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An Analysis of Current and Former Residential Student Academic Success at a Hispanic Serving Institution on the United States - Mexico Border

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AN ANALYSIS OF CURRENT AND FORMER RESIDENTIAL STUDENT
ACADEMIC SUCCESS AT A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION ON THE
UNITED STATES - MEXICO BORDER

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By

Rueben Moreno

2014

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my family for all of their support and patience.

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ACADEMIC SUCCESS AT A HISPANIC SERVING INSTITUTION ON THE
UNITED STATES - MEXICO BORDER

By

RUEBEN MORENO, B.S. M.A.

DISSERTATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to examine academic success and engagement among current and former residential students living at the University of Texas at El Paso's student housing facilities. UTEP is a distinctive institution of higher education because it serves a large number of first generation and minority students. The majority of the population at UTEP consists of Hispanic students, and it is located on the U.S.-Mexico border.

The population for this study included current and former residents of UTEP's student housing during the fall 2012, spring 2013, and fall 2013 semesters. Three methods were used to collect data from students attending this institution. The first was a regression model used to analyze student information. The dependent variable was student grade point average, and the independent variables included housing status, hours earned, home residence and financial aid (receipt of the Pell Grant award). The second method used was a student survey administered to current and former residents of student housing. The third method of data collection was the utilization of two focus groups. One focus group consisted of students who were currently living at the student housing, and the other was made up of students who departed the facility.

This study found that housing status significantly predicted academic success (in terms of grade point average); current housing residents earned more degree hours than former residents; financial aid and home residence were not significant factors in student success; the family had a major influence on students' college experiences; and the influence of the Hispanic culture related to different residential experiences for students from the El Paso region when compared to students from other parts of Texas and the United States. Other data indicates that more research is needed on cultural influences on residential life and student success, and on financial issues affecting students in this area along the U.S.-Mexico border.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The topic of student engagement requires further investigation based on what the current literature states about student success. When it comes to students' success in the classroom, many factors come into play. Factors such as high school grade point average, college entrance exams, and performance on placement exams such as ACCUPLACER or COMPASS play a significant role in student retention and persistence rates. Once students are enrolled in courses, they face new and challenging obstacles in the college environment. Students immediately assume full responsibility for their class selection, tuition payments, financial aid, initiating a degree plan and finding their way around campus. In essence, students face the task of having to navigate their way around a huge bureaucracy that offers little to no information on how to negotiate their way around it. As students continue their journey in higher education, they find their role on campus as it relates to student life, engagement with faculty and staff, and getting involved with clubs and organizations.

The college experience can typically result in a rough start, but eventually, students will settle in. A key factor in student success is where they choose to live. Student living off-campus reside in diverse living arrangements and arrive on-campus by dissimilar means of transportation (Wilmes & Quade, 1986). Diverse living arrangements include, but are not limited to, living with their parents or independently in an apartment off-campus. Students living on-campus are housed in residence halls intended to provide low-cost, attractive, safe, and convenient living quarters for undergraduate students in close proximity to academic buildings (Ryan, 1992). There are pros and cons for both living arrangements as students have the opportunity to engage in student life, access student services and establish relationships with faculty and staff. The connectedness

a student feels to their college or university will have a significant impact on their persistence, grades, and the ability to complete a college degree (Nora, 2004).

1.1.1 Commuter and Residential Students

All students do not live on campus when they go off to college. Commuter students are defined as students who do not live on campus in either a university-owned residence, or a fraternity or sorority house (Jacoby, 2000; Miller, 2003). Jacoby (2000) estimates that about 86% of students in the United States are commuter students. Some commuters are traditional age (18-24 years old) and may live at their parents' home, while other commuters are non-traditional (older than 24), and may live alone, with a spouse or partner, and may be raising a family (Jacoby, 2000; Miller, 2003). Some commuter students attend school full-time, while others may attend only part-time (Jacoby, 2000).

At the institution where this study will take place, 97% of all students, both undergraduate and graduate, are classified as commuters (UTEP Fact Book, 2011). When identifying commuter students, the matter of distance must also be addressed. For example, some students may live close to the institution where driving to campus may be more convenient. At UTEP, a typical commuter student lives in their childhood home and drives on average half an hour to the college campus (UTEP Fact Book, 2011)

Residential students live in university owned or operated residential housing located on-campus (Jacoby & Girrell, 1981; Jacoby, 1989). Residential students are deemed as full-time students pursuing undergraduate, graduate, professional studies, or continuing education. At this institution for the proposed study, 626 beds are available for students to live in (UTEP Fact Book, 2011).

Colleges and universities serve traditional and non-traditional students. On average, the

traditional student is 18-24 years old, lives on-campus, and maintains full-time enrollment status (Bean & Metzner, 1995). By contrast, the adult learner, or non-traditional student, is age 25 or older, resides off-campus, commutes to school, is enrolled part-time (Bean & Metzner, 1995), works full-time, is married, and has children (Ashar & Skenes, 1993). Most institutions have adapted and reacted to the unique needs of the non-traditional student by offering weekend programs, intersession courses, or distance learning courses (Spear, 2002). At the national level, students in their 20s primarily seek four-year degree granting institutions (58%), as compared to two-year degree-granting institutions (44%). Two-year schools attract the most students under age 18 through age 19 (40%) and ages 30 through 64 (24%), as compared to four-year degree granting institutions (30% and 11%, respectively; National Center for Education Statistics, 1999).

Traditional and non-traditional students have different experiences while attending college. While traditional students seek a balanced social and academic life (Getzlaf, 1984; Pascarella, 1985; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1980; Tinto, 1987), older students focus more on academics and are intensely committed to furthering their education in order to advance in their career (Ashar & Skenes, 1993; Renner, 1993). Giles (2002) suggested that adults learn rapidly, in part, because "they don't need to spend time becoming adults, as traditional-aged students do" (p.103). Non-traditional students feel less of a need to participate in campus events or activities. Additionally, non-traditional students seek small class settings where they can interact socially and engage in collaborative learning with other students (Ashar & Skenes, 1993).

In addition to dealing with basic transition issues when starting college, non-traditional and commuter students are faced with many challenges that traditional students may not encounter. For example, a survey of community college students revealed that 32% of these

students work more than 30 hours per week, 80% do not participate in extracurricular activities, and 21% have children living at home (Hoffman, Perillo, Hawthorne, Calizo, Hadfield, & Lee, 2005). Also, non-traditional students have unique learning styles and may not respond well to traditional teaching and assessment methods (Giles-Gee, 1989). Additionally, non-traditional students who live at home while enrolled may find the college experience less rewarding without the social and intellectual rewards of residing on campus (Pascarella, 1985).

Commuter students, particularly first-year students, often have a difficult time "fitting in" to the campus community. Commuters often find the task of meeting students challenging because their only point of contact with other students is in the classroom, a small part of the total college experience. Residential students live, eat, study, and socialize together in residence halls, thus having greater opportunities to make friends and to become socially integrated into the campus community. A great amount of socialization for college students also occurs in the cafeteria, student center, recreation center, through extracurricular activities, or during late-night study sessions. As a result of not living in residence halls or spending a substantial amount of time on campus, commuter students miss out on these opportunities to "connect" to the university and other students and to enhance their learning and development (Pike & Kuh, 2006). Astin (1993) found that peer group interaction positively affects critical thinking skills, cultural awareness, leadership development, and academic development.

Commuters often face limited contact opportunities with faculty and staff members. Commuters must make additional trips to campus to meet with faculty members during their designated office hours. Unlike residential students, commuter students rarely have the opportunity to observe faculty and staff members on campus involved in non-classroom activities, such as playing sports in the recreation center or interacting with students in the

student center. These informal student-faculty interactions have been linked to academic performance and to personal and intellectual development for students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). The interaction time for commuters with faculty members is often limited to a few minutes between classes or briefly during office hours, leaving commuter students feeling disconnected from the academic system of the university. Commuters often find forming relationships with faculty and administrators difficult because of these limited interactions outside of the classroom (Kuh, Gonyea, & Palmer, 2001).

Transportation issues are a large part of commuter concerns. First, because of limited parking availability on most campuses, commuters have difficulty finding parking spaces and must often allow extra time to do so (Harrington, 1972). Further, commuters often readjust their course schedules to attend classes in large blocks of time, again reducing the hours spent on campus outside of the classroom and the opportunity to become socially and academically integrated into the college community. Some classes may be scheduled at difficult times for commuters to attend, such as early morning or midafternoon. Because of long commutes to school, these students may encounter difficulty attending such classes, which are easily accessible for residential students (Chickering & Kuper, 1971).

Commuter students have a limited knowledge of the university itself, including the location of buildings, functions of university departments, campus policies and procedures, and current events, which may be due to how little time they spend on campus making connections with the institution. Residential students become familiar with the university by spending a substantial amount of time on campus, taking part in student forums, and discussing current campus events in the residence hall or in small groups. Therefore, residential students often have a better understanding of the status of the university and the daily occurrences (Blimling, 1993).

In addition, greater proximity gives residential students more frequent occasions to establish personal relationships with faculty and staff, who serve as resources and mentors. These mentors may provide assistance and information regarding new policies and procedures. Since commuter students spend limited time on campus and limited time creating relationships with other students, faculty, and staff, they have fewer opportunities to engage in quality interactions with these individuals. Therefore they are less likely to make a strong commitment to the university or its programs and are more likely to drop out of school than residential students (Tinto, 1993). In contrast, students who have high interaction with their university's academic and social systems are more likely to persist in college (Tinto, 1993). The literature on residential students indicates that students demonstrate higher grade point averages, higher retention and persistent rates, and greater student involvement with campus activities (Kuh, 2009).

1.2 PROBLEM AND SIGNIFICANCE

Although there is considerable research on commuter and residential students, the research has been conducted primarily within the East Coast and Midwest regions of the United States, and has not included a large number of minority students. This research project is important because of how it differs from most other work on commuter and residential students. The research will be conducted at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) located on the U.S.-Mexico Border. Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are public and private two- and four-year colleges and universities with Latino enrollments of 25% or more full-time equivalent students (Laden, 2004). The four-year institution involved in the present study has a student population of approximately 23,000 students, with Latino students comprising 79% of the population. Also, 97% of the university's students are classified as commuter students and 3% are residential. This

research project will examine whether previous research and theoretical models are applicable to an institution where the majority of students are Latino and commuters.

This study will examine persistence, success, and engagement among residential and commuter students attending a HSI in a border community. The study will provide information to the field of education by examining whether residential students hold advantages over commuter students, as seen in previous research, at a campus on the border where most students are Latino and commute. It will also indicate if residential students enrolled at an HSI perform better academically and if they are establishing stronger relationships with faculty, staff, and other students. In addition, this research can provide a clearer understanding as to how and why students at a commuter HSI do or do not get involved with campus activities.

Few studies have been conducted on the relationship between student housing and achievement at Hispanic Serving Institutions and at post-secondary institutions on the border. However, Pérez and McDonough (2008) have explicitly considered both Hispanic identity and prospective first-generation college students. Institutions of higher education along the U.S.-Mexican border can serve as sources of information about students who do not take the traditional route in obtaining a college degree. Students attending border colleges and universities typically have lower retention, persistence and graduation rates because the students they serve do not live on-campus (Hurtado, Clayton-Pedersen, & Allen, 1998).

More research is needed on the college experiences of Latino students. Over the past decade, the Latino population within the U.S. has grown from 35.3 million to 50.5 million, composing 16.3% of the total U.S. population (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011). In fact, more than half of the growth in the total population of the U.S. from 2000 to 2010 can be attributed to the increase in the Latino population. Yet, while Latinos clearly constitute a vital

portion of the U.S. population, they continue to face barriers in the pursuit of postsecondary education. Only 37% of Latino high school completers between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in college, compared to 40% of Black and 49% of White high school completers (Santiago, 2011). And, only one in ten Latino adults between the ages of 18 and 24 hold a college degree (Brindis, Driscoll, Biggs, & Valderrama, 2002). During the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately half of all Latino college students had parents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma or less (Santiago, 2011). If the college enrollment and achievement gaps for Hispanics are to close in accordance with the nation's degree attainment goals (Santiago, 2011), it seems that more Hispanic students from first-generation college backgrounds must gain greater access to and success in college.

According to Padrón, Waxman, Rivera, (2002), students living along the U.S. – Mexico border face issues not commonly experienced by students in other regions. For example, familial duties, money, and lack of family support can be huge obstacles they encounter. Family responsibilities at home may include babysitting, cooking and cleaning. Students may be obligated to work to help the family with expenses. Their home financial situations may contribute to Latinos reporting greater concern regarding their ability to finance a college education (Huber, 2010). This being the case, first-generation college students are more likely to consider financial issues and proximity to home as prime factors in their decision of where to attend college (Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf and Yeung (2007) suggest Latino college students may choose to enroll in post secondary institutions within 50 miles of home as a means to avoid incurring the extra costs associated with living on-campus.

The Latino culture and family traditions may have a significant impact on Latino students choosing or declining to live on-campus. One study found that the number of Latino adults

(33%) for whom proximity to home was a factor in their college enrollment decision is double the number of white adults for whom home proximity was a factor (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004). Therefore, Latino students are more likely to live at home while enrolled in college. According to data from the 2003-2004 academic year, one-third of Latino undergraduates live with their parents, as compared to less than a quarter of all undergraduates nationally (Santiago and Cunningham, 2005).

Latino students living along the U.S.-Mexico border may face English language barriers in college. Many Latino students grew up speaking both English and Spanish. Common words such as “hair tie” (known to Latinas as “ligas”) are new to Latino students. Another example is the use of the term “latte”, better known as “café con leche” to Latino students.

