing their first year and persisting through their second year at the same higher education institution. Given that Hispanic students are not graduating with a baccalaureate degree at a rate comparable to their peers (Snyder & Dillow, 2012a; Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2013), this study examined the attributes of successful Hispanic students and was guided by the following question: What are the first-year experiences of former AVID Hispanic students within a four-year higher education institution? Also, this study attempted to gain a better understanding of the participants’ current academic and social reality in higher education. As a result, four sub-questions were developed to gather a richer and more in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences. Those four questions are:

1. What are the academic experiences of these students?
2. What strategies do these students attribute to their success?
3. What are the social experiences of these students as pertaining to their academic environment?
4. What part, if any, did AVID play in these students’ success?

The rationale for including the first three questions was to develop a sense of how participants create and maintain their success. Managing academic and social experiences is critical to the success of postsecondary students (Kitsanta, Winsler, & Huie, 2008). The rationale for including the final sub-question was to probe further into
the success of Hispanic students by investigating the level at which AVID has impacted their success. I wanted to determine if inclusion in AVID was benefiting a specific group of first year students within a large, urban area. By structuring this study around these questions, I was able to discover a variety of attributes among participants that contribute to their success. Those attributes are further discussed in chapter four. To provide a clear description of how this study was completed, this chapter is divided into sections providing a detailed overview of the research design, setting, and participants, as well as data collection and analysis.

3.2 Research Design

In order to provide an in-depth description of Hispanic student experiences in a postsecondary institution, this study used a traditional qualitative approach. Qualitative research is an investigative process that uses interviews and observations in settings natural to participants (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Qualitative researchers then use participants’ own words to bring meaning and understanding to various problems (Creswell, 2009). The goal of this particular study was to construct meaning through participants’ personal stories of successful experiences in a public, four-year university in North Central Texas, and the extent to which AVID played or did not play a role in their success.

3.2.1 Setting

Because of the high percentages of Hispanic students in North Central Texas (NCT), this study specifically focused on high school graduates within this area. NCT has experienced a 56.8% increase in the Hispanic population since 2000 (Hobby Center for the Study of Texas, n.d.b). Texas Education Agency (TEA) reports the demographic percentages for the North Central Texas ISD (NCTISD) (23% African American, 43% Hispanic, 25% White, 0% American Indian, 7% Asian, 0% Pacific Islander, and 2% Two
or More Races) (Texas Education Agency, 2012). These percentages demonstrate that Hispanics are now the majority of students in NCTISD.

By studying former AVID Hispanic graduates, this qualitative research study adds to the existing AVID literature on the successfulness of AVID graduates to fulfill AVID's mission of preparing students for success in a four-year university (AVID: Decades of Dreams, n.d.c.). Currently, there is a lack of qualitative research on former AVID Hispanic graduates in the NCT area. NCT is unique in that it houses several universities categorized as high research intensive universities—Texas University (TU), University of Central Texas (UCT), and North Central State University (NCSU). The national AVID Data Center reveals a large portion of former AVID Hispanic students in NCT attend Texas University (TU) making TU the optimal location for this study. Due to local district approved access to participants and the close proximity to TU, AVID graduates from the NCTISD were invited to participant. NCTISD and TU are used as pseudonyms to protect the identity of institutions and participants.

3.2.2 Participants

Participants included eight (Table 2) Hispanic college students, who completed at least five years in a high school AVID program and their first year of a postsecondary institution. Dukes (as cited in Creswell, 1998) explains that up to 10 participants is optimal for qualitative investigations. Upon IRB approval, a large, urban school district within the NCT area, NCTISD, provided a criterion-based selection of individuals having graduated high school and having participated in an AVID program in the previous school year (Appendices B & C). This information was provided in an Excel spreadsheet and contained name, email, graduating high school, ethnicity, and projected college enrollment location. In addition, approval was given to contact any potential participants from the Excel document (Appendices C). Using this list an email was sent to each
individual (Appendix D). Individuals were asked to complete a short demographic survey using Google Docs (Appendix E) in order to determine an intensity selection of participants fitting the scope of this study. Intensity selection in qualitative research “involves information-rich cases that manifest the phenomenon intensely” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 111). The sole purpose of this survey was to determine which individuals best represented the scope of this study. The primary criteria used to make this determination were related to demographics, academic background, and familial collegiate experiences. More specifically, the optimal candidate for participation in this study was to be a) Hispanic, b) first in their family to attend college, c) an AVID alumni with five or more years in the program, d) participant in Advanced Placement or dual-credit courses, and e) a sophomore at TU. Based on these survey results, selected students were invited to participate in this study through email (Appendix F), and those individuals not fitting the scope of this study were emailed and thanked for their initial participation (Appendix G). Before interviews began, participants signed a consent form (Appendix H), and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities (Creswell, 2009).

In order to solicit the most possible responses from the initial call for participants, individuals responding to the survey were entered into a drawing for one of three $25 gift cards. Due to a lack of initial participation, another email was sent informing potential respondents that they would receive a $25 gift card for simply completing the survey. This approach yielded 11 potential participants. Two respondents did not fit the requirements of the study, and they were mailed a $25 VISA gift card. A third respondent that indeed fit the study was unable to complete the interview and did not provide a mailing address for the $25 VISA gift card. The remaining eight respondents were each interviewed and given a $75 VISA gift card for completing both the online survey and the one-on-one interview.
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Citlali</th>
<th>Maria</th>
<th>Salma</th>
<th>Sophia</th>
<th>Jose</th>
<th>Julio</th>
<th>Roberto</th>
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3.3 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were employed as they allow researchers to “prob[e] more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information” (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007, 246). This type of interview technique allowed for the gathering of rich details of students’ experiences within their first year and revealed whether or not AVID in fact contributed to their collegiate success. Semi-structured interviews lasted approximately one hour and were recorded for transcription purposes. Questions posed to participants (Appendix I) were meant to provide a) a well-rounded description of participants’ academic and social experiences during the first year of college, b) strategies used throughout academic coursework, and c) the level at which those strategies impacted their success. Had it been determined that clarification from initial interviews or more data was needed participants were available to participate in follow-up interviews. These follow-up interviews were not necessary. Interview data were transcribed verbatim to ensure a precise review of interviews during data analysis (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2007; Maxwell, 2005).

Participants were asked to provide several examples of work; however, only one participant had materials with him. Therefore, participants were asked to provide details of their work. These descriptions allowed for an analysis of the use or non-use of AVID strategies. Qualitative documents are useful because they “enable a researcher to obtain the language and words of participants” (Creswell, 2009, p.180). Specifically, participants were asked about their use of a yearly calendar, an organizational system of academic material, and study materials. The purpose of the yearly calendar was to examine how and if participants keep track of academic assignments and social events. An organizational system of academic material may come in the form of a binder system or notebook system. Third, examples of study materials would consist of note cards,
notes, textbooks, or professor-generated materials. The description of these documents were useful in a) adding to the data on the practices of successful college students and b) describing whether or not participants used AVID strategies as part of their college experience.

3.4 Data Analysis

After interviews were recorded, the researcher personally transcribed the interviews verbatim. Data analysis for this study consisted of the constant comparative coding method, which involves sifting the data to create a list of categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2009). Those categories were then examined and reexamined against the data for similarities and differences, which eventually led to the creation of themes. Themes were then used to present research results in chapter four. Numerous validity strategies were used to strengthen the trustworthiness of this study (Creswell, 2009). Member checks were attempted by asking participants to review a detailed report of themes and participant quotes to ensure that their interview data had accurately coded (Creswell, 2009). Maxwell (2005) explains that this form of validation is the strongest tool to keep from misinterpreting participants' words and perspectives. The final reporting of results includes thick, rich descriptions so that the discussion of results and conclusions drawn is most realistic to the outside reader. In addition, I have equally presented the results whether positive or negative to the study (Creswell, 2009). Finally, a trusted third party has reviewed the data, codes, and results so that any potential bias may be removed (Creswell, 2009).
4.1 Introduction

This study developed out of a curiosity of my junior high Hispanic students’ future experiences in their pursuit of a successful higher education goal. I began by examining the national statistics of Hispanics and their lack of educational attainment, as well as the body of research on Hispanic students’ barriers to success. Through eight one-on-one interviews with successful Hispanic students, I was able to form a better understanding of how my participants’ pre-college development and their academic and social postsecondary experiences have shaped their success. For the purpose of this study, success is defined when a student completes their first year of college and enrolls for a second consecutive year. In order to create meaning from participant experiences, I employ Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. This theory, which is embedded in sociological understanding, supports current research that reveals Hispanic students benefit from a set of collective aspects—successful academic experiences (Zajacova, Lynch, & Espenshade, 2005), mentorship (Ahn, 2010; Radcliffe & Bos, 2011), a sense of belonging (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004; Musoba, et al., 2013), and systems of supports (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004).

To begin this chapter I provide a short description of each participant. By doing so, it is my hope that they become real to the reader. Next, I present my interpretations of the eight one-on-one interviews. Through discussions focused on high school academic experiences, as well as university academic and social experiences, six themes emerged from my utilization of the constant comparative coding method that help me better understand how these students managed a successful first year of a four-year
The following themes are discussed in detail throughout this chapter—pre-college development, distractions and responsibilities, intrinsic qualities of success, study habits, support systems, and social impact in college, and conclusions will follow in the next chapter.

4.2 Participants

All eight participants currently live at home with their immediate family. Even though each participant is unique in their experiences with family, community, and work, all participants comment that education is a top priority. They realize the demands of maintaining success in college; therefore, they have worked to adjust their lives in order to find an appropriate balance. In addition, each participant revealed that their choice to remain in North Central Texas and attend TU was due to financial reasons and proximity to family. Each participant identifies with his or her Hispanic culture. They acknowledge that their early understanding of higher education populations were predominantly white; however, having been on campus for over one year, they feel that they belong and are a welcome part of the student population. Just as the literature suggests (Cabrera & Padilla, 2004), this sense of belonging is critical to the success of Hispanic students. The next eight sections focus on each participant for the purpose of describing their family make-up, family experience with education, living arrangements, work, desire for college, motivations, and other basic information to reveal the personal side of each participant.