Latino culture may also differ in certain ways from Anglo American culture at postsecondary institutions in terms of family values, financial status, food, music and celebration. Latinos frequently interpret the culture climate at predominantly White colleges and universities as alienating, isolating, hostile, and unsupportive (Hurtado, 1994). Institutions face the challenge of promoting civility and tolerance among students and creating a sensitive faculty. Increasing the diversity of an institution can lead to better institutional climates for Latinos and all students in general (Hurtado, 1993). Parent involvement is a key factor in students selecting a college. While Chicano parents tend to be very supportive of their children’s pursuit of higher education, these parents often have limited information to share with their children about college because many of them did not attend college (Ceja, 2004). The challenges continue once Latino students arrive at college. Finding a niche, and a cultural identity, can be difficult for Hispanics, as many college campuses do not reflect the diversity of America. Tinto (1975) suggests that departure from college can be understood as a longitudinal process of interactions that take place

between individual students and the academic and social systems present within the colleges they attend. If a student lacks academic integration, which can be measured by grade performance and intellectual development, and lacks social integration, which might involve social interactions and relationship development with peers and faculty, the student will be more likely to develop a low institutional commitment and, subsequently, to choose to dropout from the institution. This being the case, Tinto (1975) posits that college student departure may be attributed to a lack of congruency between an individual and the academic and social norms espoused by an institution.

The University of Texas at El Paso is one of 293 Hispanic Serving Institutions in the United States, and one of 49 in the state of Texas (Excelencia in Education, 2009). UTEP is located on the U.S. – Mexico border and possesses a unique Mexican-American culture. Since the majority of students attending UTEP are Latinos, Mexican food is served at the food court on a regular basis and the student organizations recognize holidays celebrated in Mexico, such as the 16th of September holiday celebrating the Mexican Independence day. The college environment is new to most Latinos, who often hold part/full-time jobs while enrolled in courses. There are two Latino student organizations that address student needs, help students adapt to the campus environment, and promote the Mexican-American culture. Many UTEP Latino students are bilingual in Spanish and English, and are more comfortable speaking Spanish with their peers. This study should yield some interesting findings because of the unique college and cultural environment at this campus.

1.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based upon previous findings and gaps in the literature, this study will address three research questions: The first question is to what extent did living on campus predict academic achievement among students at a Hispanic Serving Institution? The second question is what

factors contribute to students' decisions about continuing to live on campus? The third question is how did residential and former residential students differ in their preferences and perceptions regarding life on and off-campus?

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

2.1.1 *Major Theories*

Research is needed on students living on-campus at a Hispanic Serving Institution to examine their involvement with campus activities, use of student resources, the relationships with faculty and staff, and academic performance. Pascarella and Terenzini's research on how college affects students, Astin's Theory of Involvement, Tinto's Model of Student Retention, and Kuh's research on student engagement serve as a solid foundation for understanding student success and persistence in higher education. However, there has been some criticism by scholars researching minority students on the principles of these studies because they do not include minority students such as Latinos or Hispanic Serving Institutions located on the U.S. – Mexico border.

Kuh (2007) has utilized the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) in various research studies to measure student connectedness on college campuses. NSSE measures student involvement with faculty and staff members, involvement with other students inside and outside the classroom, the uses of communication tools (email, social media), and interaction with faculty/staff outside the academia arena. Kuh (2007) has been able to establish that students living on-campus perform better academically and socially. Students develop relationships with faculty, staff and other students. One strong impact on learning and personal development during college is institutional practices that include high levels of engagement across various activities in and out of the classroom (Kuh, 2007).

Vincent Tinto's research has examined student integration. He focused on the connections students make on campus such as belonging to a group of friends, the amount of

personal contacts they have with faculty/staff, and if they are enjoying the college experience. Tinto (2006) states that early studies indicated that student retention or the lack thereof is seen as the reflection of individual attributes, skills, and motivation. In addition, students who did not stay were thought to be less able, less motivated, and less willing to defer the benefits that college graduation was believed to bestow.

Tinto's theory or model of student retention serves as a foundation in researching first year students' academic success and retention rates. According to the Model of Retention (Tinto, 1982), persistence and attrition is predicted by the student's degree of academic integration and social integration. In academic integration, the students can be assessed on their level of performance, their own identification with the university's culture, achieved grades and their satisfaction with the courses (Tinto, 1982). The social integration component of Tinto's theory focuses on the connection students make on campus such as belonging to a group of friends, the amount of personal contacts they have with faculty, and if they are enjoying the full college experience (Tinto, 1975). This perspective plays a major role in the discussion of academic success and retention for first-year students. Tinto is not only observing the overall student qualifications for student outcomes, he is examining the factors that are difficult to measure yet are essential to students feeling comfortable in their new environment and making the necessary adjustments in their personal lives to feel a part of the university. Simply belonging to a club or organization is not enough.

Astin's research was on residential students and their involvement on campus. His research examined relationships with peers, learning communities, and the relationship between academic and student affairs personnel. Also, residential-based learning communities are one type of intentional environment that hold the potential for breaching the walls that

compartmentalize a student's collegiate experience (Astin, 1993).

2.1.2 Critiques of Major Theories

Despite the near universality of Tinto's (1975) theory, it has been the subject of considerable criticism, especially with regard to its applicability to diverse student populations such as Latinos. Tierney (1999) states that by placing the responsibility on students to assimilate to institutional values and norms in order to be more likely to persist, student integration theory encourages students from nontraditional backgrounds to commit a form of cultural suicide, cutting all ties with their home cultures. He advocates instead for a model of cultural integrity, which places more responsibility on institutions to create climates, which are inclusive of the precollege cultures of a diverse student body. According to Rendón (1994), the expectation for nontraditional students to assimilate into a new, dominant institutional culture contributes to nontraditional students' development of feelings of alienation and intimidation within the college environment. Whereas such feelings of alienation and intimidation may lead students to doubt their abilities to succeed within college, she finds that external agents, including faculty, staff, and administrators, can provide these students with academic and interpersonal validation that empowers them to believe in their abilities to be powerful learners (Rendón, 1994).

Also concerned with the problematic nature of integration and assimilation for students from historically marginalized groups in higher education, Hurtado and Carter (1997) propose sense of belonging as a useful measure for recognizing that students may simultaneously maintain affiliations within multiple communities as well as for assessing specifically "which forms of social interaction (academic and social) further enhance students' affiliation and identity with their colleges" (p. 328).

The common thread among these critiques of Tinto, Pascarella & Tanzini, Astin, and Kuh's perspective on student integration is that institutions of higher education need to acknowledge that students from diverse backgrounds, such as Latino students, will carry with them diverse ways of assimilating into their environment. College administrators need to explore new and innovative methods to help minority students not only to sustain their sense of identity but also to cultivate them into individual strengths that will enable them to succeed in college instead of trying to eradicate these cultural differences. These theoretical considerations are essential in the examination of how institutions can best serve Latino and other minority students.

2.1.3 More Recent Models of Engagement

Claude Steele's (1997) theory of stereotype threat suggests that student academic performance can be undermined by adverse climates where stereotypes pervade the learning environment for minority students and women. The theory suggests that student success requires identification with school and creates a sense of belonging. Steele's research (1997) shows that this threat dramatically depresses the standardized test performance of women and African Americans who are in the academic vanguard of their groups, that it causes misidentification with college life, and that practices that reduce this threat can reduce these negative effects. Individual perceptions of discrimination-based group identity or an adverse environment for intergroup relations can affect student educational outcomes such as academic performance. Dovidio and Gaertner's (1996) notion of aversive racism suggests that the racial biases in college can be subtle and present barriers to the advancement of well-qualified members of historically underrepresented groups. Students are educated in dynamic racialized contexts, and their responses to group stereotypes and individual instances of discrimination are necessary to

examine should institutions want to create ideal conditions for learning environments that serve the growing number of Hispanic and other minority students on college campuses. When conditions on campus for intergroup relations are appropriate, and all students have the opportunity to interact with diverse classmates, positive learning skills can be attained.

Although a hostile environment can have a negative effect on some outcomes, it should also be noted that some research has concluded that students who perceive hostile environments are also the most critical of their educational institutions and seek ways to change it (Hurtado, 1990, 1994). That is, students might employ a form of resistance to hostile atmospheres and work against stereotypes through protest, persistence, or a strong work ethic to prevent negative stereotyping in certain situations. Social identity theory suggests that when individuals realize the low social status of their group-based identity, they often do their best to change the status of their group-based identities by assigning positive attributes to its unique features (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory may be useful in understanding how perceptions of negative climates can sometimes result in positive outcomes for individuals. Therefore, students' responses to interracial conflict and hostile environments may not always be internalized. The effect of individual perceptions of a negative campus climate may show differences on outcomes for Latino and other minority college students (Steele, 1997).

Nora's Model of Student Engagement focuses on college student retention with minority students, and will serve as the theoretical framework for this study. This model states that student persistence to graduation or an advanced degree is a central issue not only to Hispanic success in higher education but to broadening the participation of Hispanics in competitive fields of professional work. Persistence to degree completion is the focus of many college policies, practices, and interventions. Retention is of critical importance to Hispanic access, participation,

and success. However, attrition from higher education denies access to graduate and professional schools and future participation in society (Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2005).

Nora's Model of Student Engagement proposes six major components: (1) precollege/pull factors, (2) sense of purpose and institutional allegiance, (3) academic and social experiences, (4) cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, (5) goal determination/institutional allegiance, and (6) persistence. This indicates the path of the relationships among the major components as well as the more specific sub-components involved. Highlighting one of the aspects that have shown to impact retention is the issue of financial assistance. Not only is a financial award important in retaining students, but the more intangible aspects associated with financial aid are indirectly influential through the perception that the institution cares enough to invest in the student. Equally important is the encouragement and support that the student receives from the family. It may be difficult for families to provide support on issues that they are unfamiliar such as the processes, costs, time commitments, and benefits associated with going to college. According to Nora, familial ties remain important all throughout the time that Hispanic students are enrolled in college. Educational aspirations and commitment to enroll and graduate from a specific institution provides the student with a sense of purpose to attaining a degree at that institution. Equivalently important are the academic and social experiences of students, the formal and informal interactions students have with faculty, a collaborative or competitive learning environment with peers, a sense of tolerance and acceptance associated with the campus, positive mentoring experiences accompanied by a sense of acceptance of their intellectual contributions and, finally, validation as an individual in the classroom environment. Grades that are good enough for credit (i.e. developmental credit) but not to the expectation of the student have a much more severe impact on Hispanic students than on non-Hispanic white students who may be

able to “brush-off” a poor grade or a bad semester or a “B” when they expect A’s. These factors affect a student’s academic experiences, perceived and actual intellectual gains and appreciation of art and intellectual endeavors, and an overall sense of self-esteem and efficacy, which ultimately will impact student retention or Hispanic student success (Nora, 2004).

Nora’s Model of Student Engagement is focused on theoretical perspectives related to student persistence, the role of college on diverse student populations across different types of institutions, and the development of retention models that integrate economic theories and psychosocial perspectives within college persistence frameworks. The Model of Student Engagement is suitable and preferable for this study for the following reasons: 1) this model has been applied to minority students such as Latinos, addresses persistence, 2) it addresses academic and social experiences, familial ties, 3) the model take into account retention and financial issues, and 4) interactions between students and faculty. Nora’s model will assist in helping to interpret the finding of this study through the student surveys and focus groups. In essence, Nora’s model can help address issues that are unique to Latinos and institutions of higher education along the U.S.-Mexico border. The impact of this model addresses student persistence, the Latino culture, and the influence of ethnicity.

2.2 COLLEGE STUDENT OUTCOMES

2.2.1 *Student Engagement*

Student success has been a topic of concern in the field of education for many years. There are many factors that may contribute to the academic success or failure of traditional first-year students. The factor of student involvement or engagement has been one of the many predictors for student success. Students are engaged when they are attracted to their work, persist

despite challenges and obstacles, and take visible delight in accomplishing their work. Student engagement also refers to a student's willingness, need, desire and compulsion to participate in, and be successful in, the learning process. Also, student engagement has been used to depict students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending classes, submitting required work, and following teachers' directions in class. That includes participating in the activities offered as part of the school program and student participation in school reform activities. Silver and Robinson (1995) identified five indicators for student engagement in college. They included the level of academic challenge, active and collaborative learning, student-faculty interaction, enriching education experiences and a supportive learning environment.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) state that one of the benefits for getting involved in campus activities was to gain a strong sense of community and pride of being a part of the university. In addition, Kuh (2003) states that smaller colleges and universities generally do better when it comes to engaging students by getting them involved more deeply in their learning and in the institution. Students need to feel a connection between themselves and the school they are attending. Students' personal growth and development tends to prosper if they are connected to some type of student activity. One strong impact on learning and personal development during college is institutional practices that include high levels of engagement across various activities in and out of the classroom (Kuh, 2009). For example, some institutions, including UTEP, implement freshman seminars to assist with the transition into the college environment. Engagement includes activities that occur off-campus as well, such as community service. Gonyea (2008) found that programs such as Study Abroad was related to increased levels of engagement after the experience. As it stands, first-year students have a difficult time adjusting

to their new environment. Kuh (2008) states that student engagement has a compensatory effect on grades and persistence to the second year of college at the same institution. Participation and engagement remain key factors in students' success and persistence.

Student success and happiness can be measured in several ways both in and out of the classroom. The residential living environment has been shown to produce the most significant effect on the extent to which students are connected to their environment and are able to grow and develop (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). Colleges and universities have worked to develop intentional, programmatic living and learning environments for first-year students aimed at increasing peer interaction, engagement, and student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005). At UTEP's residential facilities, programming includes learning communities for residential students and events several times a week, including a residential student organization.

Student success is generally defined in terms of graduation and retention rates. Although these two represent indicators of student success, rather than a specific definition, these are mostly the terms used to refer to student success when addressing the issue. Other parts of the definitions also include a student's grade point average (GPA) and achievement of students' educational goals. Student success depends in part on institutions' success conveying high expectations of students from all backgrounds and developing an inclusive, multicultural campus climate, curriculum, and "college-going identity" (Oakes, 2002). Schools need to create the campus environment that promotes student engagement. Participatory educational experiences i.e. student engagement can positively contribute to students' academic performance and persistence. Oakes (2002) found positive correlations between service learning and students' intention to reenroll and/or actual reenrollment at the same institution. Among first-time, first-year college students nationwide, service-learning participation had a marginally significant

relationship with intention to re-enroll, mediated by enhanced interaction with faculty and good academic practices (Keup, 2005). Student engagement and student success are linked in helping students persist in their educational goal of graduating from college.

2.2.2 Persistence and Student Success

Persistence in post-secondary education refers to student's continuation behavior that leads to the completion of a degree. Persistence may be affected by issues outside the classroom such as access to financial aid, the age of the student, gender and race (TGSLC, 1999). For example, older students with family responsibilities and full time employment may experience a difficult time completing school. Their main concern will be on the family unit and not on school. Despite their academic performance, student engagement is not a factor with their persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) indicate that service learning plays an integral role in student engagement. Specifically, students who participate in service learning often earn better course grades and are better able to apply skills learned in their courses. Student success can be measured in academic performance and graduation rates. Persistence rates can be affected by student success. If the student is learning, they are more likely to stay in school.

Student engagement can be observed in many forms such as classroom participation, enrollment in student organizations and participation with community service. Student engagement can be measured. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) measures four levels of engagement: 1) level of academic challenge, 2) active and collaborative learning, 3) student-faculty interaction and 4) enriching educational experiences. NSSE is a key tool in assisting institutions of higher education increase persistence and retention rates (Harper and Quaye, 2008). By measuring this level of engagement, researchers can get a better perspective on

students' involvement, the frequency, and location of the activity. Harper and Quaye (2008) state that the more involved the student is, the more likely the student is to succeed in the classroom.

Academic success is affected by many factors. One key factor is student employment. It is not uncommon for students to be employed while attending college. Many students work more than 20 hours per week. Pike, Kuh and Massa-McKinnley (2008) found that students' grades are related to student achievement and persistence. The more hours they work, the lower the student success in the classroom. In addition, this time away from the college campus can affect student involvement with student activities. In contrast, Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005) state that part-time, on-campus student employment is associated with high levels of academic achievement. This can lead to higher rates of retention and persistence. Part-time employment can have a positive effect on achievement and grades. Students who get involved with clubs and organizations tend to make new friends and connections, and expand their personal boundaries. Hoffman, Perlillo, Hawthorne, Hadfield and Lee (2005) state that college campuses best inspire students by promoting student engagement to feel better connected to the student body. This student involvement affects persistent rates and student success. Engagement can have a real positive impact on their grades, learning ability and overall college experience (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt, 2005). The involvement students experience on college campuses is different from the high school setting. College clubs and organizations are not only involved with campus events, but also with community service. College campuses help students embrace their civic responsibility, build their skills and expand their knowledge (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh and Whitt, 2005). This continues to promote student growth and development and the willingness to continue their college education eventually leading to the achievement of a college degree. Eck and Stephenson (2007) found that learning communities extend learning beyond the classroom

for first-year students. This is a crucial factor in retaining first-year students and keeping them interested in returning for their second year.

2.2.3 Retention

Retention is generally a percentage measurement showing how many students re-enrolled at a school they attended the previous year. Institutions when tracking first-year, first-time students commonly use retention rates (TGSLC, 1999). Retention rates are typically calculated for full-time students who enroll from one year to the next. When retention rates for cohorts are examined over time, the rates decrease with time. When cohorts are examined by grade level, higher grades are associated with higher retention rates. For the most part, freshmen and sophomores have the lowest retention rates of college students while juniors and seniors have the highest retention rates. Also, institutions with higher admissions standards tend to have higher retention rates (Bean and Eaton, 1995). Tinto (2006) states that early studies indicated that student retention or the lack thereof is seen as the reflection of individual attributes, skills, and motivation. In addition, students who did not stay were thought to be less able, less motivated, and less willing to defer the benefits that college graduation was believed to bestow. Students failed, not institutions. Involvement, or what is increasingly being referred to as engagement, matters and it matters most during the critical first year of college (Tinto, 2006). While it is true that students must experience academic success to remain in college, it is also vital that they become involved and engaged in other areas of college life. In fact, Gaffner and Hazler (2002) state that personal adjustment and integration into the social fabric of campus life plays a role at least as important as academic factors in student retention.

Bean (1990) identifies five conceptual misunderstandings regarding retention rates: 1) retention rates depict a complex interaction between both the characteristics of a school and the

student attending the school, 2) retention rates change as changes occur in the demographics of an institution and in a student's experience--academic, social and psychological, 3) retention rates are as individual as the institutions themselves, 4) retention and persistence studies often examine one institution and should not be generalized to larger populations, and 5) it is important to know the student's goals before retention can effectively be measured.

Also, students who drop out of college may be misperceived in several ways. Students may enter and leave college getting exactly what they desired from the college experience. Neither the institution nor the individual failed. Another misperception could be that the student's educational goals must be known before they can be considered a dropout. Also, it is easy to confuse dropouts with stopouts. Students who drop out of school do not return to complete their education. Stopout students leave school for an extended yet undetermined amount of time but return to school. It is easy to misuse both terms because the student is seen as failing or choosing to stop their educational process. Stopout students do leave school but they eventually return. Stopout students may leave for a variety of reasons such as the loss of financial aid and a change in the work environment. The dropout student leaves school with no intention of returning. Tinto (1993) states that the issue of student dropouts is an individual and institutional failure. This occurrence is a result of the student and institution not making connecting.

Bean (1990) states that other factors that may affect retention rates include but are not limited to the type of school (2 year or 4 year school; public or private institution), college costs, financial aid, and the student's socioeconomic status. Finally, the type of student will affect retention rates, in terms of high-risk students, first generation students, traditional and nontraditional students, full-time and part-time students, residential and commuter students, and differences related to ethnicity (Bean, 1990).

Tinto (1993) established three principles of effective retention to help students persist. As college administrators look to increase persistence rates for students at all levels, a close examination of these principle must be examined. The first principle: successful retention efforts are committed to the development of supportive social and educational communities in which all students are integrated as competent members. Tinto states that institutions need to engage students in the daily life of the institution and to provide social and intellectual support for their individual efforts. Institutions must develop relationships among faculty, staff and students both on and off campus. These relationships should not be limited to the classroom environment.

The second principle: successful retention programs need to be committed to the education of all students, not a select few. Tinto (1993) states that effective retention programs do not leave learning to chance, and that institutions bear the responsibility of ensuring that incoming students enter with or have the opportunity to possess sufficient knowledge and skills to meet the academic rigors of the institution.

The third principle: successful retention programs are committed to the students they serve. Tinto (1993) states that institution's educational mission should be at the forefront in serving students and ensuring their success, and that it should permeate the character of institutional life. In essence, this responsibility and that of the students' prosperity/well-being/engagement falls on the institution's leadership. In addition, Tinto (1993) also states that an institution's commitment to students then generates a commitment on the part of the students to the institution. This ultimately leads to a strong relationship between the two.

To help student persistence, certain factors play key roles: the students intention to continue their education, grade point average, and the institutions commitment to the student via student support services (TGSLC, 1999). This is important to first-year students as they navigate

their way around the bureaucracy associated with higher education. Student retention leads to student persistence in that student need to feel connected to the institution and the assistance it provides. The most significant and intimate student service available to student is academic advising. This relationship between the student and academic advisor has a huge impact on first-year student as they learn how to manage course selection, degree plans and the selection of college majors. Institutions utilize this practice to increase retentions rates, while at the same time, schools use this to increase student persistence rates. In essence, Tinto (1993) states that students get out of their education what they put into it, and it may reinforce the importance of articulating a graduation or retention rate as an indicator of the larger outcome: student success.

Institutional research has been conducted to examine the predictors of being “at-risk” and persistence at UTEP. Carrejo, Weldelessie and Mathew (2008) found that a low semester grade point average, failing a course, part-time enrollment and previously stopping out increases the risk of departure. However, the availability of student financial aid increased student persistence. Additional risk factors were identified during the admissions process. Significant factors included math placement scores, high school class rank percentile, intended number of hours spent to work, and delayed matriculation from high school (Carrejo et al., 2008).

2.2.4 Relationship Between Student Housing, Success, Retention, and Engagement

Prior research has indicated that living in a college residence hall affects the integrative process. Astin (1973) indicated that dormitory residents were more likely than commuters to obtain a baccalaureate degree in four years, reported higher levels of social interaction, had higher levels of self-confidence, and stated that they were more satisfied with their undergraduate experience. In addition, his study showed that, when separated by type of institution, four-year colleges showed the greatest benefit from dormitory living. Findings for

men and women were comparable. Astin (1977) later went on to discuss that freshman year residence halls are an important factor associated with graduation rates, which certainly are affected by first year retention.

Levin and Clowes (1982) also studied this issue to determine whether students who live in residence halls have higher social status, higher high school grades, and higher aptitude than students who live at home and commute to campus. Findings indicated that higher socioeconomic status and academic success in high school was associated with living in college residence halls. Results supported earlier propositions made by Tinto (1973) that students attending four-year colleges and living in college-owned facilities were more likely to graduate after four years. Living in a dormitory increased the likelihood that one would graduate from a four-year college, but the effects of socioeconomic status and the completion of a degree were unclear. A study at Humboldt found that 71% of males who lived on campus were retained as compared to only 69% males who lived off campus. Under represented minority (URM) students were retained about equally regardless of living on campus or off campus; however, non-minority students living on campus were retained at a 4% higher rate than non-URM students living off campus (Humboldt University, 2012). Michalski and Catalano (2009) found that a lower proportion of students who resided on-campus earned either the Bachelor's or the Associate's degree as compared to their counterparts who resided off-campus. About 33% of students who resided off-campus graduated with a Bachelor's degree as compared to about 25% among students who resided on- campus. Similarly, among those seeking an Associate's degree, 18% of students living off-campus graduated, compared with only 11% of on-campus residents. The University of California, Irvine (2007), conducted a study on freshman students living on and off-campus to determine whether significant differences existed between commuter and

residential students on quarterly GPAs and their one-year retention rate. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between commuter and residential students in terms of quarterly GPAs; that is, their academic performance, measured by course grades, was similar. However, residential students were more likely to be retained to the sophomore year than commuter students (94% compared to 90%). That is, although both groups earned similar GPAs, students who lived on campus were more likely than commuters to still be enrolled one year later (UC Irvine, Office of Research and Evaluation Division of Undergraduate Education, 2007).

Thompson (1993) states that retention is significantly higher for on-campus students regardless of race, gender or admission type. Additionally, this study demonstrates that students defined as high risk (low academic achievement) may benefit more from living in on-campus residence halls. In an attempt to determine how freshman seminars affect retention, Ishler and Upcraft (2005) state that students who reside on campus and participate in freshman seminars are more likely to persist beyond their freshman year. In contrast, some studies have found that living/learning residence halls did increase student grade point averages, but did not significantly impact retention rates (Kanoy and Bruhn, 1996). The quality of on-campus living facilities must meet students' needs since the residents are not from the area of the school they are attending.

Voorhess (1985) identified variables such as financial need, student residency status, non-campus-based student loans and grants as having direct effects on student persistence. If a student is to continue their education, resources such as financial aid are crucial to student success. For example, most students cannot afford the cost of housing; therefore, grants and loans need to be available to them. Many colleges and universities share the same basic benefits of student housing such as being closer to classes, student support services, access to leisure/recreational activities, dining, campus security and frequently used campus facilities such

as the library, gym and office within the Division of Student Affairs. In essence, they become accustomed to their new home that helps with the transition to campus environment. With all of the issues outside the classroom settled, the student is allowed to focus on academic performance (Voorhess, 1985).

2.3 STUDENT ACADEMIC SUCCESS AND EMPLOYMENT

As anxiety rises concerning the escalating costs of schooling, students are left with the decision of how to cover the cost of college, family obligations and other daily expenses. Students have the option of guaranteed student loans, federal and/or state grants or scholarships. Other students, however, are left to pay their own way by means of full-time or part-time employment. More than half of all undergraduates attend college part-time, and 80% work while enrolled (Ehrenberg and Sherman, 1987). Students' employment can have an effect on their grade point average, the amount of time it takes to complete a college degree (i.e. graduation), and future earnings (Furr and Elling, 2000)

Schuh (2005) found that students in the highest income quintile had the lowest rate of employment, followed by students from the lowest income quintile (i.e. poorest students). The students from lowest quintile typically took advantage of need-based financial aid. Bozick also found that students from the middle-income quintiles were the students working the most hours to meet college expenses.

2.3.1 *Effects on GPA*

A major factor in determining the positive or negative effects of employment on the academic performance of students is their grade point average. Since a student's time and energy are limited resources, employment detracts them from studying, and can negatively affect a student's GPA. This is most prevalent when the student's number of hours worked per week exceeds 20

hours. Students who work fewer than 15-20 hours often report higher GPAs than those who do not work at all (Dundes and Marx, 2006). Ross, Kena, Rathbun, KewalRamani, Zhang, Kristapovich, and Manning (2012) found that students working 15 hours weekly have a significantly higher GPA than both students working 16 or more hours and students who don't work at all. Dundes and Marx (2006) reported that 74% of students believed that employment forced them to become more efficient. However, 64% of students reported that employment also increased their level of stress and anxiety. Orzag (2001 et al.) found that only on campus employment had a positive influence on academic performance. Astin (1975) reported that the effects of on campus employment were characterized as positive in nature, while off campus student employment is associated with lower GPA. The positive effects of on campus employment are due to enhanced integration with the institution, including involvement with other students and with faculty. In addition, on campus jobs often include responsibilities with academic components (Furr and Elling, 2000).

2.3.2 Effects on Time to Graduation

Student employment also affects the time needed for graduation as the time is increased. Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) stated that this is caused by the perception that students would need to reduce the number of credit hours they carry each term in order to make time for employment. Working more than 20 hours a week off campus contributes to a higher likelihood that students will drop out of school before receiving a degree. Fulltime workers are 10 percent less likely to eventually receive a degree than part-time workers or those who do not work at all (Orszag, Orszag, and Whitmore, 2001). However, working 20 hours or less per week on campus did not seem to have an effect on dropout rates compared to non-workers. According to Astin (1975), having a part-time, on campus job strongly increases the student's chances of finishing

college. Ehrenberg and Sherman (1987) states that by working long hours and attending school part time, students not only lengthen their time-to-degree, but also increase their likelihood of dropping out. Riggert (2006) found that while working students were more likely to drop out than nonworking students, they also did better in the labor market if they do graduate.