4.2.1 Thomas

Thomas was born in NCT to legal immigrants. After moving around for approximately 11 years, Thomas, his younger sister, his mother, and his step-father settled in a quiet North Central Texas community. Thomas explained that he does not interact with his surrounding community or his extended family living nearby, since becoming a college student and working a full-time job. His only familial knowledge of
higher education stems from his stepfather, who attended the local community college for a short time. Thomas participated in AVID for five years, and his sister is currently an AVID student. Having not succeeded as well academically as he would have liked his first semester, Thomas renewed his motivation to complete college by improving his academic standing his second semester. Currently in his second year at TU, he is maintaining all A’s and one C.

4.2.2 Maria

Living with only her mother, Maria does not work and considers herself lazy, which she admits “my time as a student is really stressful because I’m lazy.” When describing her community, Maria explains that her protective mother would not allow her to venture outside. Maria splits her time between home and school. She does, however, participate with the TU spirit team, a yell squad promoting school spirit at various events. At an elementary age Maria spent much time with her extended family; however, now that she is older, she and her mother do not see them often. Due to Maria’s mother only having finished the sixth grade, Maria learned about college in school through her six years of AVID and honors level coursework. To maintain her level of success at TU, Maria makes it a point to complete her homework before attending any social events. Her plan is to graduate with a degree in Information Systems within the College of Business.

4.2.3 Salma

Salma grew up in North Central Texas with her father, mother, and two sisters. Her father completed his Associate’s degree in Mexico, and her mother recently received her GED and is considering attending the local community college. Salma and her immediate family do not see their extended family very often even though they live in a nearby city. Having witnessed her older cousin graduate from high school and attend
college, Salma decided early on that she would attend college herself. She participated in AVID for five years. Majoring in mechanical engineering and setting her sights on a Masters degree, Salma views college as an outlet to better herself and her family. Salma spends most of her time either in class or studying, and she works part-time.

4.2.4 Sophia

Growing up in North Central Texas with her father, mother, older sister, and younger brother, Sophia participated in AVID for six years, maintained all A’s, participated in various organizations, and worked throughout high school. Sophia, a nursing major, continues to split her time between school and work. She works a full-time job as a manager at Chuck E. Cheese and is the only one in her family to go to college. Growing up in a tight knit family with limited education, Sophia is admired by her cousins. During their frequent gatherings, her family asks her about college and explains that they too want to go to college because of her. Her family’s admiration and her motivation to improve her family’s financial circumstances, Sophia remains motivated to complete her education.

4.2.5 Julio

Julio immigrated to America at the age of ten with his family and is the only one to extend his education passed high school. As a participant in AVID for five years, Julio received his International Baccalaureate (IB) diploma in high school. He currently works a full-time job at Chipolte Mexican Grill and attends TU full-time. Any free time he has is either spent studying or with his family. Throughout the interview Julio’s mannerisms made him seem reserved, focused, and quite serious about his college experience. As an aerospace engineering major with plans to work for NASA, he does not “have much time for social life.” The pride from Julio’s family strengthens his motivation to complete
his undergraduate degree, obtain a Masters in aerospace engineering, and later another degree in astrophysics.

4.2.6 Citlali

As the youngest of four children to a single mother, Citlali is the first to go to college. She has lived in NCT her entire life and spends less time with her extended family because of the demands of school. Although, she does still find time to volunteer in her community. Citlali lives at home with her mother and two siblings and is not employed. Upon entering college, Citlali was majoring in Biology; however, she is currently undeclared. Her motivation for completing a bachelor’s degree stems from her witnessing the financial struggles of her mother. After having spent five years in AVID, “it was more cemented into my brain” that college was the correct path to securing her financial future.

4.2.7 Jose

Jose is a first-generation college student who lives in a quiet neighborhood with his father, mother, and two sisters. He explains that “there is constantly family visiting… once… twice a month.” When asked about his family’s experience with higher education, he explained that his father quit school after fourth grade, and his mother attended high school; however, he believes he has two uncles with some education beyond high school from Mexico. Jose attends TU full-time, as well as maintains a full-time job at Sam’s Club. His plans are to minimize his work hours as he enters into his upper level Business Management courses. Having spent five years in AVID and in honors courses throughout high school, Jose maintains his desire to attain his undergraduate degree. His family has “always looked up to me as a smart kid.” Jose admits to placing added pressure on himself to complete college and be a part of improving the statistics on Hispanics in higher education.
4.2.8 Roberto

Roberto moved to the United States when he was one year old and can see raising his own, future family here in North Central Texas. His parents have limited education from Mexico, but he recalls his father attending classes to learn English while here in the U.S. Both Roberto and his brother are currently in college. Roberto works only part-time with family members allowing him more flexibility to attend college full-time. Roberto moved to the United States when he was one year old and can see raising his own, future family here in North Central Texas. His parents have limited education from Mexico, but he recalls his father attending classes to learn English while here in the U.S. Both Roberto and his brother are currently in college. Roberto works only part-time with family members allowing him more flexibility to attend college full-time. Roberto rediscovered his motivation for succeeding in college after not being as successful his first year as he would have liked. Thinking of his younger sister motivated him to get more serious about his academics.

4.3 Discussion of Themes

As previously stated, interviews revealed six themes that categorize the elements participants embody in order to maintain educational success. These thematic categories are a) pre-college development, b) distractions and responsibilities, c) intrinsic qualities of success, d) study habits, d) support systems, and e) social impact in college.

4.3.1 Pre-College Development

Aligning with current research (Conley, 2012; Porter & Polikoff, 2012), all participants credit the involvement in rigorous courses during high school as a factor contributing to their success in college. A number of participants were enrolled in dual-credit, IB, or AP coursework and were able to receive college credits due to their IB and AP exam scores. There is a difference, however, among participants in which rigorous courses, they believe, were the most effective. One participant explains that dual-credit was most closely aligned with community college level work instead of university level work. This particular participant is a full-time TU student and a part-time community college student. Sophia explains that her high school dual credit courses were much like
her community college courses—lower grading standards and less depth of thought. IB, however, seems to be the courses that received the most support among participants. Five out of eight participants were IB students, and they remark that their university courses are either almost exactly like or easier than their IB courses. Because of the high level of academic standards (Conley, 2007a; Porter & Polikoff, 2012), Jose remarks “IB was a rigorous course, so the classes my freshman year were kind of similar… I’d say the only difference was maybe a bigger campus having to walk around.” Moreover, Jose’s essays in IB were more challenging and had long page limits than essays required by college professors. In addition, IB coursework brought participants to the university library in order to complete group research assignments. TU librarians assisted students with understanding how to conduct research in a college library. This early exposure to the library’s academic setting provided participants a familiarity and comfort with their current college surroundings.

In inquiring about the level at which IB and AVID prepared Thomas more for college, he explains “IB is a college level course, and AVID is more of a how to deal with the situations that college puts you in—organization and all that. AVID actually helped me a lot with IB since you have to be organized.” Participants credit AVID as the driving force behind their college aspirations and motivation to participate in rigorous coursework. Jose believes “if it wasn’t for AVID, I probably would not have taken the AP classes… They…motivated me to take the AP classes.” Because participants wanted to remain in AVID throughout high school, they had to maintain success in honors level classes. With the help of AVID’s academic strategies and tutorials, participants were able to successfully complete their honors level work. Similarly, Citlali credits AVID for “pushing [her] to not give up on something, no matter how hard it is for you.” For Julio, AVID served a critical purpose in his pre-college years. He credits AVID for taking down
the barrier that was placed by the educational system upon first moving to the U.S. at the age of ten. He was placed in ESL and regular education classes because of his language barrier. It was not until he was accepted into AVID that he realized he was capable of honors level coursework. Julio commented that he felt the educational system had initially held him back academically. Participants clearly attribute AVID for their success in both high school and college. It is the combination of participants' persistence and goal setting abilities along with the development of study and self-monitoring skills that Lombardi, Seburn, and Conley (2011) posit are measures for college-readiness.

AVID also provided students an understanding of what to expect once in college, which Bernhardt (2013) explains provides students with “a clearer understanding of school norms” (p. 213). Because AVID and AP teachers warned Citlali about the expectations professors place on college students, she was able to transition more smoothly into preparing for her first and second round of exams during the Fall semester of her first year. While she watched her college classmates ask about test reviews, she already knew that “it was going to be more about me and me having to apply myself.” Therefore, with this knowledge, Citlali was prepared to take more control over what materials she used to study for her tests. AVID teachers also assisted participants with the transition process by explaining the lack of attendance expectations of some professors, which is quite different from their high school experience. Participants were, therefore, instructed on the importance of demonstrating more personal academic accountability.

Visiting universities and engaging in college access discussions improve students’ perceptions of college and strengthen their determination to attend college (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). AVID’s focus on strengthening students’ access to college played an integral role in participants’ pre-college development. As they learned more
about college and completed the necessary requirements for college, their belief that college can be a reality was solidified. Participants expressed appreciation toward their AVID teacher for pointing out the differences between various universities and their admissions process. AVID teachers would instruct students to investigate tuition and housing costs, as well as how to get involved with on-campus activities. This would allow students to narrow down what type of college experience they would like. Participants explain that AVID assisted them with financial aid forms, scholarship applications, and adhering to the admissions calendar. Several participants mention that AVID placed a heavy emphasis on SAT preparation and taking the SAT exam a number of times. In addition, AVID provided students with direction on creating a college schedule. Roberto explains that his senior AVID teacher “went through how we were going to be picking up our schedule slots and stuff. So I already knew what I was going into.”