2.3.3 Effects on Future Earnings

Recent estimates reveal that academic success in school has a smaller effect on post school wages than older models indicate. Student employment, however, has an additional, positive effect (Light, 2001). Although working in college does not appear to have a direct effect on postgraduate earnings, there is an indirect effect on persistence (completing a degree) and GPA. In addition, working on campus was associated with a higher probability of enrolling in postgraduate education (Ehrenberg and Sherman, 1987). This in turn, results in higher future earnings. On campus jobs often include responsibilities with academic components. These opportunities will improve their academic experience and enhance their résumé through meaningful, applicable work, resulting in improved marketability to higher paying jobs.

Schuh (2005) states that work imposes constraints on the use of time. The time a student spends working, the less time they have for school-related activities and homework. For example, when a student is working at a fast-food establishment, it results in less time reading, writing, or completing class assignments. Students must balance their time between work and school. Eventually, one or the other fails. The student can drop a course, drop out of school, or leave their job. This has a huge impact on prolonging their graduation time frame.

2.4 CONTEXT OF STUDY

2.4.1 Hispanics and Education on the United States-Mexican Border

Historically, El Paso, Texas has not been a place where educational equality has been prevalent. According to Romo (2002), in the early 1900's, students had little to no access to an education much less a college education. Anglos intimidated minority groups at the polls, political arena and educational setting.

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights completed a study on Mexican-American students attending public schools along the U.S.-Mexican border in 1971. The study centered on Ethnic Isolation of Mexican-Americans in the Public Education schools of the Southwest. The basic conclusions of the study indicated that Mexican-American attending schools across the southwestern part of the country were severely isolated in their schools and within the districts and student populations were ethnically imbalanced especially at the elementary level (Commission on Civil Rights, 1971). The Mexican American Education Study (MAES) in 1974 provided evidence that educational standards between Anglo and Mexican-American students were not equal. The MAES study was completed over forty years ago and was a catalyst for creating educational reform. This study led to educational reform by improving teacher preparation, classes that were culturally sensitive to Mexican heritage and increasing in student engagement. However, it did not address migrant families, their educational needs and teacher training needed to deal with migrant students.

According to Texas Monthly (2011), Texas lags in college graduation rates for minorities. Hispanics fall under this category. By increasing funding in college readiness programs such as Migrant Education Programs, Upward Bound, Education Talent Search and GEAR UP there would be an increase in college enrollment, retention and graduation rates for Latinos and other minority students. College access is crucial to strengthening the workforce for

not only Texas but the country for the twenty-first century. The position of Texas Governor has the power and authority to enact new policy that can benefit student success in the classroom and in the workforce.

Students on the U.S.-Mexican border comprise a special population of college students. The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) is labeled as a Hispanic Serving Institution with over 79% of the students being Hispanic. Bilingual education is offered to students who struggle with the English language; however the job market constantly seeks bilingual employees. In addition, UTEP is considered a commuter college. This means that the majority of students only spend time on campus for classroom instruction limiting the interaction and engagement of students outside the classroom. Also, this reduces the use of student resources available to them such as academic advising, tutoring in Math and English, and career services. This hinders the student's growth and development such as independence, confidence, the development of meaningful relationships and identity.

Life on the border for college students can be stressful if they are undocumented. These students face the daily fear of having to be confronted by the U.S. Border Patrol. Benjamin Saenz (1992) provides a colorful and detailed insight on how he was harassed as a New Mexico student attending UTEP. Undocumented students also face the hardship of not being able to access financial aid from the federal government despite graduating from a high school in the United States. When it comes to housing, migrant families usually live in the colonias, which are located on the outskirts of El Paso. The spatial distribution of the population in El Paso shows that the majority of the population is located in the west and east side of the city (Staudt and Mendez, 2010). This movement pushes the colonias further away from the center of town and

UTEP. This growth affects student's transportation to UTEP, as it is located in the central area of the city.

Staudt and Mendez (2010) state that students need to be prepared and educated for global competitiveness. As the United States workforce is turning its focus to a service industry, a college education is fundamental to a strong economy. The policy on high stakes testing is designed to ensure that all students in the K-12 educational system are proficient in Math, English and Science. This in turn prepares students for success in post-secondary institutions. However, Hispanic students continue to take developmental courses at institutions of higher education such as UTEP. Students who enroll in developmental courses typically take longer to graduate from college but developmental courses do not decrease the student's chance of graduation significantly (Carrejo, Weldelessie and Mathew, 2008). Colleges and universities along the U.S. – Mexico border offer developmental courses at a higher rate than schools located farther away from the border. According to Carrejo et al. (2008), significant factors that explain college graduation include students placing below college level Math and placing in the bottom half of their high school graduating class will decrease the probability of graduation.

Latino populations in colleges and universities continue to grow, and have established clubs and organizations on college campuses. Mediratta, Seema and Shah (2009) state that to create change within the community and schools, people need a source of power. A key source of power in low-income communities is the capacity to mobilize large numbers of community members to challenge political priorities that keep things the way they are. This is clear evidence of migrant students investing in social capital, and leadership training. Coalition building will be a key factor for migrant students to learn from one another and address common problems together. A long history of research suggests that achieving school transformation requires an

extended period of time (Mediratta, Seema and Shah, 2009). Latino students have taken the most important step in getting themselves organized to achieve not only change but recognition.

2.4.2 Hispanic Serving Institutions

It was determined that Hispanic students make-up approximately half of the student population at two-year Hispanic-serving institutions in a study completed by Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998). Their research also indicated that Hispanic students find more success at a Hispanic-serving institution than a non-Hispanic-serving institution. This study suggests that two year Hispanic-serving institutions have geared their policy and practices to provide more support towards Hispanic students. Two year Hispanic-serving institutions tend to serve minority, first-year, first-generation students (Nunez et al., 2011). Also, this research indicates that half of all students attending community colleges expect to transfer to a four-year institution to earn a bachelor's degree (Nunez et al., 2011). Further research could examine the practices found at two year Hispanic-serving institutions and determine if they can be applied at four year Hispanic-serving institutions.

Colleges and universities on the U.S.-Mexico border cannot do much about the demographic variables students bring to the table because what students bring to the table are external to the institution (Ortero, Rosas and Rivera, 2007). In a study completed at a border institution, the University of Texas at Brownsville, student retention was closely examined to see if it could be predicted. Each student brings with them their academic baggage that includes strengths and needs. However, Ortero, Rosas and Rivera (2007) state that the variables institutions can control for such as social and academic integration can increase student retention. At the University of Texas-Pan American, Salinas and Llanes (1992) studied persisters and nonpersisters and compared academic indicators such as the SAT, ACT, previous grade point

averages and the Texas Assessment of Skills Program (TASP) scores to determine if students would persist into their second year. Both types of students shared similarities, but experienced different outcomes. Nonpersisters gradually left school by taking fewer and fewer courses until they eventually dropped out. Students felt they did not fit into the college environment (Salinas and Llanes, 1992). Another factor contributing to students dropping out of school is being admitted on a probationary status or being on academic probation. Since this was a commuter school, student integration was minimal. UT Brownsville and UT Pan American are Hispanic-serving institutions located on the U.S.-Mexico border and whose student population commute daily and do not live at on-campus housing facilities. In the state of Texas, there are six major universities and four community colleges (and several satellite sites) along the U.S.-Mexican border. Each of these institutions serves large Latino student populations. Of all the colleges and universities along the border, Sul Ross State University is the only isolated, small institution where the majority of students live on-campus.

2.4.3 History of Student Housing at the University of Texas at El Paso

According to the UTEP Heritage House Flowsheet Collection, the first dormitory for men opened at the School of Mines and Metallurgy in 1917 and the women's dorm opened in 1919. In 1920, the men's dormitory was named Burges Hall and the women's dormitory was named Kelly Hall. Burges Hall continued as the men's residency facility until 1933; Kelly Hall maintained the women's facility until 1926.

In 1936, a new men's and a new women's residence hall opened, Worrell Hall and Benedict Hall. Both of these dormitories offered residents' lounges, a radio, and room to dance. In 1936, the College of Mines and Metallurgy instituted the parietal rule requiring all out-of-town residents to live on-campus. For several years, this policy afforded many students living

outside of El Paso the opportunity to attend college. This policy drove the need to construct more dormitories as the growth of out-of-town students increased. In 1947, Bell Hall, a women's residential hall, and Hudspeth Hall, a male dormitory were constructed. In 1950, Miners Hall opened to house the male athlete residents. In 1963, the new men's dormitory, Burges Hall opened, bringing the totals to four dormitory facilities for male students and two for women.

In 1972, the residential options on-campus changed. Two sky-rise dormitory facilities with the ability to house about 350 students each were opened. Barry Hall housed the male students and the new Kelly Hall housed the female students. Many of the old dorms were repurposed as offices and classrooms, leaving Barry Hall and Kelly Hall the only residential facilities for out-of-town students. Burges Hall continued to house male athletes. Living on-campus was no longer as appealing or as necessary as it was in 1936. In fact, enrollment of out-of-town students dropped considerably leaving the new dorms well below capacity. In 1973, the university revoked the parietal rule, turned the dormitories into co-educational facilities, and renovated the interior of Kelly Hall and Barry Hall to be more appealing to students. In 1977, both dorms had reached capacity. The two buildings would continue to house students until 2001 when Miner Village opened. In 2010, Miner Heights opened in order to accommodate an additional 200 students. Both Miner Village and Miner Heights offer on-campus living in state-of-the-art apartment-like dorm rooms. Currently, UTEP is in the initial phases of planning a third residential housing facility to be located on the UTEP campus. The expected opening date is scheduled for Fall 2014.

2.4.4 Demographics of Residential Students At UTEP

Currently, Miner Village and Miner Heights house 626 undergraduate and graduate students. The population encompasses 266 males (43%) and 360 females (57%). According to the Director at Miner Village, Dr. Charlie Gibbens, the breakdown of ethnicity was not available since nobody has asked for it. There are 241 freshmen (38%), 101 sophomores (17%), 65 juniors (10%), 63 seniors (10%) seniors, 86 graduate students (14%), and 70 students with no classification. Students did not indicate their academic classification or the system did not have sufficient information to assign them a classification (11%). Approximately 50% of students living at Miner Village are from El Paso County. Athletes comprise 20% of the students living at these housing facilities. The UTEP Athletic Department requires all first-year scholarship students to live on-campus. In addition, certain teams, such as the Women's Basketball team, are required to live on-campus as well. Presently, residential students comprise 3% of the total student population, while commuter students make-up the remaining 97% (UTEP Fact Book, 2011).

Chapter 3: Methods

3.1 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY METHODOLOGY

My interest in this study stems from my experience in the field of higher education. I served as the Director for the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP) for over ten years. CAMP served thirty-five freshman students each academic year. To help incoming students make the transition from high school to college, CAMP would house all students on campus. CAMP would pay all housing expenses for one full year. Since most students lived more than 20 miles from campus, this was a big help to them in terms of saving gas, commuting and maintaining a vehicle. Students became involved in campus activities and earned modest grade point averages. The program staff assisted with roommate issues, collaborated with residential housing staff, and provided academic assistance. At the end of each academic year, approximately forty percent of students would choose not to live on campus. Over a ten-year period, CAMP had a graduation rate of forty-four percent. CAMP students comprised a fraction of the student population, but I became interested in finding out if the remaining residential population had similar experiences.

This research applies a mixed methods approach to gain information that involves collecting data consecutively to best address the research questions. The data collection involved collecting statistical information and transcript knowledge so that the final database would best represent both qualitative and quantitative information. The first phase of the study began by analyzing student information from current (completers) and former (departures) residential students. Statistical analysis was used to examine the link between students living on campus and academic success. Two focus groups of current and former residential students were conducted to add to the data collection. The third data set was collected by implementing an online student survey to explore the relationships among student housing, employment, family impact, and student engagement.

This study examined success and engagement among current and former residential students attending a Hispanic Serving Institution located along the U.S.-Mexico border. It centered on three questions with a mixed methods approach. The first question is to what extent does living on campus predict academic achievement among students at a Hispanic Serving Institution? To answer this question, student data obtained from the Center for Institutional Evaluation, Research and Planning (CIERP) was analyzed. The second question is how do residential and former residential students differ in their preferences and perceptions regarding life on and off-campus? In addressing this question, a survey was administered to residential and former residential students. The third question is what factors contribute to students' decisions about continuing to live on campus? To address this question, two focus groups were conducted. The first focus group included five students currently living on campus. The second focus group included five students who previously lived on campus, but have since moved out of the housing facility. My hypothesis is that completers will have higher academic success, as measured by grade point average, than departures.

3.2 METHODS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 1

3.2.1 Procedure

The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) requires that all research involving human subjects conducted by faculty, staff, and/or students affiliated with the university be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to initiation. IRB approval was granted in May 2013.

To ensure confidentiality, no student names were used. Instead, the analysis only utilized UTEP student identification numbers. The list of students analyzed came from the Office of Residential Life's (ORL) student records. The ORL provided a list of students who lived at

Miner Village and Miner Heights during the fall 2012, spring 2013 and fall 2013. Once the list was obtained, the following students were eliminated: student athletes, international students, and graduate students. The list of students was then divided into students who continued to live at either Miner Village or Miner Heights (*completers*) and students who left student housing (*departures*).

The final list of remaining students was sent to CIERP and the UTEP Office of Student Financial Aid. CIERP provided the following information on each student: grade point average, hours earned, full- or part-time enrollment status, and home residence. The Office of Student Financial Aid identified students who were awarded the Federal Pell Grant. The Federal Pell Grant served as a proxy for student socio-economic status.

The student data provided by CIERP was compared to the focus group data, which included current and former residential students. The focus groups were intended to provide an in-depth analysis about the students' experiences of living at Miner Village/Miner Heights that focused on academic success, family impact, employment, and financial issues.

3.3 METHODS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 2

3.3.1 Materials

Two focus groups were conducted: 1) students currently living at Miner Village or Miner Heights, and 2) students who formerly lived at Miner Village or Miner Heights.

3.3.2 Procedure

A flyer was posted at Miner Village requesting participants for this activity. Interested participants responded to the flyer via a telephone call and email. The researcher arranged for an individual meeting with each prospective participant to explain the parameters of this study and their role in the research process. Once all prospective participants had been interviewed, the

researcher selected five participants for the study. Students were informed that by participating in the focus group, they were able to share their experience pertaining to living on campus and how it had affected their academic performance, connectedness to faculty, staff and students, satisfaction with the housing facilities, and the utilization of student services available to students. The director for student housing provided pizza and soft drinks to all participants, and provided office space to conduct the focus group.

Students participating in the focus group were asked a series of five questions by the researcher (see Appendix B). The researcher sought to identify elements regarding why these participants continued to choose to live at Miner Village. In order to capture individual experiences, the researcher audio recorded the group interview and took notes of the group's interaction called field notes. This allowed the researcher to transcribe the conversation.

3.3.3 Participants: Former Residents of Miner Village

Selected participants were former residents from Miner Village, and enrolled full-time at UTEP for the current semester. Participants resided at Miner Village or Miner Heights during the fall 2013, spring 2014, and fall 2014 semesters. Participants were classified as undergraduate students in good academic standing, and not involved in any disciplinary action with the Office of Student Life. Five former Miner Village residents participated in this focus group.

3.3.4 Participants: Current Residents of Miner Village

Selected participants were current residents at Miner Village, and enrolled full-time at UTEP for the current semester. Participants were required to be classified as undergraduate students in good academic standing, and not involved in any disciplinary action with ORL or the Office of Student Life. Five students were selected to participate in this focus group.

3.3.5 Procedure

To recruit students who left Miner Village, the Housing Director sent out an email to former residents requesting participants for this activity. The researcher arranged for an individual meeting with each prospective participant to explain the parameters of this study and their role in the research process. Once all prospective participants had been interviewed, the researcher selected five participants for the study. Students were informed that by participating in the focus group, they were able to share their experience of living on campus and how it affected their academic performance, connectedness to faculty, staff and students, satisfaction with the housing facilities, the utilization of student services available to students, and reasons for leaving the student housing complex. The director for student housing provided pizza and soft drinks to all participants, and provided office space to conduct the focus group.

Former residents from Miner Village were asked the same questions as the participants living at Miner Village. However, for this group, the researcher sought to identify elements regarding why these participants decided to leave Miner Village and return home with their parents or to an off campus living site. The same procedures for recording data were followed with the second focus group.

3.4 METHODS FOR RESEARCH QUESTION 3

3.4.1 Materials

As described in Chapter 2, the NSSE is used to measure student engagement inside and outside the classroom (Kuh, 2007). The purpose of the NSSE is to assess the extent to which undergraduates are engaged in educational practices that have been linked to high levels of learning and development (Kuh, Cruce, Shoup, Kinzie, & Gonyea, 2008). However, NSSE does not take into account variables that are common for students attending a college or university on the U.S.-Mexico border or Latino students; nor does it assess the strong presence of family

values. For this study, a student survey was developed using the NSSE as a model, but was supplemented to explore the role of family responsibilities, the importance and strength of family values, and student employment concerns.

The survey questions of primary interest concerned student engagement, relationships with faculty/staff and students, campus involvement, employment, and family connections and activity off campus (see Appendix A). The survey contained items regarding student demographics (Questions 1-11), the impact of the student's family (Questions 12-25), employment issues (Questions 26-35), and student engagement (Questions 36-41). For most questions, students were asked to answer using a Likert response instrument with a four point scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. In addition, two open-ended questions were included: 1) what are three reasons that made you leave student housing, and 2) what is one factor that would keep you from leaving student housing.

A pilot survey was used on eleven undergraduate students to test the questions being considered. Students reported the survey was well organized, easy to follow, and the questions were easy to understand. The average time to complete the survey was approximately six minutes.

3.4.2 Procedure

Campus Labs, formerly Student Voice, is designed to collect information from students that could be used to impact programs and services, and is the leading platform and service provider for assessment in higher education. The University of Texas at El Paso and Campus Labs are partners in research projects with the Division of Student Affairs. Currently, Campus Labs collaborates with the UTEP University Career Center, Office of Residence Life, and the Office of Student Life on assessing student services and student feedback. The Director for the

Department of Residential Life recommended Campus Labs to assist with the student survey for this research.

Campus Labs distributed the survey via the Internet. A total of forty-three survey questions were sent to Campus Labs via email, and Campus Labs set-up the survey in an electronic format. Once the survey questions were formatted, the researcher reviewed the survey for accuracy.

The same list of *completer* and *departure* students used for Research Question 1 was used to contact students in order to investigate Research Question 2. The researcher submitted the list of student emails via the Campus Lab website. Campus Labs was responsible for sending out the student survey via email. Once an Internet link to the survey was emailed to the prospective students, they had the opportunity to complete the survey. The email informed the prospective participants of my dissertation in Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Texas at El Paso, and that I had received authorization by the Institutional Review Board at UTEP to conduct a survey among undergraduate students to better understand their experiences at Miner Village/Miner Heights. Students learned that their input on this survey would add to knowledge about issues concerning residential students at UTEP, including student involvement in campus activities and the impact of family and employment while attending school. The email informed students that the survey would take only about 6 minutes to complete, all information gathered would be anonymous, and there were no foreseeable risks in disclosing personal views because all responses would remain confidential.

The survey opened on October 1, 2013, and closed on December 1, 2013. Campus Labs sent email reminders to students about the survey. Students who had already completed the survey were identified and not included in the email reminders. During the survey period, the

researcher was able to monitor the number of students that had taken the survey and view preliminary data results. Once the survey closed, all data was immediately available for analysis on the Campus Labs website. The data included pie charts and bar graphs to illustrate student response rates.

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: STUDENT DATA RESULTS

4.1.1 *Sample Demographics*

Student Information was gained from UTEP's Miner Village office. To ensure student confidentiality, only UTEP student identification numbers were obtained. The student sample consisted of a total of 880 students. There were 673 (76.5%) *completer* students who continued to live on campus during the 2013 fall semester, 2014 spring semester, and the 2014 fall semester. The sample was also comprised of 207 (23.5%) *departure* students who were living on campus, but left for unknown reasons during the 2012 fall semester, 2013 spring semester, or the 2013 fall semester.

Across the entire sample, 796 (90.5%) students were enrolled for classes at UTEP during the fall 2013 semester, while 76 (8.6%) were not enrolled at UTEP or any other college or university. In terms of enrollment, 677 (76.9%) students were enrolled full-time (12 credit hours or more), and 135 (15.3%) were enrolled part-time (less than 12 credit hours) during the fall 2013 semester. Also, 88 (10%) students graduated from UTEP by fall 2013, while 792 (90%) students were still enrolled at UTEP during that term.

Students' home residence was broken down into three categories: 1) 513 (58.3%) students were from El Paso County, 2) 249 (28.3%) students were from a Texas County outside of El Paso, and 3) 118 (13.4%) students were from another U.S. state. Student financial aid award status was broken down into two basic groups: 1) 455 (51.7%) students received the federal Pell Grant, and 2) 425 (48.3%) students did not receive the federal Pell Grant during the 2013 fall semester.

4.1.2 Variables

The predictor variables used in this analysis were housing status (*completers* or *departures*), total hours earned/completed by fall 2013, the student's home residence, and financial aid award status. Housing status was the predictor variable of primary interest. Hours earned was entered into the analysis to control for the large variation in the number of hours completed by students in the sample. The student's home residence was selected for inclusion in the model because the second focus group indicated that living near their home residence affected their academic performance due to family responsibilities. Financial award status was included in the model because students in the second focus group discussed how financial need and employment affected their grades. The dependent variable was cumulative grade point average (GPA), used as a measure of student success.

4.1.3 Model Test

To test the hypothesis that completer and departure students would differ in terms of academic success, a model was tested using the Generalized Linear Models procedure in SPSS 21 in which the dependent variable was student grade point average and the explanatory variables were housing status, hours earned, home residence, and financial aid status. The following two-way interactions were included in the model: housing x residence, housing x financial aid, and financial aid x residence. The three-way interaction, housing x residence x financial aid, was also included in the model.

The overall test of the model was significant, $F(12, 861) = 89.76, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .14$, Adjusted $R^2 = .13$. As predicted, housing status was a significant predictor of GPA, $F(1, 861) = 13.05, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .02$. Completers had a significantly higher GPA ($M = 2.82, SE = .04$) than departures ($M = 2.53, SE = .08$), $p < .001$, when controlling for hours earned. Hours earned by

students was also a significant predictor of GPA, $F(1, 861) = 81.92, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .09$. No other main effects or interactions significantly predicted GPA.

A follow-up analysis was conducted to examine the hours earned for completers versus departure students. Completers earned significantly more hours ($M = 72.02, SD = 46.99$) than departures ($M = 54.14, SD = 49.63$), $F(1, 873) = 24.26, p < .001$.

The General Linear Model procedure in SPSS was used instead of Multiple Linear Regression. General Linear Model was preferable because all of the predictor variables were categorical, which made it easier to interpret output for those types of variables. However, the analyses were run using both procedures and the findings were the same.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

4.2.1 Approach to Data Analysis

The qualitative data was used to highlight the students' experiences of living on-campus. Data collected from the focus group was analyzed for potential patterns, themes, and categories. Categorical units were defined in terms of an expression, regardless of length, that refers to or describes the same person, object, or event. The focus group analysis reflected how group members collaborated on some issue, how they achieve consensus (or fail to), and how they construct shared meanings about their personal experience of living on campus. Data used in this content analysis included speech, observations of behavior, and various forms of nonverbal communication. The speech itself was recorded. Before the content of a focus group was examined, it was converted into specific units of information that can be analyzed by the researcher.

Expected findings from this focus group included themes on relationship building, family ties and the adjustment to a new living environment. Participants shared both positive and

negative experiences of living on-campus. The researcher identified elements that provide an insight as to why these participants continue to choose to live at Miner Village. In addition, students shared their experiences of actively engaging with faculty and campus activities.

4.4 FOCUS GROUP #1:CURRENT RESIDENTS AT MINER VILLAGE

4.4.1 Overview

The first focus group consisted of five participants currently living at Miner Village at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP): one Hispanic female, one White (Non-Hispanic) female, two White (Non-Hispanic) males, and one Hispanic male. All participants were housed at Miner Village during the 2013-2014 academic year. Of the five students in this focus group, one resident was from El Paso County. The remaining four students attended high school outside El Paso County. All five students elected to live on campus, and plan on returning to attend classes and live at UTEP's Miner Village for the 2014-2015 academic year.

Pseudonyms were used for all participants. The first participant was John, White (Non-Hispanic), a sophomore seeking a degree in Health Sciences. John attended high school outside the El Paso region. The second participant is recognized as Ashley, White (Non-Hispanic). Ashley is a senior and attended high school outside the El Paso region. She is seeking a degree from the College of Business. Brad, White (Non-Hispanic), is a junior and is seeking a degree from the College of Liberal Arts. Brad attended high school outside the El Paso region. The third participant is recognized as Eddie, Hispanic, a sophomore from a location outside the United States. He is seeking a degree from the College of Engineering. Eddie currently works part-time on campus. The fourth participant is identified as Ana, Hispanic, a sophomore from El Paso County. Ana is seeking a degree from the College of Health Sciences. John and Ana openly revealed that they have a physical disability and were receiving governmental assistance.

4.4.2 *Living at Miner Village*

Residents living at Miner Village expressed high satisfaction with living on campus. Each participant chose to live on campus as soon as they began their college preparation during high school. The main reason for choosing to live on campus was convenience. Brad stated that since he was from a city outside El Paso, he felt it would be easier to make the transition to both the area and college by living at Miner Village. Brad as well as Eddie said they had each decided living on campus was the easiest choice for them. Ana stated that she and her family decided that living on campus would be best due to her disability. Although her family was initially opposed to her leaving the house, they supported her decision. By living at Miner Village, Ana would not have to rely on the local transportation agency that transports people with physical disabilities, which has a history of problems. She was comfortable and satisfied with the services offered by UTEP's Accommodations and Support Services Office. Ashley did consider living in an off campus apartment but chose Miner Village due to an overall better value for her money.

Students shared their experiences with faculty and staff at UTEP. For example, Eddie stated that faculty was accessible and always willing to assist him. He stated, "professors really want you to come visit them." He now makes it a habit to get to know the office hours of each of his professors. In connecting with faculty, John stated that just living on campus can make all the difference in establishing relationships with faculty. John's apartment is located only three minutes from the Liberal Arts building. Ana, who gets around campus on a motorized wheelchair, felt that just being on campus the entire day can make the difference in meeting or missing a professor for any help she may need.

Ashley felt that other students and new friends help make living at Miner Village smooth. She felt she was forced to grow up, accept responsibilities such as establishing a daily schedule and attending class on a regular basis. She felt that it was much easier to stay in bed and wait

until the last possible minute to leave her apartment for class. The entire group agreed with Ashley as they burst out laughing. Brad stated that the environment at Miner Village was not what he expected since students from all over the world were in his front and backyard. He felt this made him expand his horizons in accepting and meeting new people from different backgrounds.

Another positive experience discussed in the focus group was the integration of the student body at Miner Village. Each student was a member of the student organization at Miner Village. They each shared fun experiences, such as the float making party and parade to celebrate the school's homecoming, and the International Food event on campus. It was through those experiences that they also made new friends who didn't necessarily live on campus. They felt that as the year progressed, they became more immersed with the entire student body. Since students are living on campus, it is much easier to get involved with campus activities and student organizations. Aside from the student organization for Miner Village residents, John and Eddie are members of other campus clubs. They did not limit themselves to friends at Miner Village, as they enjoy meeting other people.