The experience of visiting various college campuses with their AVID teacher and peers allowed participants “to see what college students look like and do. [Roberto] saw a lot of students studying, and [he] thought this is what I’m going to have to do.” By visiting various colleges, participants were able to witness the differences between private and public, as well as small and large universities. Therefore, participants are able to discover campus environments, which allowed them to more easily fit in and create a positive view of college (Radcliffe & Bos, 2011). As they viewed campus grounds, students, and campus activities, participants are preparing themselves to enter into college. Moreover, Citlali commented that her experience on one particular college campus “look[ed] cool…they are chilling out, some were dressed in pajamas. Once we were there I like[d] listening to a lot of the traditions. I thought that was unique to each school the different traditions they had, the different programs; it was pretty interesting to me.” This type of early college experience built an excitement in Citlali and other
participants and perhaps helped their transition into the collegiate environment at TU. What impacted Sophia “was walking through the courtyard and seeing people sit outside in groups looking at their books. Like that is something that sticks in my head even until now… I was first interested in college life like partying and stuff. Seeing them studying outside of class, it’s for people who actually want to get somewhere in life, which is something I want to do.” Finally and most significantly, college field trips presented some students with new experiences. Maria explains that it was the first time she had ever stayed in a hotel.

4.4 Distractions and Responsibilities

Results from this study support research that says outside work priorities act as a barrier to college students (Bozick, 2007). Those participants that work full-time jobs are typically able to find a balance between full-time work and full-time academics. It is at certain times during the semester that they feel added pressure of balancing work and assignment due dates. Thomas explains that after completing his first semester, he realized that he underestimated the difficulty of the classes and working too many hours. Therefore, his second semester he made adjustments by setting his academic priorities above his work priorities and worked fewer hours. To ensure a proper balance at various times in the Spring semester, Thomas worked to build a relationship of trust with his boss so that he was allowed flexibility in his schedule for times for study. Similar to Thomas, Jose adjusted his work schedule to an opening shift at Sam’s Club so that he was able to be more alert during class and while studying. The closing shift caused him to sleep late and feel exhausted throughout the day.

Even though lowering work hours can add more of a financial burden on students (Hurtado, et al., 2007), several participants remark that they would like to lessen their work hours because they want to spend more time on their academics, especially as they
move into more rigorous upper level courses. Three participants that either worked fewer than 15 hours per week or none at all realize that they are lucky. Because of having more time for study, they do not allow themselves excuses for being academically unsuccessful. In spite of financial demands, Salma lowered her hours so that she could have more time to study. Her realization that spending more time on her academics impacted her future more than how many hours she worked. The added financial strain was something she was willing to accept in order to meet her long-term goal of completing college.

Similar to the constraints work hours can place on academic study, Sophia explains that her work hours impede her participation in on-campus activities. She has, however, made it a priority to volunteer through the College of Nursing for an annual volunteer day at TU. By participating in the annual event and spending a few hours each week with her boyfriend, Sophia is able to fulfill a small portion of her desire to be socially active. Sophia realizes that her other friends are spending a larger amount of time on various social activities as they post pictures on Facebook. Although Sophia would like to share in these experiences, she places her academic success ahead of her social life “because I'll be doing something that I enjoy and not having to work a day-to-day job. I pretty much want to get a good job and buy a new house for my parents. They [her friends] won't be able to help their parents.”

In addition to balancing various aspects of work and school, participants feel important to their family unit. Both Sophia and Citlali provide transportation for their siblings, nieces, and nephews. At one point feeling fatigued because of all of her responsibilities, Sophia commented she wished she did not have to go to college and could just stay home. This shows that the pressure to balance full-time work, school, and assisting family members presents obstacles for first-year college students (Hurtado, et al., 2007). On the other hand, Sophia feels a strong bond to family due to poverty and
the necessity of everyone helping each other out for survival. Sophia concludes that college will allow her to be of more help to her family one day. As a result, she continues to manage her priorities keeping academics high on the list.

Many participants live with a number of family members at varying ages causing them to find it hard to concentrate. Tuning out the television, conversations, babies crying, or other noise is difficult for participants. As a result, they have found various solutions to this type of distraction. Most participants are drawn to other study places such as the library and a local park or even purchasing earplugs. Nine people living in one household creates a situation that makes studying impossible for Sophia; therefore, she finds it beneficial to study at the TU library. It is evident throughout the interview data that most participants, like Sophia, value the academic atmosphere of the library. In choosing the library as a preferred study space, participants are exhibiting a level of maturity that perhaps is one factor contributing to their level of postsecondary success.

Research indicates the importance for families to support, or advocate for, their college students (Auerbach, 2007; Cabrera & LaNasa, 2001). Results from this study reveal that parents find it hard to understand why so much time is spent studying. Subsequently, there is an initial level of frustration as to why their college student does not always attend family events. However, these family members do begin to understand that the time spent on academics translates into academic success (Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). Sophia explained that she has transformed her father’s belief in the benefits of higher education. Upon first entering TU, her father did not believe that she belonged in college because coming from an impoverished area of Mexico he believed higher education “is for people with money.” However, when Sophia received the TU Promise, a TU scholarship, his attitude and support began to change. He is now encouraging her younger siblings into an academic path that leads to attending college.
This change in Sophia’s father’s attitude towards the benefits of higher education is critical in balancing the educational outcomes between underrepresented students and their White peers (Auerbach, 2007).

Even though a family’s expectation to spend time with their college student can be a distraction, participants revealed that they feel the responsibility to change the college outlook of their families. Because they know the value of college, they want their siblings to see it also. Participants not only maintain a self-motivating quality, but they try to motivate their parents, siblings, and cousins to aspire for a higher education degree. One of Salma’s goals is to mentor her sister to place more emphasis on studying and setting high collegiate goals, but she also wants her sister to be true to who she is. Not only is encouraging family members to aspire towards a college degree important, Jose and Sophia see their college achievement as being impactful to the Hispanic culture as a whole. Jose acknowledges, “in school a lot of people always ask who is first-generation [college student], and I tend to see most Hispanics raise their hand. So for some reason I feel I need to graduate to make those statistics better.” Further, Sophia’s boyfriend is not an American citizen, and she wants him to apply for citizenship under the Dream Act. This impacts her “because I realize that there are some people who want to go to school. I think that has an impact on me too; that he can’t go to school, so it pushes me.” This loyalty to their Hispanic culture causes participants to place on themselves the added responsibility of altering the cycle for other Hispanic students.

4.5 Intrinsic Qualities of Success

The personal responsibility of encouraging family to share with participants a belief that higher education is important also translates into an internal motivation to succeed and give back to their family. Sophia discusses the financial struggles of her father and his family in Mexico. She “think[s] about their struggles, and when I go, it is
just like… I want to help them.” This desire to be of service to her family rests on her
ability to secure a certain level of financial freedom, which she acknowledges is through
attaining a college degree. Secondly, witnessing family hardships and poverty have
impacted Citlali’s decision to get a college education. These factors serve as the impetus
for Citlali to make graduating college her mission. Citlali explains “before AVID, I wasn’t
sure I wanted to go to college. Well, I had the idea. But it was when I got into AVID [that]
it was more cemented into my brain. You know, you really have to do this. If you want to
do this in life or become this in life, you need to go to college. AVID helped me with that.
Before if I was 70% sure, with AVID I was 100% sure.” As reflected here, we can
understand AVID implanted the idea that college was her key to success. Similarly,
Salma’s work ethic and desire to do well has propelled her to work even harder. Her
mother’s comment of “I don’t see how you do it” is one motivating factor for her.

Consistant with the literature (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Johnston, Huerta, Mendiola, & Alkan, 2008) participants credit AVID
for instilling in them a specific academic and non-academic skill set that has assisted
them in maintaining a successful first-year of college. The skills learned and practiced in
AVID over a number of years (i.e. Cornell notes, planner, organization, goal setting) has
been internalized by participants in such a way that when curious classmates inquired
about their successful practices, Salma and Sophia were able to assist other college
students with adopting these skills. They in turn became the provider of new knowledge
for other college students. When discussing other habits developed through participation
in AVID, Thomas internalized that “it is kinda hard to not keep organized if you want to do
well in class.” Jose entered college with the understanding to not “expect the teachers to
go back over the notes… learn how to take good notes.” As the result of this AVID
mentorship, Jose and others internalized the ownership of their own learning. Sophia
also credits AVID for showing her “that if you want to get somewhere in life you have to try.” This can-do attitude is what has helped Sophia and other participants remain motivated to continue onto their second year of college at TU.

Even though Jose was not pleased with his academic achievement level during the Fall semester, he made sure he attended all classes. He feels that his attendance ensured his ability to maintain at least passing averages. “But I’ve never really been the type of person to skip class. It makes me feel uneasy in some way.” As a result of his intrinsic feelings of responsibility to attend classes, he adjusted his work ethic for the Spring semester. Roberto also began to realize that there were classes he could not miss. Because of professors’ unique presentation of material and important explanations later reflected on tests, Roberto did not feel comfortable missing class. Citlali attends class because not all of her professors share their notes online. Also, she learned through experience she could not count on fellow student notes, which “has kept me coming to class.” In addition, Sophia does not miss class because she is able to understand the material more with her professors’ explanations. She comments that reading from her textbooks is not enough to prepare for the tests. Julio makes every effort to attend all classes; however, when he misses, he contacts the professor ahead of time for copies of the notes. Salma rarely misses class, but when she does, she contacts someone in the class for a copy of notes.

Although Thomas fell asleep during a final and still passed the class, he improved his second semester by expecting more out of himself. He realized that it was due to his work schedule. His concern prompted him to begin meeting with his advisor regarding his GPA and setting short and long-term GPA goals. At the end of our interview, I asked if he had anything else to share. He further explained the importance of setting long-term goals. “Set your priorities… Another thing is imagine… See where
you want to be.” Having an intrinsic motivation is vital to managing academic success. Roberto shares he did not do as well during his first-year. Because his friends reminded him of his purpose of setting a good example for his siblings, Roberto decided to not be a quitter. He interfaced his mentality of academic success with his previous soccer attitude of not quitting.