Students expressed additional benefits of living on campus such as not having to worry about monthly rent charges, utility bills, and issues with "nightmare" landlords. Instead, Ana stated that her main bill was her cell phone bill. The stress levels reported by all participants were relatively low, which allowed them to focus on their course work. Another major advantage was the technology available to them. The wireless internet was free and the availability of computers around campus was handy. Plus, Brad felt that the software was the most up-to-date versions.

Perhaps the most discussed advantage was the issue of privacy. Everyone felt that they needed their own, personal space. The traditional style of dorms does not allow for privacy, as rooms are shared with very little personal space. At UTEP, the residential facility takes on the design of apartments. Roommates share kitchen space, a living room and a bathroom. Brad stated that having his own room with a lock and key gave him the space needed to study or simply hang out. Ashley felt that the shared and personal space is a good balance.

Each student shared some of the obstacles they encountered during their fall semester at UTEP and Miner Village. Some of the issues discussed included the registration process, getting acclimated to the hot weather, connecting their electronic devices such as iPads and phones to the UTEP system, and dealing with the large amount of students speaking Spanish both on and off campus. So many students speaking Spanish caught some of the students off guard. They were used to hearing English in their home environment.

One major issue students faced while living at Miner Village was the discovery of freedom. Since they were living on campus, there were no parents or guardians to supervise them. They were on their own and had to take on the responsibility of cleaning their apartments, washing dishes, cooking and doing their laundry. Ashley stated that it took some getting used to, but she managed to survive. The adjustment for Brad was very quick since he had a roommate who liked to keep a clean apartment. A common issue was the maintenance of the food stored in the refrigerator and cabinets. The topic of sharing groceries and cooking responsibilities usually served the right ingredients for a disagreement. According to Eddie, this was a good lesson on negotiations. As we continued identifying some problems with living at Miner Village, the students centered on a problem that has yet to be solved: garbage. It is common for other residents to simply place their trash bags in the breezeway or the stairwell. John and Ashley

displayed anger with other students not being clean. Brad stated, “some residents are pigs and do not care about having a clean place to live, even if it was just outside their door.” The last common issue students faced was taking for granted how close they live to the buildings where classes are held. For example, Eddie would sleep in as late as possible before heading out to class. Ashley said that she would simply need to adjust her schedule to get to class on time and not feel rushed about it. Although the students adjusted to their new living environment, they still missed their family and beds.

4.4.3 Academics and Living On Campus

Students stated that their grades were what they expected. They spend approximately four to five hours studying on their own time and additional time participating in study groups both at Miner Village and on campus. Students spoke openly about their grades when asked how they did this past semester. Grade point averages were self-reported as follows: 1) John: 3.5, 2) Ashley: 3.65, 3) Ana: 3.90, 4) Eddie: 3.25, and 5) Brad: 3.4. Eddie stated that his GPA would probably have been lower if he had lived off campus because he would have to work more hours in order to pay his rent and other expenses. Ana did state that by living on campus and being involved with student organizations, she felt a little pressure to earn good grades in order to stay active with her friends. Ashley felt that the majority of her time her time was spent studying and being around campus with friends. John stated that his grades were a reflection of his past performance in high school. He said he had “the goods” to complete a college degree.

4.4.4 Living on Campus and Finances and Family

Only one of the five students, Eddie, worked part-time on campus. He worked with a student services department at nineteen hours per week. Eddie was also the only student receiving student financial aid. Ana is receiving governmental assistance based on her disability.

John own a small business that helps pay for his college expenses. Ashley receives financial support from her parents. Brad was not working, but did not disclose how his expenses were being paid. Students did not express any concern on how their rent was paid.

On the issue of family, the group of participants did not seem too interested. Ashley stated that since she lives so far away from home, she has gotten used to the idea of starting her professional life in this region of the country. John stated that he came from a small family, but was not very close to them. Brad did not respond to this topic. Eddie said that he came from a large family and missed them very much. He goes home to visit as often as possible. For example, Eddie stayed connected to his family via email, or on his iPhone using face time, which is a video call from his phone, Skype, and occasional visits back home. Ana, the only resident from El Paso, stated she came from a traditional Hispanic family and felt some guilt about leaving her family behind, even though she was twenty minutes from her home. As the academic year progressed, her family began to accept her independence.

4.5 FOCUS GROUP #2: FORMER RESIDENTS OF MINER VILLAGE

4.5.1 Overview

The second focus group consisted of five former residents of Miner Village who have since moved out of the housing facility. The group consisted of five Hispanic students: four female students and one male student; two students were from El Paso, and three were from outside El Paso County. Rosie, a senior in the College of Liberal Arts, attended high school in the El Paso area. She is currently living at home. Christy, a sophomore in the College of Health Sciences, attended high school in the El Paso area and is living at home with her parents. Rocky, a junior in the College of Engineering attended high school in a nearby county and is currently living with relatives in the central part of El Paso. Briselda, an Education major, recently got

married and is living with her husband. She attended high school outside the El Paso area. Emmie, a nursing student, attended high school outside the El Paso area and is currently living independently in an apartment on the north eastside of El Paso. All students commute daily to UTEP in their personal vehicles.

4.5.2 Living at Miner Village

Students stated that they chose to live at Miner Village because they lived too far from campus. Briselda and Emmie lived approximately 60 miles outside of El Paso, which is nearly an hour drive through Interstate 10. Emmie stated that she has to get up at 4:00 am, get dressed, leave her house at 5:30, and fight traffic through the heart of El Paso. She would arrive at UTEP at approximately 7:00 am. This would give her enough time to find parking and attend her 7:30 class. A daily commute added up to over one hundred and thirty miles per day. At the end of the week, she would rack up almost 700 miles on her car. It made more sense to live on campus, save on gas, and not put her vehicle through what she described as “too much wear and tear.” Plus, she could get more sleep and focus on her course work. Rocky, also lived far from campus, did not have access to a car, and felt it was better to live on campus. Rosie did not live too far from campus, but chose to live at Miner Village because she did not own a car. Christy did own a car, but also chose to live on campus due to high fuel prices. All students chose to live on campus because the convenience it provided. Dealing with traffic, high fuel prices, the wear and tear on their vehicles, higher insurance rates, and the price of parking permits made it an easy choice to live at Miner Village. Also, each student wanted to have the “college experience” they had heard so much about from their high school counselors and seen in videos and brochures. They each had visions of joining a fraternity or sorority, studying on the campus lawn, hanging

out at the Student Union, and cheering on the football team. In the end, the choice was easy to make.

Students shared some of their positive experiences that included easy and quick access to classroom buildings, individual freedom, making new friends, cooking, and the availability of technology. Briselda stated that her hometown did not have internet access outside the school, and the computers at her school were not the latest version. Emmie enjoyed her personal freedom and got her first taste of independence. She decorated her room to her liking and cooked the food she enjoyed most. Rocky enjoyed sleeping in late and going to class right out of bed. Rosie appreciated the carefree apartment. In other words, she enjoyed not having to worry about paying rent since her financial aid took care of it at the beginning of the semester. Christy enjoyed meeting people from different parts of the country. She was shy at first but eventually came out of her shell. She stated, "I was scared and shy on the day I moved in, but by the evening hours, I was already talking to my new friends. I got comfortable very fast." Emmie stated that the initial experience was fun, exciting and full of energy. The campus environment made her want to start classes right away. Rocky stated that he was not accustomed to seeing other students with an apartment stocked with game systems, expensive stereos, computers and tons of clothes. Rocky only brought what he needed and felt a little embarrassed.

The students shared some of their experiences that were not positive. For example, Emmie stated that parties were everywhere the first few days before class, but when it came time to be serious, she had a difficult time focusing on her classes. She found herself struggling with a basic freshman course, ART 1300. She ended up failing the course for two consecutive semesters. She struggled with her freedom and independence. Rosie stated that there was no one there to remind you to go to class or to do your homework. Christy felt that there was pressure to

do well in every class because you had no obstacles. She stated, “You don’t have to worry about rent or fuel for your car, you are supposed to get good grades.” Briselda felt that once school started, the noise level never really came down and she was forced to study somewhere else, which defeated the purpose of living on campus. Briselda also had what she labeled as the “roommate from hell.” Her roommate wanted to “boss her around” and have her do all the cleaning. She immediately held her ground and her roommate backed off. The relationship with her roommate was never the same. They got along with one another until the end of the semester. She was unaware that she could have requested a room change. Emmie felt that the front desk people were too slow to respond to issues in the rooms such as clogged sinks and heating/cooling issues. Rocky stated that the Residential Living Assistants (RLA’s) were not visible or available when problems arose. Another common problem was the traffic of their roommate’s visitors. Christy stated that she was not used to strangers entering her apartment, but it came with the territory.

Although students were living on campus, they each struggled with their family obligations. Students shared how they felt guilty living in apartments that were much better furnished than their parents’ homes, where the appliances were new and in working condition. One student stated that his parent’s home uses an evaporative cooler during the summer that often breaks down while the apartments at Miner Village use refrigerated air. It was hard for some students to make this adjustment of living in a really nice place while their family was back home. This made going home for the weekend something to look forward to.

Students also expressed how they missed their family members whether it be good or bad interactions. Rosie stated that she missed living with her two younger sisters, and even arguing with her mother. Although the students missed home, they did not like being called so often

during the week. For example, Briselda stated that she would get calls from her mother reminding her of things she needed to do when she went home for the weekend, such as cleaning the house or babysitting. Students felt that they kept their family obligations despite living at UTEP. Rosie felt that her family chores were simply moved to the weekend. Briselda shared a story of when her mother showed up at her apartment during the week unannounced. This created a huge problem because she had a boyfriend and her mother did not know about it. She felt smothered by her mother who lived over sixty miles away. Emmie stated it was common for her to make a special trip home to help her family. For example, she had to go home on a Wednesday to help babysit her younger brother and sister while her parents went to a doctor's appointment.

When students did visit their families on the weekend or on a school break, they were expected to help around the house, babysit, and even work. For example, Rocky would return home on Friday afternoons and work with his father Saturday to earn money for the family; however, his parents expected him to study and do homework in a house full of adults and kids. Christy was expected to help cook and clean while she was at home. A student quietly whispered in the group that she felt like a hired maid for the weekend. Students may not have looked forward to these visits, but the parents expected them home every weekend despite school obligations. Briselda shared that she would lie to her parents about a class assignment that had to be done on campus and was unable to go home for the weekend.

Students expressed a difficult time in balancing school and family. When they didn't help their parents, they felt guilty yet relieved. They were pulled from school and home. In the end, students felt that school always came up short. Emmie stated that her parents didn't understand

how college worked. They assumed that college was the same as high school. As they were half way through the semester, students felt their relationship with their family was strained.

When it came to money, the family also had an impact on students. Each student in the group was receiving financial aid and had some amount of refund. This financial aid refund is to be used for textbooks and housing. If any money were left over after those expenses, students would give some of the refund to their parents to help out with bills or other expenses. Rocky stated that he felt guilty for having all this money when his parents worked so hard and didn't have enough to meet their expenses. During the fall semester, he gave his parents \$300 to help with the household. When the spring semester came along, his parents expected to get some of the financial aid refund. This put Rocky in a tough and uncomfortable position. How could he not give his parents money they needed? Rosie stated that her parents knew of her financial aid refund and actually expected to get some money in return. Rosie's parents stated that because financial aid was based on their income, they were entitled to some of the refund since most of her school expenses were paid.

4.5.3 Academics and Living on Campus

All five students stated that their grades should have been higher while living on campus since many of the university's resources were readily available. Rosie stated that between going to class, her part-time job, and sorority and family obligations, she really didn't have the time to utilize resources such as the university's Writing Center. She was multi-tasking throughout the day trying to meet her daily commitments. For example, her sorority had community service obligations and bi-weekly meetings.

Emmie was also surprised by the class sizes. Her Psychology 1301 course had over 400 students, which left little room for establishing any type of relationship with the professor. She

felt as if he would not have time for her since the class was so huge. After coming from a small school in Far West Texas, this was culture shock. Emmie made no connection with the course, professor and other students. She attended the class, got a copy of the daily power point presentation, and read the book. She had to put all three factors together in order to pass the course. She ended up getting a “C” in this course. One of Emmie’s distractions was her health. She always seemed to have something go wrong with her health. For example, she ended up having surgery on her wrist from playing tennis in high school. She had no regrets about playing tennis since she was a Texas State Champion.

The grades for Briselda were A’s and B’s, and her overall GPA was a 3.40. Her classes were not as large, but she did not have any success connecting with faculty. In her History 1301 course, her professor always referred all questions and meetings to the Teaching Assistants (TAs). She never got to meet with her History professor during the semester. Her main distraction was her freedom and new boyfriend, whom she met at Miner Village.

Rocky earned A’s, B’s and C’s in his classes. He found some classes easier than others, and Math was his strongest subject. He started out as a Kinesiology major, but ended up changing to Engineering. His classes were not large, but professors always deferred questions about class assignments, quizzes and exams to the TA. It became the norm for Rocky to just go the TA instead of the professor. For Rocky, the distractions came from living on campus. He played pool at Summit Hall (Miner Village), went to room parties, or played sports games on his PlayStation 3. With so much to do around campus, it was easy to put off his assignments. He stated that he would tell himself that he could read at night when everyone was asleep, only to find himself asleep before everyone else.

Christy appeared to have the best academic success. She earned a 3.7 GPA. She made the extra effort to meet with her professors. While trying to figure out her major field of study, she was able to get a meeting with the Director for Human Resources at UTEP to see if that's the field she wanted to study. In the end, she ended up selecting to major in Speech Pathology. One of her main distractions was going home to her family. Although she had strong support from her parents, they didn't seem to understand the dynamic of attending college. Her parents would often ask her to help around the house with chores such as washing dishes. She figured the only way to study at home during the weekends was to lock herself in her room at night. While living at Miner Village, she enjoyed staying on campus and not driving to and from school on a daily basis.

Some common issues faced by all five students affecting their academic performance while living at Miner Village included poor time management, not being able to do homework when they went home for weekend visits, distractions from boyfriends/girlfriends, and work.

4.5.4 Living on Campus and Finances and Family

Each of the students received a full financial aid package that included the Pell Grant, Texas Grant, Work Study and Student Loans. The Pell Grant for two semesters was approximately \$5100. The Texas Grant paid students \$5500 for the fall and spring semester. The amount of financial aid for Work Study averaged about \$2700. Each student was eligible up to \$3,000 in student loans for the year.

Christy, Rosie, and Emmie all held jobs while living at Miner Village. Christy and Rosie were employed on campus, and Emmie was employed off campus. Rocky and Briselda did not hold any regular paying jobs. Rocky worked with his father on weekends. The students who worked did so because they had expenses their family couldn't help with. For example, Christy

felt that by living at Miner Village, she was giving her parents another bill they couldn't afford to pay. Although her rent and books were covered by financial aid, she still needed help with groceries, clothing and other miscellaneous expenses. She did not account for these small but significant expenses. Christy worked to help pay for her vehicle expenses such as fuel and repairs. Rosie needed a notebook computer, but her parents couldn't pay for one. Emmie worked to help pay for her personal expenses such as books, groceries, and items for her apartment. Another student stated that despite having all the financial aid money and part-time job, he was always broke.

This focus group offered plenty of insight on the impact of their family. Although the families supported these students, the expectations at home did not appear to change. For example, students were expected to visit the house every weekend to help around the house or work to earn money. One student stated that her apartment at Miner Village became her "crash site" after a long weekend with her family. Her apartment was her home away from home. When it came to financial aid refunds, some students were expected to give a certain amount of it to the parents, while others voluntarily helped their parents. As the academic year progressed, each student's relationship with the family appeared to be strained. For example, students eventually made fewer visits home as the semester advanced.

One critical insight this focus group brought to the table was the ability to examine their time at Miner Village in hindsight. The group came to a quick consensus that they could have 1) handled their money better, such as saving some for emergencies (money management), 2) spent more time studying and getting higher grades (time management), 3) not felt guilty for having access to financial aid and campus housing, 4) gotten more involved with campus events, 5) found a better balance between family and school, and 6) avoided having a part-time job.

4.6 ANALYSIS

4.6.1 Similarities

The focus groups shared similar when sharing their time at Miner Village. For example, all students expressed how they felt more connected to faculty and staff. This is one benefit to living on campus that students missed once they moved out. Students who moved out spent more time commuting and fighting traffic, looking for parking, rushing to and from class, and getting to work. Another similarity between both groups of students was connectedness to campus life. Students living on campus continued to take part in student organizations and being close to the classrooms. For students who moved out from campus housing, they had little to no time for anything outside the classroom. In addition, residents experienced academic performance, which resulted in higher grade point averages (GPA). Both groups also shared how they all enjoyed their newfound independence from their parents and families. Students stated how they learned to live on their own by trial and error. For example, students burned meals they cooked in their apartments as they cooked for themselves. Finally, students shared how they were satisfied with what Miner Village did for them. It provided a safe and independent place to live while attending college. Both groups felt that the residential staff supported them, and plenty of activities were available after classes were done for the day.

4.6.2 Differences

The issue of *available time* for school was much lower for students living off campus. These students spent more time attending to issues outside the classroom (family commitments, employment, and commuting) than their time spent studying. When compared to students who continued to live on campus, residents had more time to spend on reading and writing assignments, participating in lab assignments, and completing extra credit for courses. The lives of the residents were simplified and the available time was greater. Residents had more time to

give a strong effort on their classwork. The issue of money to cover housing expenses was also different between the two groups. The residential group of students experienced no obstacles in covering the monthly rent. The former residents relied on financial aid since their families were unable to assist them with college expenses. For example, students relied on the Pell Grant, Texas Grant and student loans to cover the rent for the semester. Another difference between the two groups was the issue of employment. Former residents took on jobs to meet their personal, family and academic needs. In contrast, the residential students who did work only did so to have spending money. The most significant difference between both groups of students was the factor of family involvement. For the most part, residential students did not experience family intervention nor did they feel a need to stay frequently connected with them. Former residents shared their experiences of numerous weekend visits, the need to keep in touch on a daily basis, and maintaining their home responsibilities such as helping around the house, babysitting, and working. The family factor is what took away from available time to study, and it also took away from the normal experience of living independently at a college campus. Former residential students did not get the full experience since they left on Friday afternoons and returned on Sunday evening. Students did not really experience the weekend activities.

4.6.3 Departure from Student Housing

Former residential students faced three key factors that eventually led them to move out from campus housing. The student's family played a huge role in them leaving campus housing. Students were expected to return home on weekends and holidays, provide help around the house such as with cleaning and cooking, and participate in family events. The second factor was employment. Despite receiving financial aid, students still needed to be employed to earn money for items in their apartment, school supplies and groceries. The third was students feeling guilty

about leaving the family. Students expressed feelings of guilt because the apartments were much better than their parents' homes, parents were left without a babysitter or someone to help cook during the evening hours, and they were unable to help with picking up siblings after school. One student stated that he felt like he abandoned his family to live on campus. This particular student returned home after living at Miner Village. These issues pulled them away from campus housing and back to their parents' homes. Some students rebelled and eventually got an apartment off campus to live independently from their parents. Students faced an almost impossible balance of family, school, work, and their own personal time.

The focus groups provided an in-depth view of student experiences shared by the students living at Miner Village/Miner Heights. The data influenced and helped develop the questions that were asked in the student survey. The responses from both focus groups prompted the researcher to seek responses to a greater number of questions from a larger sample of completers and departures, than were in the focus groups. The original survey consisted of ten questions, however, the focus group data lead the researcher to divide the survey into four sections: basic student demographics, family impact, engagement, and two open ended questions. The final design of the student survey was comprised of forty-two questions utilizing a Likert scale, and two open ended questions asking students to identify three factors that would keep them living on campus, and three factors that would lead them to depart from student housing.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

4.2.1 Survey Respondent Demographics

The survey was sent out to eight hundred and eighty students through Campus Labs via email to current and former residents from Miner Village/Miner Heights. A total of 198 students responded to the survey during a thirty-day period.

The first ten questions obtained basic information from students such as classification, gender, ethnicity, hometown, and marital status. The majority of participants were seniors (37.02%), followed by juniors (27.07%), sophomores (27.07%) and freshmen (8.84%). With respect to gender, the majority of participants were females (69.06%), followed by males (29.29%) and 1.66% of participants stated “no answer”. Ethnicity was also asked of each participant. Hispanic students comprised the majority of respondents (65.19%), followed by White, Non-Hispanic students (19.34%), African American students (5.52%), other ethnicity (not specified, 3.87%), Asian American students (2.76%), and students who responded “no answer” (3.31%). Students were asked about their hometown (county). El Paso County residents accounted for the majority (51.38%), followed by students living outside El Paso County (25.41%), Hudspeth County (next to El Paso County, 3.31%), and 1.10% came from the state of New Mexico. Marital status indicated that 91.71% of students were single with no children, 3.87% of students were single with children, 2.76% of students were married with no children, and 1.66% of students were married with children.

The next series of questions focused on college enrollment information: 92.27% of students were enrolled in a college or university, and 7.73% were not enrolled. Among those enrolled, 97.58% were enrolled at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), 1.82% at the El Paso Community College (EPCC), and 0.61% were enrolled at another college or university.

Students were asked about enrollment for the spring 2014 semester with 92.73% stating they would enroll and 7.27% had no plans to enroll.

In reference to current living arrangements, 47.19% stated they were living on campus in student housing, 23.03% were living with parents/family, 13.48% were living with a roommate, 8.43% were living alone, and 7.87% were living with spouse/partner and children. Students were asked about their household income: 43.26% of students earned less than \$10,000; 19.66% earned more than \$10,00, but less than \$19,999; 12.36% earned more than \$20,000, but less than \$29,999; 4.49% earned more than \$30,000, but less than \$39,999; 3.37% earned more than \$40,000, but less than \$49,999; 2.81% earned more than \$50,000, but less than \$59,999; 5.62% earned more than \$60,000, but less than \$69,999; and, more than 9% earned more than \$70,000.

4.2.2 *Family Impact*

The next series of questions centered on the impact of family and experiences of living on campus. The majority of students (75.17%) stated that the distance between their house and an the UTEP campus was a significant factor in choosing to live on campus, while 22.88% stated that distance was not a factor. Students were then asked if living on campus took them away from their family obligations: 61.44% of students indicated that living on campus did not interfere with family obligations, while 38.57% indicated that it did affect them and their families. Students were asked if living on campus was too expensive for them: 50.33% noted that living on campus was too expensive, while 49.67% disagreed. The responses were just about even on this question. When asked about living on campus being too much of a change for them and their family, there was a significant difference: 73.20% indicated that the change was not too much of an obstacle for them, while 26.81% felt it was a big change. Students were also asked if living on campus allowed them more time to study. The majority of students (80.39%) agreed

they had more time to study, while 19.61% disagreed with this question. The next question asked if students felt they could save money by living at home. Responses indicated large differences among students, such that 69.93% answered that they would save money, with only 30.06% indicating they would not save money. Students were asked if their family preferred they live at home: 59.48% of students agreed that their family prefer they live at home, while 42.48% disagreed. Students were then asked if they left their family values behind while attending college. The response was noteworthy in that 14.38% agreed that their family values were left behind, while 85.62% disagreed with this question. The next question asked whether their role as a care provider conflicted with their college work: 81.05% of students disagreed with this question, while 18.96% agreed that their college work was affected by caring for a family member. Students were asked if they were able to talk to their family about struggles and concerns at school. The majority of students (75.82%) indicated that they had no difficulty, and 24.18% disagreed. The next question asked if their family responsibilities limited their involvement in campus activities. The survey indicates that the majority of respondents (81.69%) disagreed that family responsibilities limited their involvement in student life; however, 18.31% agreed with this question. The survey asked students if their family responsibilities made it difficult to do well in class. Most students (85.62%) disagreed with this question; a minority of students (14.38%) agreed that their family responsibilities played a role in their academic success. The next question asked if students thought of themselves as someone who provides care for others (e.g., children, elderly or younger family members, disabled family members): 15.69% strongly agreed, 24.18% agreed, 34.29% disagreed, and 24.84% strongly disagreed. In essence, the majority (59.13%) of students disagreed with having to commit to caring for a family member, but 39.87% found this to be a factor in their college experience. For the final

family related question, students were asked if their role as a care provider conflicted with their college work. As with the prior question, the majority of students disagreed (86.28%) and only 13.73% agreed.

4.2.3 Employment

The first question in this section asked students if they needed to work to pay for college and personal expenses. The majority of students (58.17%) agreed with statement and 41.83% disagreed. The next question asked students if they thought of themselves as the primary wage earner in their family. An overwhelming majority (86.93%) did not view themselves as the primary wage earner, although only 13.08% agreed. Students were then asked if they agreed with the statement that their role as the primary wage earner conflicted with their grades. A similar response was recorded: 86.94% disagreed with the statement, while 13.07% agreed. The following statement asked students if they had plenty of time to study after working hours. The results were mixed: 59.48% of students agreed with this statement, whereas 40.63% disagreed. The next question asked students if they had the energy to study after working hours. The responses indicated that 46.41% agreed they had enough energy to study after working, although 53.57% answered that they did not have enough energy. In regards to working while attending school, 65.36% felt that they should hold a job while enrolled in school, as compared to 34.64% of students who disagreed. When asked if parents expected them to earn money while enrolled in school, 58.83% of students disagreed with that statement, although 41.17% agreed. As students had college and personal expenses to cover, students were asked if they had to earn money in order to have and maintain a vehicle: 53.60% of students disagreed that they did not have to earn money to maintain a vehicle, while 46.40% agreed. Students were asked if it was important to have spending money of their own. The vast majority of students (85.97%) answered that they

agreed, as compared to 15.03% of students who disagreed. As students face a tough balance, they were asked if schoolwork was more important than earning money. Only 16.34% of students disagreed, whereas 83.66% agreed that schoolwork was a priority.

4.2.4 Student Engagement

The survey's third section focused on students' participation in activities inside and outside the classroom. Students were asked if they participated in classroom discussions, with an overwhelming majority (83%) agreeing with that statement, but only 17% disagreed. In reference to student life outside the classroom, students were asked if they joined a student group/organization: 67.66% of the students agreed that they participated in student groups or organizations, while 33.33% disagreed with this statement. The next question asked students if they made an effort to meet with faculty and staff to improve their grades: 78.43% of the students agreed with this statement, while only 21.57% of students disagreed. Students were then asked if they sought academic assistance before their grades went down (tutoring, meeting with an advisor, or an individual meeting with the professor/instructor). The vast majority of students (71.89%) agreed that they sought academic help when their grades were not good, compared to 28.11% who disagreed. Students were asked if they were able to successfully balance school, family and friends: 87.78% of students agreed with this statement, while only 12.22% disagreed. The final statement of this section asked students if they saw themselves as part of the UTEP community. The majority of students (78.13%) agreed with this statement, but 22.87% disagreed.

4.2.5 Open Ended Questions

Students were asked two open-ended questions. The first question asked students to list three reasons that made them leave Miner Village/Miner Heights. The three most common answers centered on cost, issues with roommates and family issues.

- Roommates: Students listed issues such as incompatibility, excessive noise, no privacy, unruly and untidy roommates, excessive alcohol consumption, missing personal items, and food sharing.
- Family: Students listed issues such as missing family members, starting a family (becoming a parent themselves), returning home, and responsibilities at the home.
- Cost: Students listed issues such as the loss of financial aid such as grants, loans, work-study positions, and scholarships, the high cost of living, and parents unable to assist with housing payments.

The second question asked was for students to list one factor that would keep them from leaving Miner Village/Miner Heights. The four most common answers dealt with cost, food, and proximity to campus.

- Cost: students expressed the need for lower rent and more financial aid dedicated to housing. The issue of cost was the number one cited factor.
- Food: Students stated that a cafeteria and access to food would keep them at student housing facilities.
- Family: Students cited missing their family and distance from their home as important factors.
- Proximity: Students expressed the convenience of living on campus and having quick and easy access to classrooms and other buildings.