Minimizing social activities became necessary for Roberto because of its negative effect on his schoolwork. However, he mentions, “I have to face the facts that I can’t do everything that I want, and I have to get my priorities. And that is school… Like my friend says, you have the options there. You are missing out because you choose to.” This friend’s wise counsel reminded Roberto of his priorities. Similarly, Sophia’s motivation to maintain her academics has remained a top priority. Sophia exhibits determination in achieving success. “First, I want to make sure I can stay on top of my schoolwork before I get involved with anything. I want to show my dad that it can happen. That’s pretty much the idea… the mindset.”

Having participated in AVID for five or more years, participants were schooled in how to set goals and why setting goals is important. Setting goals has, therefore, become a natural response for each participant. For example, Roberto mentions one goal is to “try to get a minimum of one C if any.” Because AVID required students to remain in honors level coursework throughout, Citlali “learned how to push myself to get through [them], which actually taught me I could do it… I feel like that is something I brought to college as well.” In addition, she mentions that being in college you are more on your own and must learn to manage your academic responsibilities in order to be successful. When asked about setting goals, Roberto maintains his full-time enrollment “because I’m motivated to do better and be the best student possible.”
Interview data provides evidence that the AVID atmosphere helped to instill confidence and acceptance in participants. As a result, Julio began to set higher goals, which has transferred to setting long-term educational goals as a college student. He plans on attaining a graduate degree in astrophysics. Salma admits that AVID habits have become so ingrained in her that they have become her natural habits. The competitiveness within Salma prompted her to set loftier goals and work even harder to achieve them. This was a direct result from the AVID teacher placing emphasis on class rank.

4.6 Study Habits

It is evident from the interview data that all participants take their academics seriously in varying degrees. One participant spends up to 30 hours per week studying, several others stay up late at night, and several others make it a priority when not at work. Three participants admit that their laziness and procrastination cause them stress, which has led them to change their habits. In spite of Maria’s consistent down playing of her work ethic, snippets throughout the interview reveal that she does in fact plan, take notes, and worry about her success. She admits to “waking up at 3:14 AM and reading and doing homework.” In contrast to Maria, Salma reveals that she spends approximately 30 hours per week studying. Her most challenging class is Calculus II, with which she spends most of her time. She finds herself studying best at the library because she likes surrounding herself with other students studying. Salma “found it is helpful to read the chapter we are [going] discuss in class and have an idea of what he is talking about. After class I like to look over my notes.” After not achieving as well as he would like his Fall semester, Thomas realized the importance of not only attending class but reviewing materials. His strategy of reviewing materials before and after class allowed him to improve his grades. Roberto realized after his first semester that not
spending enough time preparing for tests hurt his academic standing; therefore, he adjusted his study schedule to allow for more time. This adjustment made a difference in his success. Maria was forthright about her academic laziness and admitted that she needed “to figure out something to fix that” because her headaches were a result of stress linked to her procrastination.

Consistent with the research (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011) interview data demonstrates that all participants acknowledge the importance of taking good notes, albeit in varying degrees of adherence to the Cornell note method. When discussing Salma’s use of Cornell notes in college, she comments “I do a summary like in Calculus; I summarize our theorems. Cornell notes…I love them. It is the only way I can do it.” Sophia also strictly adheres to the Cornell note method. She takes notes in class, creates questions over those notes, and summarizes the notes immediately after class. Even though Julio does not complete the entire Cornell note method of including a summary, he still creates study questions from his notes taken during class. Citlali reviews her notes a number of times—before, immediately after, and throughout the week in order to retain the information. Citlali “has maintained a lot of the structure from” Cornell notes because she finds it helpful in college. Jose continued to take Cornell notes in college. When professors provide Power Points, Jose found it most helpful to follow along with the Power Point, highlight, and make notes on the sides. In addition, when participating in collaborative study, Jose will add to his notes based off of what he is learning from his peers. He also finds that his notes assist the others when they are studying. Contrary to the previous participants, Roberto and Thomas do not take Cornell notes. Instead, they have adapted to their own style of note taking. Roberto rewrites all of his notes from class to study. He does, however, write little summaries about various topics covered during review sessions.
Thomas found it helpful to use his own notes, as well as notes from friends that previously took the class. His style of taking notes does not conform to AVID’s Cornell note-taking method; however, he types them on his computer. He has adapted this style of note taking because he finds it more organized by using folders on his laptop. With each class’ folder, he includes all handouts from professors.

Another particular strategy participants maintain from the AVID curriculum learned throughout junior high and high school is the planner. Each participant has adapted the AVID planner system into his or her own personal way of organizing. Thomas uses a detailed weekly planner in order to prioritize assignments by point value and due dates. Salma “has to have a planner; I love my planner. That’s my life.” Sophia has created a color-coding system to remain organized in her planner. This color-coding system helps her prioritize her assignments and “without it I would be lost. Right now because of my planner, I haven’t lost an assignment.” Citlali keeps her planner and credits “AVID [for] helping me start working on things earlier,” which perhaps is due to the planner.

Participants do not necessary follow the AVID binder system. They, however, have adapted the system to meet their needs. Salma, Roberto, and Julio like having one notebook per class. This allows them to always have materials for opportune study times. Roberto “always stays organized. I have to keep [my notes] organized because I will drive myself crazy.” After having participated in AVID, Roberto finds that his own method of organizing his notes in one notebook is more comfortable for him. Citlali uses a large notebook that includes all her classes divided into five sections and finds it helpful to review notes on a daily basis.

All participants believe that their amount of study directly impacts their success. Most participants like going to TU’s main library to study. Salma utilizes the Life Science
building for retrieving copies of old exams and likes going online to look for You Tube tutorials in order to prepare for her tests. When not having to report to work directly from class, Salma will review her notes and sometimes visit the on-campus Math Clinic to make sure she understands the new content. Additionally, Julio also takes notes during class and reviews those notes immediately after class. Julio and Sophia both use old tests, online tutorials, and notes from other students and professors when preparing for tests. Citlali on the other hand only looks up old tests to add to her notes when reviewing. Thomas takes advantage of meeting with teacher assistants before the test to ask pertinent questions.

Collaborative study is another example of how some participants were able to remain successful throughout their first-year of college, which remains consistent with research (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011). For example, Thomas and a group of his peers would come together “and work on Economics and everyone will just pitch in some ideas. We will get a big board and write out the problems.” The questions Thomas brings to the group are those that he has noted during class and homework time. This type of collaborative study is similar to the AVID tutorial method. AVID tutorials involve a group of peers problem-solving through questioning techniques. The purpose of tutorials is to work through difficult problems. High school AVID tutorials taught Julio that through explanation with friends, he is able to better comprehend the course material. Therefore, Julio often engages in academic collaboration with his peers. Citlali finds herself gravitating to the library to study whether it is with peers or by herself. Jose advises that not only attending class regularly is important, but “join study groups because even though you may be the best at taking notes, you may still miss some things. Even just getting a different point of view from the notes that helps a lot too.” Jose relies most heavily on his own notes and
materials from the professor; however, he will at times receive old notes from friends that have taken the course before. Sophia finds it useful to stay in contact with her AVID tutors from high school, who still help her when she contacts them through Facebook. Jose likes studying alone unless it is a difficult class. He will then form a study group with friends to get different points of views.

In conclusion, participants believe that their participation in AVID has helped mold their successful academic habits. When asked about the AVID curriculum, Salma declares, “I think it has definitely shaped the way I study and think about my academics because I still take Cornell notes. That is the only way I can take notes. I still have a planner.” In addition Salma states, “because of AVID I am the way I am.” Not only do participants reveal that AVID’s academic strategies are helpful, Citlali believes “Socratic Seminars helped… how to think critically.” Further, Jose credits the AVID tutors in high school with helping him the most in learning how to problem solve and be more thorough in his work.

4.7 Support Systems—On and Off Campus

Research indicates that support systems are necessary in supporting first-year students (Colyar & Stich, 2010; Cabrera & Padilla, 2004). The current study supports this finding; however, some participants find it difficult to ask for help. There are multiple academic support systems on-campus, such as—professors, teaching assistants, academic clinics, and advisors. Salma admits that asking for help is difficult even in the university Math Clinic. When needing help on a certain problem, “I went into [the math clinic] and I just couldn’t ask for help. I don’t know why. It’s just really hard for me to ask for help.” She realizes that she needs to develop the courage to ask questions because even when she is with her peers in study groups, she still cannot ask for help. In studying for Calculus Salma finds that helping others in her study group helps her to
better understand. Maria finds it difficult to get to know professors for large classes because she admits to being too shy. She has, however, gotten to know her professors from smaller classes and found that they are helpful when she approaches them. Julio rarely will ask his professors; he prefers instead trying to help himself by looking online. In contrast to these participants, several others are able to benefit from the on-campus academic support systems. Julio goes to the Math Clinic with friends to seek help. His confidence in asking for help in this setting provides him more assistance in maintaining success. Sophia used the freshman tutoring and feels “the tutoring helped because they walked me through exactly what would be on the test and what to expect.” In addition, Sophia would attend the study sessions with the teaching assistants for Anatomy and Statistics. Each session was a review of material covered in class, and Sophia explains that this was one strategy that helped her be successful. Sophia also attends professor office hours and math and writing clinics to manage her academic success. Citlali prefers asking her peers for help; however, she has attended the math clinic because math is something she struggles with. Roberto, on the other hand, does not use the on-campus clinics or ask his professors for help because he is only on campus for class and leaves immediately after for work.

In addition to using the on-campus academic support systems, most participants feel more comfortable in creating their own academic support groups. Thomas finds that the study groups with his peers are helpful. Julio feels that working in a group is wise because it forces him to explain which is the way he learns best. Citlali typically participates in study groups for her large classes like Biology. Jose likes working with study groups because he can better understand the material through an open discussion of topics. Maria and Sophia, on the other hand, do not like to study with peers. As a slower paced learner, Maria feels she will not learn with others because they are fast.
Plus, her talkative nature can be distracting. Sophia finds it more comfortable to ask professors and university personnel for help instead of her peers. She explains that she is shy when it comes to meeting and working with her peers.

In contrast to Thomas’ experience with advising, Julio found his advisor beneficial. The advisor continuously helps Julio with the number of hours to take in order to balance school and work. Jose found the freshman orientation helpful. “They showed me some of the things to watch out for like to start studying more, not to slack off, and they also talked about not only academic wise but what goes on on-campus like safety and being concerned about others.”

Participants credit the AVID program as having kept them on track throughout high school in order to be prepared for college. Financially, AVID in NCTISD covers several application fees for each AVID student when they apply for college, taking SAT tests, and enrolling in summer classes during high school. All participants commented on the continual support and mentorship of their AVID teacher. Maria appreciated the forthrightness of the AVID teacher in explaining the possible hardships that college can present. Although Jose was provided advice by the AVID tutors and others throughout his high school experience he admits not adhering to all of the advice. “So many AVID tutors and so many people that experience college they always warned us do not slack off during first semester, really study, but I think most of us don’t really think… really learn how serious they were until we actually experienced it for ourselves.” In fact, a number of participants continue to keep in contact with their AVID family. Sophia describes her high school AVID teacher and peers as family, and she considers them her best friends now. She keeps in contact with them through Facebook for fun and for support because “if anybody needs something, you just post something, and everybody just starts posting.”
Jose mentioned that he and other AVID students return to high school to visit their AVID teacher for advice.

The AVID elective class provided a necessary emotional support for some participants. Salma presents a comparative between two different AVID teachers. One was very passionate about students excelling, whereas the other one was preoccupied with his coaching responsibilities. The year she had the coach as an AVID teacher, she ended up dropping two honors level courses. “He didn’t really push us the way I was used to being pushed. That year I dropped two of my [Pre Advanced Placement] classes. I was so mad at myself at the end of that year because I had to play catch-up and bring my GPA all the way up.” Citlali compares her AVID family to a sports team. “We would help each other out with whatever it was. We would hangout out of school. Things that weren’t school related.” When describing his AVID class atmosphere, Jose explains “everyone was so focused on college that just walking in there around people determined to go to college kind of motivated me to participate more and push for higher goals.”

Similar to the support participants receive on-campus, through peers, and from the AVID system, family serves as an important system of support for all eight participants in this study. Maria’s mother is supportive and has pushed her to attend and graduate from the university. She explains that living at home keeps the pressure down because she has the support of her mother. From family discussions Salma clearly notes that her family is proud of her. Julio’s family is also supportive and is proud of him since he is the only one going to college. Even though Citlali’s family is supportive of her succeeding in college, “they don’t realize…how everything needs to be” for her to be able to focus on her studies at home. Jose’s immediate and extended family is supportive. When he is with them, they inquire as to how school is. In addition to having the support
of his family, Jose benefits from his manager at work “always encouraging me to receive my bachelor’s degree.”

4.8 Social Impact in College

All participants comment that they enjoy the diversity that is on the TU campus.

This finding is in line with Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, and Gonyea (2008) because participants felt comfortable on campus and validated by the amount of diversity on-campus. Thomas states, “I guess because of the level of intellect, you are more tolerant of others. You are more understanding. Everyone more or less wants to help each other out to get by.” Maria enjoys the diversity but “it still comes down to [each] personality.”

She sees through the diversity and makes friends based on who they are not what they look like. Salma reveals in her interview that her experience with a male student in her Calculus lab was frustrating. She felt that this was not due to her being Hispanic, but due to her being female in a male dominated field. “It got on my nerves because I would be right, and this guy would ask the professor about everything I would say. He would say that he just needed to make sure it was right, and I was like, okay, whatever.” On the other hand, Roberto thinks that the university works to make him feel like he belongs.

Seeing a lot of Hispanics on campus makes Jose proud. Sophia also feels “like I belong” on the TU campus. “It is like a community. I remember my first day on campus everybody would say hi even people I didn’t know.” Julio enjoyed TU’s cultural awareness event that presented food from various cultures. “It makes me feel really good because being in a minority and seeing that the university supports that kind of diversity in the school is really, really good.” Other than this experience Julio does not have any social experience at TU due to work responsibilities. He does, however, seek friends that benefit him academically.
Through interview data it is revealed that most participants have sought Hispanic student organizations as their way of initially participating with on-campus activities. Thomas tries his best to get involved on-campus; however, work responsibilities cause him to miss out. He has attended some concerts and belongs to several student organizations. Thomas would like to spend more time on-campus attending various events related to his field (i.e. job fairs, etiquette classes). Julio participates in the aerospace student organization instead of Hispanic organizations. Julio focuses his on-campus activity time on how he can benefit academically. The friends that Sophia has made on-campus are from the college of nursing, her major. Her closest friends are from work and also attend the local community college.

TU, like many other campuses, has traditions involving students that take place on-campus. For example, Roberto enjoyed the Homecoming activities. In addition, Maria, like several other participants, makes sure to attend the a number of traditional events on-campus. She also is on the spirit squad, which is a yell squad that spreads spirit for various TU events. Maria tries to participate with on-campus events as much as possible because “it takes some stress away. It’s fun. It just makes you feel more in connection with the people.” The annual summer parade was a positive social experience for Maria as she began possible friendships with students on the spirit squad. In contrast, Sophia does not have much time to participate with on-campus activities; however, she has brought her boyfriend along for several volleyball games. Citlali is unable to participate in on-campus activities because she is a commuter and does not have time.

The importance to balance work, academics, and social is mentioned by a number of participants. Salma is considering rushing in a sorority next fall because she is missing that college camaraderie. She feels that too much of her time is spent on work
and study, and she would like to have more of a balance that includes friendship. Sophia is also considering joining a sorority, but she “wants to make sure I can stay on top of my schoolwork before I get involved with anything. I want to show my dad that it can happen. That’s pretty much the idea… the mindset.” Similarly, Roberto is interested in joining a fraternity because he wants to return to a degree of social activity on-campus.

4.9 Conclusion

This study was born out of a desire to uncover ways Hispanic students could successfully achieve educational success beyond K-12. I found it necessary to examine the practices and experiences of successful Hispanic students because national statistics indicate that Hispanics (8.5%) are not graduating college at a rate comparable to their White (70.8%) and Black (10%) peers (Snyder & Dillow, 2012a). Given Dukes’ (as cited in Creswell, 1998) recommendation that up to 10 participants is favorable for this type of qualitative study, the eight participants in this study each reveal similar and telling insights that begin to tell a story of how underserved Hispanic students are capable of defying society’s stereotypes. Research gleaned from this select group of participants adds to the body of research to form a more complete picture of educational success among first-year Hispanic students. The themes presented throughout this chapter reveal the following attributes that successful Hispanic students embody: a rigorous pre-college academic experience, support in developing college access, ability to adapt academic strategies, and multiple key support systems. Participants further revealed that they feel similar students without an AVID background have a distinctly different experience during their first year of college. They feel that their participation in AVID and rigorous high school coursework provided them with the necessary skills and motivation to succeed in postsecondary education.
5.1 Introduction

Reason, Ternzini, and Domingo (2006) found that students are more likely to persist in a postsecondary institution when they 1) begin college with academic ability and social awareness to support academic competence and 2) are successful throughout their first year of college. The development of academic ability takes place when students are involved in rigorous coursework (Conley, 2007a; Ishatani, 2006) and are instructed on various non-cognitive behaviors (Lombardi, Seburn, & Conley, 2011). The AVID College-Readiness System embeds these two factors of success as their foundation in developing college-ready students. By requiring participation in and supporting students through advanced classes and instructing students in writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading strategies, AVID is changing the landscape of postsecondary enrollment among underserved populations. Several studies have shown that Hispanic AVID graduates have performed well in Hispanic-serving institutions in South Texas (Huerta, Watt, & Reyes, 2013; Mendiola, Watt, & Huerta, 2010; Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011). In an effort to add to the lack of research on former AVID students in a four-year university, this study closely examined eight successful Hispanic students, who participated five or more years in an AVID program. One question guided this examination.

1. What are the first-year experiences of former AVID Hispanic students within a four-year higher education institution?

In order to fully understand the various aspects of a successful first-year experience, the following sub-questions were examined:
a. What are the academic experiences of these students?

b. What strategies do these students attribute to their success?

c. What are the social experiences of these students as pertaining to their academic environment?

d. What part, if any, did AVID play in these students’ success?

Results from one-on-one interviews supported current research that postsecondary students benefit from a) participating in rigorous high school coursework; b) building familial, academic, and social support systems; and c) developing academic skills to support success. This study, therefore, furthers the research by providing evidence that when all of these elements are combined, Hispanic students are academically successful and persist in a large, urban four-year university. Further, Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of cultural capital provides the lens for understanding how these findings combine to produce clarity of students’ postsecondary experiences within the first year. It is this thematic combination that provides insight into the ways at which participants are managing their level of success. Moreover, using the theory of cultural capital reveals how participants’ success is molding their societal placement in rungs of status and class, which was one reason participants set attending college as a long-term goal.

The theory of cultural capital as explained in chapter one is divided into three states—the embodied, the objectified, and the institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986). Each of these three states works in conjunction with the other to build an individual’s level of culture and catapult them to a higher level of society (Moore, 2012). The following items explain Bourdieu’s three states and how they are able to shed light on understanding this study’s eight participants and their first-year experiences.
1. The embodied state occurs when an individual consciously and passively acquires culture over time through socialization (Bourdieu, 1986). By socializing in different settings (i.e. home, work, school) and with a variety of individuals (i.e. peers, bosses, teachers), a person will develop new knowledge. Gaining this knowledge from different types of experiences builds an individual’s capacity to understand new situations. Within this state, therefore, an individual develops “habitus,” which is the unique way a person thinks and demonstrates his character. The significance of the habitus is that it establishes a natural ability for an individual to respond to various situations. By doing so, that individual develops confidence in their ability to adapt when presented with new and different experiences. The preceding thematic sections present ways in which participants have begun to develop their habitus and, as a result, have built a level of confidence that benefits them in withstanding their educational success.

2. The objectified state consists of personal possessions that equate to a financial profit or a symbol of understanding a broader culture (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state develops as the objectified state strengthens. Simply having ownership of an object does not create cultural capital for an individual. It is the ability to a) understand the objects’ purpose and b) be able to operate or explain the object. Possession of this more cognitive ability transmits into an individual’s ability to participate in higher-level conversations of sorts with other individuals possessing the same ability. Hence, an individual embodies a heightened level of cultural capital. As it pertains to this study, participants’ objectified state is developed through their acquisition of academic content. Through collaborative efforts, participants
build confidence in their ability to problem solve with their peers. For example, Julio explains that he is proud when he can assist his study partners in better understanding the academic material.

3. The institutionalized state consists of institutional qualifications or recognitions (Bourdieu, 1986) (i.e. high school diploma, graduating with honors, university diploma). By acquiring institutionalized qualifications an individual is able to convert this into economic capital. Graduating from high school and fulfilling the appropriate requirements allows students to gain admittance into a postsecondary institution. By succeeding in college and acquiring an undergraduate degree, students are then able to seek specialized employment that provides them more financial stability had they not furthered their education beyond high school. Results from this study indicate that participants realize that college provides them a foundation for improving their financial status and are highly motivated to complete their degree.

The building of cultural capital does not solely rest on one individual state; however, it is the combination of each state that builds an individual’s cultural capital through awareness, experience, and acquisitions (Bourdieu, 1986). The cadre of experiences shared with academic professionals and peers, the development of confidence within the academic context, and the advancement along the higher educational continuum have combined to guide participants in creating effective habits of success and, thereby, increase their level of cultural capital. Furthermore, it is evident that the academic achievements of Hispanic students within this study can be better understood through Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital. Throughout this chapter, I present conclusions from participant interviews to show that students’ development of
cultural capital is a result of a) successful academic experiences and b) key relationships developed during their personal and academic journeys. Through family situations, work environments, academic settings, and human interactions, participants have developed a foundation that will enable them to sustain and further develop their habitus. Bourdieu (1986) explains that in the evolution of an individual’s cultural capital, the reproduction of cultural capital is a natural sequence. More specifically, someone who has strengthened their cultural capital can support the development of cultural capital for their closest associates—their own children. As a result, participants in this study that are continually and successfully developing their cultural capital are altering the familial non-education cycle for future generations.

Conclusions from this study are presented within each of the sections below. In addition, theoretical discussions are combined with findings of current research to show how eight Hispanic participants have a) constructed a successful first-year of college and b) developed a stronger level of cultural capital.

5.1.1 Academic Experiences and Successful Strategies

Even though academic experiences and successful strategies represent two separate research questions, results show that they are closely related. Data from participant interviews show that successful strategies are embedded within participants’ academic experiences. Therefore, it can be understood that through the application of acquired strategies participants were able to successfully navigate their daily academic experiences. Such strategies included academic and non-academic areas learned through long-term participation in AVID and rigorous coursework throughout high school. As a result, this study concludes and supports existing research that participation in AVID (Lozano, Watt, & Huerta, 2009), as well as participation in college-preparatory courses
(Ishitani, 2006; Porter & Polikoff, 2012), positively impacted the academic success of all eight participants.

Through an in-depth data analysis on participant interviews, it is evident that participants retained and utilized most of the academic strategies taught through the AVID elective and higher-level coursework. To support and further the research by Conley (2007a) and Lombardi, Seburn, and Conley (2011), this study concludes that work ethic, study skills, and goal setting are critical to establishing a successful first-year of college. Participants within the current study have established at some point within their first-year standards for managing their success. Remaining organized, using a calendar, taking notes, studying ahead of time, and establishing a study space are standards that all participants developed. Participants were motivated to maintain these standards because they allowed participants to construct their success. As these standards were introduced and practiced in participants’ pre-college development years, participants were able to successfully transfer the application of skills over into college. This finding further the research by Zajacova, Lynch, and Espenshade (2005) in that it increases our understanding that academic self-efficacy impacts academic success. As participants experienced multiple successes throughout their first-year of college by complying with their standards, their confidence in their academic ability increased. Further, participants’ intrinsic motivation also strengthened as a response to these successful experiences.

Another conclusion drawn from this study is the importance of first-year students to secure one or more systems of support. Just as Colyar and Stich (2010) discovered that students valued the support of friends and family, participants within this study acknowledge the positive impact of others. The support of family, friends, professors, bosses, and college peers, provided various levels of support. Even though each
participant valued different systems of support and utilized different combinations of support (albeit professors and family, or family and peers), evidence points to the importance of establishing at least one system of support. By having at least one system of support, participants did not feel as though they were alone in achieving their long-term goal of graduating college.

Because participants were schooled in multiple strategies and successfully applied them throughout their first-year of college, participants developed their cultural capital in its embodied form. Through the continual use of effective strategies and production of success, participants developed successful habits that Bourdieu (1998) explains establishes confidence, which can translate to future experiences. Consequently, each situation that participants experienced success strengthened their confidence. Based on Bourdieu’s (1998) theory, it is expected that participants will continue to apply confidence to future situations and, in turn, develop a stronger cultural capital.

5.1.2 Social Experiences Impacting Academic Life

One important aspect of participants’ first-year college experience was the level at which they participated or did not participate in social activities. All participants felt as though they belonged within the university culture. When asked about whether they felt being Hispanic caused problems for them on campus, all eight participants denied that their race impeded any aspect of their sense of belonging on campus. Research indicates that universities should work toward an inclusive environment that supports and encourages cross-cultural communications (Kuh, et al., 2008; Oseguera, Locka, & Vega, 2008). The current study provides evidence that eight freshman students felt as though they were welcome on campus, even though not all participated in on-campus events.
Further research with this study’s participants should provide more evidence to explain their sense of belonging in relation to the university’s efforts of cultural inclusion.  

As research indicates a positive correlation between first-year academic effort and on-campus extracurricular participation (LaNasa, Olson, & Alleman, 2007), this study provides evidence on the contrary. Several participants found that their lack of on-campus participation provided them more time to focus on academics and to better manage their time. Although these participants want to participate more on-campus, they are determined to keep academics as a top priority. They want the whole college experience; however, they are not willing to jeopardize their chances at completing a college degree. They felt as though it was best to first acclimate to the academic expectations and second to the social climate of the university.  

Contrary to Bozick’s (2007) findings that student working over 20 hours per week jeopardize their academic standing, the current study finds that those participants working 30-40 hours per week were able to manage a successful first-year of college. It is worth noting, however, that several of those participants are considering lowering their work hours as they enter into their major-level coursework. Participants feel that these upper level courses will require longer study hours to maintain their personal level of academic success. As a result, this study concludes that full-time work hours do not impede academic success within the first year when students are able to effectively manage their time on and off-campus. Long work hours did increase participants’ level of stress; however, they were able to apply effective time managing skills to balance the demands of work and school.  

This emphasis on remaining determined to achieve their long-term goals demonstrates that participants are continually developing their cultural capital. After having completed two successful semesters, participants developed their cultural capital.
by gaining confidence in their ability to effectively manage their time. Increasing their self-belief in turn built their self-worth because they proved to themselves that their ability matched the academic expectations of higher education culture. In addition, by remaining successful throughout their first-year and into their second year, participants are institutionalizing their cultural capital. Moreover, the further each participant moves along the higher education continuum, the closer they are to receiving the necessary credentials for employment in degree-mandated fields. In addition, participants are improving their odds at sustaining higher levels of employment, which allow them to move into a higher societal status. This is Bourdieu’s (1998) explanation of how one develops cultural capital through the institution.

5.1.3 AVID’s Overall Role in Constructing Success

All eight participants in this study explain that AVID is a main reason for their current standing in college. AVID’s emphasis on goal setting has remained with participants throughout their first-year. Striving to reach their short and long-term goals and applying strategies learned in AVID has assisted participants in their success. All participants are currently in their sophomore year at the same institution and are maintaining a level of success to ensure acceptance for their junior year of college. Just as the research (Watt, Huerta, & Alkan, 2011) indicates, this study supports that long-term participation in AVID improves the success rate of Hispanic students in a higher education institution. The emphasis on collaborative study through tutorials within the AVID elective class aided participants in their ability to effectively problem solve with peers while in college. Most participants acknowledge that collaborative study was beneficial in achieving success. The capacity to effectively collaborate with peers exemplifies Bourdieu’s (1998) development of the objectified state within the theory of cultural capital. Because students are confident enough to communicate with their peers
on various academic topics, their feeling of self-worth increases. By explaining academic content so that a peer is able to clarify misconceptions or construct new meaning, participants were able to build their cultural capital. They felt value and defined that value on the basis of academic knowledge.

As Bourdieu (1986) explains, when in the embodied state, individuals develop habitus. Habitus, as witnessed within this study, is the development of unconscious habits that participants use as a natural response to various situations. Participants apply strategies learned in the AVID elective to assist in their higher education success. Most participants brought with them to the university AVID’s adopted style of taking notes—the Cornell note method. Even though the others did not strictly adhere to the Cornell note method, they were comfortable with creating their own style. Creating study questions from in-class notes and outside sources benefited students as they prepared for collaborative or individual study. This skill learned in the AVID elective class assisted participants in a smoother transition between high school and university level coursework. Having established the successful habits of note taking and studying, participants acknowledged that they had more confidence as they remained in college. In addition, participants continued to place importance on maintaining a system of organization including calendars, notebooks, folders, and supplies. Participants learned from their success in rigorous high school courses that applying AVID’s organizational strategies were necessary in the college setting to remain successful. In applying these various strategies participants developed their level of cultural capital and gained more power in their abilities. This power allows participants to become their own agent of change (Bourdieu, 1986). For participants in this study, becoming their own change agent is necessary to achieve their short and long-term goals—remaining successful each semester and earning a higher education degree.
5.2 Implications

This study provides evidence that success during the first-year of a higher education institution develops cultural capital among Hispanic students. The combination of previously mentioned experiences work simultaneously so that participants are able to embody their standards, objectify their success, and institutionalize their ability. By embodying their standards participants are creating successful habits that will allow them to maintain future success as they continue to navigate the college experience.

Secondly, participants have objectified their success by increasing their knowledge in various subject areas. This allows participants to manage educational-laden conversations with individuals on the same or higher intellectual level. Finally, the further participants progress through the high education pipeline, they improve their chances for securing degreed-level employment.

Understanding the first-year experiences of this study’s Hispanic participants allows for a better understanding of how each participant has developed their omniscient view of the benefits of higher education. Just as several participants shared, completing college will allow them to not only secure a financial future but to improve the financial standing for their family. The ability to look beyond themselves and see possibilities for others is common among participants. Nearly all participants felt as though it is their duty to a) impress upon siblings and cousins that college is a possibility and b) alter the dismal Hispanic educational statistics of previous generations by graduating college. This attitude by participants exemplifies Bourdieu’s (1998) reasoning that developing one’s cultural capital has the power to alter the cultural capital of one’s close associates. This idea of generational change in the higher education enrollment among Hispanics suggests the following attributes are critical to experiencing a successful first-year of college:
1. Participate in rigorous courses while in high school for early exposure to college-level coursework

2. Participate in the AVID College Readiness System for five or more years to develop knowledge of college and be able to navigate entrance and transition into the first-year

3. Establish at least one system of support whether it is familial, peer, or professors

4. Develop skills necessary for navigating the complexities of the academic experience (study and note-taking skills, organizational skills, goal-setting, and motivation)

5. Create effective time management strategies allowing for work, study, and social experiences

These five attributes have allowed the eight participants in this study to maintain success in a higher education institution and thereby built their level of cultural capital.

As a result of this study’s conclusions, K-12 educational leaders should consider placing more emphasis on the AVID College Readiness System and its impact on all students. Engaging with students for the purpose of increasing college access and improving strategies for academic success could improve the national educational statistics among Hispanic high school graduates enrolling in higher educational institutions. This study supports AVID’s early outreach among underrepresented students and its impact on higher education success. Secondly, four-year university officials would benefit from increasing the amount of interaction with high school students on the university campus. All participants within this study explained that early exposure, whether through field trips or completing research assignments, assisted them in their transition to higher education. Broadening the exposure of the university campus to more
high school students provides universities the opportunity to recruit more students and possibly increase the number of underrepresented students. University faculty members should consider the lack of confidence participants may have in communicating with their professors. Improving communication with students has the potential to further develop the cultural capital of first-year students because students would be encouraged to engage in academic conversations that deepen their understanding of new knowledge.

5.3 Limitations and Recommendations

Several limitations exist within this study on former AVID, Hispanic students. Although interviews were in-depth, only eight participants were interviewed. With only eight participants, data consists of a limited viewpoint to the four males and four females within this study and do not represent the larger population of former AVID, Hispanic students during their first year of a postsecondary institution. Future studies should examine a larger participant pool, perhaps through the use of focus groups. Multiple perspectives from participants representing a broad range of situations (i.e. living on-campus) would provide more enriched data to understand first-year experiences of college students.

A second limitation of this study is its focus on one school district and one university. Because participants completed high school within a 15-mile radius and still live within that same radius of the university, data is unique to these students. Had participants from other district been included, perhaps a different perspective would have been presented and different conclusions drawn. In addition, not all high school AVID programs are run with the same level of intensity. Future studies should examine graduates from multiple schools within multiple districts all with varying degrees of AVID intensity. The benefit of such a study could explain why some former AVID, Hispanic
students are more successful than others during their first year of a postsecondary institution.

Finally, the short-term duration of this study limits the measurement of success among participants. Success within the current study was defined as completion of the first-year and enrollment in a second year at the same institution. Future studies would benefit from following students throughout their postsecondary experience. This type of study could investigate the long-term collegiate effects of the AVID elective teachings. In order to understand the maximum benefits of the AVID College-Readiness System would be to follow a group of participants through the completion of a bachelor’s degree. By doing so, more evidence of postsecondary experiences among successful Hispanic students could lead to an improvement in the preparation of Hispanic high school students setting postsecondary education as a long-term goal.

Even with these limitations and recommendations, this study has added to the body of research on the successful experiences of former AVID, Hispanic first-year students within a higher education institution. As educational leaders work to improve the educational outcomes among K-12 students through the reauthorization of NCLB, this study offers evidence to support the efforts of AVID in answering the call to close the achievement gap. The purpose of this study was to examine the successful experiences of students and how AVID assisted in that success. By working to build the necessary foundation for underrepresented students to become successful in their pursuit of higher education, this study reveals that AVID is fostering habits that students value in sustaining their success.
Appendix A

Definition of Terms
Hispanic: students who “trace their origin or descent to Mexico, Puerto Rico…Central and South America, and other Spanish cultures” (Office of Management and Budget, 1997, October). The term Hispanic is primarily used throughout this text because it is more widely used in Texas in comparison to the term Latino/a.

Low socio-economic: individuals having a below average level of “education, income, and occupation” (American Psychological Association, 2013)

Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID): college-readiness system that focuses on closing the achievement gap

College-ready: having developed the necessary skills to be successful in a postsecondary institution; also college-ready student and college-readiness

Underrepresented students: groups of students that are not proportionally represented in a postsecondary institution in comparison to a majority of White students

Success: when a student is eligible to enroll in another semester at a four-year university

Persistence: when a student enrolls in a consecutive semesters at the same four-year university

International Baccalaureate (IB): a rigorous program of study focused on combining academics, community service, and creativity to develop independently motivated, global thinkers
Appendix B

Letter to North Central Texas ISD for List of Potential Participants
Good morning,

My name is Erin Fogleman, and I am currently working as the AVID Coordinator at Gunn Jr. High and completing my PhD studies at UTA in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. I am preparing for my proposal in March and would like to inquire about participants for my qualitative study. Specifically, I am looking for up to 10 participants (5 female and 5 male) that are former AVID students from the NCTISD. My methods center on one-on-one semi-structured interviews and focus on better understanding why former AVID students are successful in their first year of a public four-year university and persist into their second year. As an incentive and in appreciation for my participants' time, I am providing each with monetary gift cards.

Both Dean Gerlach, my dissertation chair, and [redacted] suggested I contact you for help. Can your district help with contacting former students that participated in AVID? I would appreciate any help and/or suggestions on how to proceed.

Thank you for your time!

Erin
Erin Fogleman, M.Ed. T.
Doctoral Student
University of Texas at Arlington
College of Education and Health Professions
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Appendix C

Response Letter from North Central Texas ISD

Concerning List of Potential Participants
Ms. Fogleman,

Your request to obtain a list of former AVID students with their email addresses in order to study program effects on their success in college is approved. I will send you a document for you to sign and in which you will maintain confidentiality of the information and its use only for the purpose of your research. Also, please send me the file description and format you wish for the list.

Wally
Appendix D

Email to Potential Participants for Completion of Demographic Survey
Good MORNING/AFTERNOON/EVENING,

My name is Erin Fogleman, and I am a PhD student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) Department at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). To complete my doctoral studies, I am conducting a study on the college experiences of former high school AVID students.

Therefore, I am writing today to ask for your voluntary participation in the first portion of my research study. Your participation requires completion of a short survey using Google Docs. In order to participate, you must be 18 years or older. Participation is voluntary and will be reported anonymously to protect your identity. Once your survey is submitted, your name will be entered into a random drawing for one of three $25 VISA gift cards. If your name is drawn, I will mail your gift card to the address you provide.

To complete the survey, please click the following link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1RNiYbcUKby7nLCw7UtIZESY2k7UC4zp1Sr1eCTnDAKE/viewform

If you have any questions, please contact me at erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu.

Thank you for your time! I look forward to hearing back from you.

Erin Fogleman
Appendix E

Demographic Survey (Google Docs)
Survey of Former AVID Students

1. This study is being conducted by Erin Fogleman (erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu) and Dr. Jeanne Gerlach (gerlach@uta.edu). The title of this project is Academic Experiences of Former AVID Hispanic Students in Higher Education. You are being asked to participate in a research study about your college experiences. Participation in this study is voluntary. The procedures that will involve you include: completing a short online survey through Google Docs, answering questions concerning your high school academic participation, family background concerning college experience, and participation in a university, assigning you a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality, and possible follow-up interview to ensure a thorough understanding of your first year experience. If an interview takes place, it will be audio recorded and transcribed. Your name and any other identifying information will not be included in the transcription. This research study will benefit future students entering college because this study hopes to help others understand the successful attributes of selected Hispanic students. There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence. Upon completion of this online survey, your name will be entered into a random drawing to receive a $25 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation. The gift card will be mailed to the address you provide at the end of the survey. There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. You can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence. Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. All data collected from this study will be stored on UTA campus in my dissertation chair’s office for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Questions about this research study may be directed to Erin Fogleman (erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu) or Dr. Jeanne Gerlach (gerlach@uta.edu). Any questions you may have about your rights as a research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu. As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study. By clicking accept below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study’s purpose, procedures, and possible benefits and risks. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you click accept, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By clicking accept, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

Mark only one oval.

☐ Accept
☐ Decline

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/13NfYf5o1Xby7n1Cw7uBZ05Sx7UC47pSfSioCTnDAXK/printform
2. What is your name? *

3. What is your gender? *
   Mark only one oval.
   - Male
   - Female

4. What is your ethnicity? *
   Check all that apply.
   - Black, or African American
   - Asian, Pacific Islander
   - Hispanic, or Latino(a)
   - White
   - Native American/Alaskan Native
   - Two or more races

5. What high school did you attend? *

6. How many years were you in the AVID program? *

7. What grade levels were you in AVID? Check all that apply. *
   Check all that apply.
   - 7
   - 8
   - 9
   - 10
   - 11

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1RKNybRc3K0y7r6L2w7U/ZtSYx7VhC4zplTS8oClTnDAEJ/paperform
8. Did you successfully complete Advanced Placement courses? *
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

9. Did you successfully complete dual-credit courses? *
   Mark only one oval.
   ☐ Yes
   ☐ No

10. What is the highest level of college that either of your parents have completed? *
    Mark only one oval.
    ☐ None
    ☐ Some community college
    ☐ Associates degree
    ☐ Some 4-year college
    ☐ 4-year undergraduate degree

11. What university are you currently enrolled? *

12. What year did you enroll in this university? *

13. What is your current classification? *
    Mark only one oval.
    ☐ Freshman
    ☐ Sophomore
    ☐ Junior
    ☐ Senior

14. Thank you for completing this survey! As promised, your name will be entered into a random drawing for the chance to win one of three $25 VISA gift cards. Please provide a current mailing address in the event that your name is drawn.
You are consenting to voluntary participation in my study by completing this survey. Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this survey will be stored in my password protected external hard drive for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

If you have any questions, please contact Erin Fogleman, the researcher, at erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu.
Appendix F

Letter to Demographic Survey Participants "Fitting" the Study
Dear Survey Participant,

My name is Erin Fogleman, and I am a PhD student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) Department at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Recently, I emailed you about participating in an online survey, and I wanted to take a moment to thank you for completing the online survey portion of my dissertation study. If possible, I am interested in gaining further information on your college experiences as a former high school AVID student. I would like to conduct an interview, lasting approximately one hour, at your convenience. Because your time is valuable, I will give you a $50 VISA gift card after our interview.

Please let me know if this is possible. I am happy to work around your schedule and meet you on campus. Please feel free to contact me at erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu if you are interested in participating in my study.

Sincerely,

Erin Fogleman
Appendix G

Letter to Demographic Participants Not “Fitting” the Study
Dear Survey Participant,

My name is Erin Fogleman, and I am a PhD student in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS) Department at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). Recently, I emailed you about participating in an online survey, and I wanted to take a moment to thank you for completing the online survey portion of my dissertation study. At this time I will not need any more information from you.

As promised your name has been entered into a drawing for one of three $25 VISA gift cards. If your name is drawn, I will mail a $25 gift card to the mailing address you provided within the survey.

Again, thank you for participating, and I wish you luck in pursuing your higher education degree and other future goals.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu.

Sincerely,

Erin Fogleman
Appendix H

Interview Consent Form
Interview Consent Form

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR
Erin Fogleman
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Erin.fogleman@mavs.uta.edu

FACULTY ADVISOR
Dr. Jeanne Gerlach
Dean, College of Education
gerlach@uta.edu

TITLE OF PROJECT
Academic Experiences of Former AVID Hispanic Students in Higher Education

INTRODUCTION
You are being asked to participate in a research study about your college experiences. Your
participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or discontinuing your participation at any time
will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Please ask
questions if there are anything you do not understand.

PURPOSE
The specific purpose of this research study is to better understand how Hispanic students are
successful in a public, four-year university. In addition, it is the goal of this study to examine
whether or not AVID had an impact on that success.

DURATION
Participation in this study will include an initial interview, possible follow-up interviews, and
document collection. Interviews should last approximately one hour. Documents will only
include example of academic work (i.e. calendar, notes, and study aids).

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS
The number of anticipated participants in this research study is no more than 10 (five males and
five females).

PROCEDURES
The procedures, which will involve you as a research participant, include:
1. meeting the researcher at a convenient location
2. answering questions concerning your first year experience at UTA (i.e. academic experiences
and social experiences that influence your academic experiences)
3. allowing the researcher to record your responses
4. examining several academic documents (i.e. academic notes, any type of academic planner,
forms of academic organization)
5. assigning you a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality
6. possible follow-up interview to ensure a thorough understanding of your first year experience
7. reading of my analysis of your responses so that your experiences are correctly understood.
The interview will be audio recorded. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed, which means they will be typed exactly as they were recorded, word-for-word, by the researcher. Your name and any other identifying information will not be included in the transcription.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS
This research study will benefit future students entering college because this study hopes to help others understand the successful attributes of selected Hispanic students.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS
There are no perceived risks or discomforts for participating in this research study. Should you experience any discomfort please inform the researcher, you have the right to quit any study procedures at any time at no consequence.

COMPENSATION
Upon completion of this interview, you will receive a $50 VISA gift card as a token of appreciation.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES
There are no alternative procedures offered for this study. However, you can elect not to participate in the study or quit at any time at no consequence.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION
Participation in this research study is voluntary. You have the right to decline participation in any or all study procedures or quit at any time at no consequence.

CONFIDENTIALITY
Every attempt will be made to see that your study results are kept confidential. A copy of this signed consent form and all data collected from this study will be stored on UTA campus in my dissertation chair’s office for at least three (3) years after the end of this research. The results of this study may be published and/or presented at meetings without naming you as a participant. Additional research studies could evolve from the information you have provided, but your information will not be linked to you in anyway; it will be anonymous. Although your rights and privacy will be maintained, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the UTA Institutional Review Board (IRB), and personnel particular to this research have access to the study records. Your records will be kept completely confidential according to current legal requirements. They will not be revealed unless required by law, or as noted above. The IRB at UTA has reviewed and approved this study and the information within this consent form. If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, the University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS
Questions about this research study may be directed to Erin Fogleman or Dr. Jeanne Gerlach (contact information provide above). Any questions you may have about your rights as a
research participant or a research-related injury may be directed to the Office of Research Administration; Regulatory Services at 817-272-2105 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent

Signature of principal investigator or person obtaining consent  Date

CONSENT
By signing below, you confirm that you are 18 years of age or older and have read or had this document read to you. You have been informed about this study’s purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time.

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature of Participant  Date

APPROVED

JUL 15 2014

Institutional Review Board
Appendix I

Interview Protocol
Thank you for taking the time out of your day for this interview. The purpose of my research is to further the knowledge on what helps make Hispanic students successful in a university. If you could please sign this consent form so that we may begin our interview. Please know that material generated from this discussion is confidential, and I will create a pseudonym instead of using your real name.

Demographics & Background Information

Can you begin by telling me a little about yourself?

Probe 1: Where did you grow up? Describe your community?
Probe 2: Family experience with a higher education institution
Probe 3: Prior knowledge about a higher education institution before coming to TU

Tell me about your high school experience

Probe 1: Describe any collegiate-type experiences you might have had before graduating high school or the summer after graduation.
Probe 2: Dual-credit coursework
Probe 3: AP exams for earning college credit
Probe 4: College transition camps

What brought you to TU?

Probe 1: What did you expect TU to be?
Probe 2: Were you surprised by anything?
Probe 3: How would you advise someone considering TU?
University Academic Experiences

Describe your academic experiences here at TU.

Probe 1: Registering for classes
Probe 2: Attending classes
Probe 3: Homework and study habits
Probe 4: Seeking out help (professors, university labs, peers, etc.)

What strategies do you think helps you be successful in your classes from
semester to semester?

Probe 1: Organization
Probe 2: Study aids
Probe 3: Collaboration

How do you use these strategies? Is there a method that you have developed
that works for you? Explain.

Why have you chosen to use these strategies?

University Social Experiences

Describe your social experiences since you have been enrolled at TU.

Probe 1: Have you been able to balance life and managing your time as
a college student? Explain.
Probe 2: Describe your experiences with making friends?
Probe 3: Describe your level of involvement with on-campus activities.
Probe 4: Do you live on or off campus?
Probe 5: Are you employed? How many hours a week do you work?
     Where?
Probe 6: Describe your experiences as a Hispanic student.
What has the college experience been like for you? Explain.

Overall Impact of AVID on University Experiences (if necessary)

Describe for me your high school AVID experience?

Probe 1: Field trips

Probe 2: AVID curriculum

Probe 3: Elective class atmosphere

Probe 4: AVID teacher and students

Has AVID impacted any aspect of your college experience? Explain.

Probe 1: Academic

Note-taking

Organization

Support/collaboration

Probe 2: Social

Time management

Setting goals

Do you think your experience at TU is different from other first-year students (sophomores) who did not participate in AVID? In what ways?

Is there anything else you would like to add about what has helped you be successful at TU that we haven’t discussed?

Thank you for your time.


Gloria, A. M., & Castellanos, J. (2012). Desafios y bendiciones: A multiperspective examination of the educational experiences and coping responses of first-


Biographical Information

Erin grew up in a home where education and understanding of different cultures was valued. By the age of 17 she had traveled throughout Europe with her mother twice. When she was 14, her mother studied her Acadian ancestors in an area of Southwest France. Witnessing this research in action and learning about other cultures set the foundation for Erin’s educational journey. After transferring from Louisiana State University to complete her undergraduate degree at West Virginia University, she lived and studied acting in New York City. After some time she journeyed to Texas, received her Masters of Education in Teaching, and became a junior high teacher. Throughout her tenure as a teacher, Erin’s passion for understanding human nature and her desire to advocate for others led her to her doctoral studies at the University of Texas at Arlington. During this time Erin focused on underrepresented students and their transition to and experience in higher education. She conducted a study titled *The Influence of AVID on the Higher Education Perceptions of First-year College Students* and presented a poster at the Texas Higher Education Symposium. In addition she co-authored another study titled *A Comparison of Public and Private Not-for-Profit Universities: Six-year Graduation Rate*, which was presented as a poster at The Annual Celebration of Excellence by Students. Erin’s future research interests include further study of successful minority students in higher education, long-term examinations of the experiences of students in higher education, and AVID’s impact on students and their level of success. Her career goals include working with the AVID Center, working in academe, and continuing to work with students.