4.2.6 Summary

This student survey revealed the majority of respondents were female, seniors living at Miner Village/Miner Heights, Hispanic students, earned less than \$10,000, and lived in El Paso County prior to living at UTEP's Student Housing. Most students were enrolled at UTEP and planned on returning for Spring 2014. Students also reported that distance from campus was an important factor in deciding to live at Miner Village/Miner Heights; that family values were not significantly negotiated by going to college; that family members had preferred they live at home with parents; and that living away from home was not a strain on the family relationships. Students also expressed that the cost of living on campus was too expensive. Students reported that family involvement did not hinder student involvement on campus; family responsibilities did not affect their academic success; and, most students did not consider themselves as someone who provides care for other family members. In terms of employment, the majority of students felt the need to work, but did not consider themselves as the primary wage earner. In addition, working did not affect their course grades; they had plenty of time to study; and they maintained enough energy to study after work. Students felt they should hold a job while enrolled at UTEP; parents expected them to earn money; they felt it was important to have money to spend, but money was not more important than school. In the third section on student engagement, the majority of students reported that they participated in class discussions, joined students clubs and organizations, made an effort to meet with faculty and staff when their grades were low, sought academic assistance before their grades went down, and were able to balance school, family and friends.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Findings

The purpose of this research was to examine academic success and engagement among current and former residential students living at the University of Texas at El Paso's student housing facilities, Miner Village and Miner Heights. The literature has consistently stated that students who live on campus are more successful and engaged academically than commuter students. The key focus of this study was to determine if the current literature on students living on campus applied to students attending a major university located along the U.S.-Mexico border. The research sought to compare students who continued to live in campus housing with students who departed from the residential facility, but (in the majority of cases) continued to attend UTEP. After a thorough data analysis, which included two focus groups, a student survey, and a regression analysis of institutional data, the outcomes suggest three major findings.

The first finding is the impact of the family on departure students whose home residence is El Paso County. Based on the focus group data, departure students at UTEP revealed that the family continued to have a major impact on students' college experiences even while living on campus. Although students were living on campus, they were expected to remain involved in familial daily routines. Some departure students stated that they maintained responsibilities in the household such as baby sitting, house cleaning and cooking. Departure students also shared that the balance between home and college was extremely difficult. They felt as if though they were living in two places at the same time. The focus group data also indicated that some departure students were expected to work part-time as well. Despite receiving financial aid that may have included federal and state grants, guaranteed student loans, and scholarships, students were expected to work part-time off campus. For example, one student stated that he worked at a fast

food restaurant to help his parents pay the monthly rent at the house they were living in. In another situation, students worked part-time to cover school expenses such as textbooks. Even if students were offered guaranteed student loans, many parents did not allow the students to take the loans for fear of not being able to repay them. When it came to financial aid refunds, students often felt the need to share it with their parents, or the parents asked for the student to help with family expenses. At the beginning of the semester, the students had little to no money for classroom expenses. Despite having financial assistance, they felt the need to work part-time to cover their personal and school expenses.

This points to the issue of actual time committed to the classroom. The departure students who participated in the focus group stated that they were torn between their family and their college experience. The biggest obstacle facing these students was time management. These students felt they had to balance going to class, reporting home either by phone or an actual visit, going to work, studying, and finding time to rest. From the student's perspective, their time was consumed with trying to meet all the demands of school, family, and work. Time spent with family and working off campus took away from the college experience in the classroom. This affected their study time that included reading, reviewing lecture notes, writing papers, participating in activities outside the classroom, research and meeting with faculty and staff. This resulted in departure students not connecting with other students and engaging in student life on campus. Students did not have time to join an organization or club and had little to no time to meet with faculty and staff outside the classroom hours. Overall students did not feel connected to the university because they were being pulled in different directions.

The focus group of departure students revealed that they were unable to commit enough time to their classwork. When a student is working or engaging with their family, it translated to

time away from their academic responsibilities; work and family took away their valuable time from their course work. These students ended up not performing at their best. Their grades suffered and they did not establish the necessary relationship with professors and their peers in the classroom. Although these departure students paid rent for their apartment at Miner Village or Miner Heights, they never really left home. Any money saved by living on campus was used for gas money with all the commuting to and from their home residence.

The findings from the focus groups and the survey reveal some differences. For example, the focus group of former residential students clearly stated that living on campus took them away from their family obligations; however, most students disagreed with this statement on the survey. Also, survey results indicated that most students disagreed that their family responsibilities limited their involvement with campus activities; students also indicated that family responsibilities did not affect their academic performance. Although the former residents expressed that living on campus was a significant change for them, students responding to the survey reported that moving into the housing facility was not much of a change for them and their family. In addition, the survey differed from the focus group in that most students reported that they could talk about school concerns with their family and were not expected to earn money while enrolled in school. Two consistencies were significant. First, the survey data found that most students' families preferred they live at home (although a large group of students disagreed with that). Second, findings from the focus group of former residents were consistent with the survey data in that most students said it was important to have spending money, yet agreed that school work is more important than earning money.

The differences from the focus group and survey data may be due to the manner in which students responded to the questions. The focus groups offered students the opportunity to hear

other participant responses, time to formulate their own answers, the opportunity to elaborate on each answer, and engage in the group dynamic experience. The group dynamic in the focus group included making a connection with other students by sharing similar experiences, feeling comfortable in sharing their personal experience, and experiencing the comfort level of not being judged by others. In contrast, on the survey, students had to choose the answer that best fit their situation. Participants did not have the opportunity to hear other students' input and expand on their responses. Although the personal contact between participants during the focus groups brought color to their experience of living on campus, the survey was designed to obtain honest feedback on students' experiences with academic success, employment, family values and student engagement. The survey asked two opened-ended questions regarding what would likely keep them living at student housing and what was an obstacle in staying. The survey allowed participants to answer at their own pace, complete it on their own time, and the anonymity provided the opportunity to give candid answers. Students did not have to deal with issues of anxiety and embarrassment during the process because they did not face the possibility of being scrutinized by other students. When it came to the questions on the survey, the student was able to stay on task, while the focus group had the tendency to get off the topic and discuss issues that were not relevant to the research. Also, the survey reached students who would not otherwise participate in the focus groups and offered a larger sample size.

The second finding concerns academic success and financial aid. The results of the regression analysis indicated financial aid status (in terms of whether the Pell Grant was received) was not a significant factor in predicting student success (as measured by GPA). However, the focus group of departure students suggested that money was the center of the student's life. Those students felt the need to maintain employment outside the university despite

receiving the federal Pell Grant. Former residential students also shared that any money left over (i.e. financial aid refund), was pooled with their home family. Students in the departure focus group were concerned with meeting their financial obligations both on campus and at home. Students in the focus group shared that the financial assistance was needed, but their grades still were not up to par. In addition, when students needed to work, it was often off campus. By working off campus, students spent less time preparing for class and completing assignments. Time away at work meant that students had less to devote to their studies. Nora (2004) states that equivalently important are the academic and social experiences of students, the formal and informal interactions students have with faculty, a collaborative or competitive learning environment with peers, a sense of tolerance and acceptance associated with the campus, positive mentoring experiences accompanied by a sense of acceptance of their intellectual contributions and, finally, validation as an individual in the classroom environment. Financial aid is a critical factor for helping students to succeed in the classroom and dedicating more time to their course work.

The theme of student employment was a key concern. The focus group data indicated that students felt the need to work to cover personal expenses, books, and car expenses. Even though they received financial aid awards, it was not enough to meet their financial needs. In contrast, the survey showed that most students disagreed with the need to work. Also, most survey respondents said they had enough time to study after work, but did not have enough energy to complete assignments. The difference between working and studying may center on energy. Students had the time to study, but were too tired to concentrate on their course work. This may explain why current residential students chose not to work. By not working, students had the opportunity to get involved in campus activities and spend more quality time completing course

work. These differences tell us that if students choose to work, they must find a balance between work and school, and although students receive financial aid awards, they may still need to work to fulfill other family needs.

The information gained from the focus group consisting of former residential students was unique in that it differed from data obtained from the institutional student information and the student survey. The participants brought real life examples of the struggles they encountered while living on campus. For example, one of the strongest themes was the family impact. Students were continuously drawn back to their home residence regardless of the fact that they were currently living on campus. This was one area of the research that was not highlighted by the CIERP data or the online survey. Another common student experience pertained to the students' academic achievement. Even though these students lived on campus, their academic performance was not up to their standards. Students felt they could have and should have done better because they were living on campus. Another relevant issue of this research was that the Federal Pell Grant did not predict academic success. All of the former residential students received the Federal Pell Grant, yet they did not perform to their academic potential. The student survey painted a different picture when it came to employment, family impact and engagement on campus. The survey indicated that students were involved with campus life, and employment was not a major issue while attending school. Even though they preferred to have their own money to spend, it was not a critical factor. The current literature does not contain in-depth research on living on campus and the struggles students face that are distinctive to this area of the country.

This data from the second focus group aligns with Nora's Model of Student Engagement as it pertains to student retention and persistence. For example, familial ties are a key factor for

Hispanic students enrolled in college. The student survey and both focus groups provided evidence that family support and involvement was crucial for academic success. In the survey, students indicated that they felt that they were part of the UTEP family and connected to student life on campus. This goes hand in hand with Nora's claim that students will enroll in an institution they are committed to, and feel that there is a sense of purpose to attain a degree from that institution. All three methods of data collection are supported by Nora's section on the academic and social experiences students have while attending the institution of their choice. Student felt the need to stay connected with faculty and staff, and to develop the mentoring occurrences that gives them a sense of acceptance of their intellectual contributions. In addition, the focus groups maintain Nora's claim that Hispanic students take low academic performance more personally and severe than non-Hispanic students. Students from the second focus group were unable to brush off low grades because the level of expectation from themselves and their family was so high. The data gained from this research supports Nora's approach to student retention and persistence with Hispanic population. This research revealed that the Hispanic core family has a strong influence on how students live on campus, perform in the classroom, feel the need to gain employment off campus, and have the necessity to share their financial aid award with their family. Further research is needed on Hispanic students living on campus, and on students who leave residential living facilities. In addition, more research is needed on the impact of Hispanic families and how they support or interfere with their children's educational growth and development.

The third finding is the effect of the Hispanic culture on students from the El Paso region when compared to students from other parts of Texas and the United States. In the focus groups, students from areas outside of El Paso did not appear to describe family relationships as students

from El Paso County did. The Hispanic culture values family connectedness, intense communications via frequent visits and phone calls, and strong family values such as helping other members with babysitting and household chores. The topic of the Hispanic culture was evident in the focus group with former residents, but was absent from open-ended responses to the student survey.

According to the CIERP data, students from El Paso County made up 59% of students living at Miner Village. Since students live so close to their home residence, they were familiar with the layout of the university and felt more comfortable. Even though students were living on campus, they remained in their own backyard. This enabled them to return home in the event something went wrong or they needed help. Even if they lived in the outskirts of the county, Fort Hancock, Texas, they had the option of returning home. Other Texas county students accounted for 28% of the sample in this study, and only 13% of students were from another U.S. state. The focus groups revealed that students living on campus were more actively involved with clubs and organizations, did not have the need to work, and felt that they were more connected with faculty and staff. Students from El Paso County who departed Miner Village or Miner Heights stated they felt disconnected from student life and experienced the “family pull factor.” They experienced a difficult time balancing their classes, family, and part-time employment. For example, students would often be asked by their parents to return home to assist with household responsibilities such cooking or babysitting. Students would often make two or three trips home during the week in addition to returning home for the weekend. Situations such as these often got in the way of students not becoming involved in student life and not earning a higher grade point average. In essence, the students’ families pulled them away from the college experience. One student stated that it was as if they never really left home. However, students’ home residence

was not a significant predictor of grade point averages in the regression analysis, although there appeared to be some degree of mean differences in GPA by home residence. The CIERP data did not provide an insight to student experience.

The differences in student responses on the survey did not always match what was said in the focus groups. In the focus groups, students had the opportunity to discuss and explain their experiences of living on campus. They were able to go beyond the Likert scale responses that the survey presented. The survey seemed to limit the student's ability in answering the questions.

Findings about the impact of the family for students residing on-campus whose home residence is near the institution is not present in the current literature. UTEP is the only major state university in Far West Texas. The next closest university is New Mexico State University, which is approximately 45 miles away. The nearest major Texas university is the University of Texas-San Antonio that is located approximately 550 miles east of El Paso. Therefore, students from the El Paso region select UTEP as their school of choice because of its proximity and low tuition rates. As mentioned previously, this comprises approximately 59% of the residents living at UTEP's residential housing section. The data showed that 58% of students departed Miner Village to move back with their parents. The issues this student population faced was not typical of the average student living on campus elsewhere in the United States. Their immediate family created unforeseen obstacles such as keeping their home responsibilities, making several trips home during the week, and sharing their financial aid refund with their parents. By living so close to home, students had added stress, which took time away from their course work. As discussed, the analysis of the regression model revealed that completers earned higher grade point averages and earned more college credit hours than departures. The focus group findings differ from the survey data and regression analysis in that students' responses were not limited,

and students shared their personal experiences in their own words. The focus group allowed for the common themes to be identified that were similar to the survey outcomes. The regression analysis supported some of the focus group topics. For example, when students lived on campus, their grade point average was higher when compared to students that lived off campus.

Latino parents often have limited information to share with their children about college because many of them did not attend college (Ceja, 2004). Perhaps getting parents better oriented to college life and college expectations will provide them a better understanding of the support they can offer to their children to succeed in the university classroom while living on campus. Nora (2005) states that familial ties remain important all throughout the time that Hispanic students are enrolled in college. The gap between Hispanic parents and colleges and universities needs to be bridged in order for students to acclimate to their campus setting.

5.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS

The University of Texas at El Paso is unique in serving and graduating first-year, first-time minority students from El Paso, the sixth largest city in Texas and 19th largest city in the nation (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012). In Fall 2013, UTEP served 23,003 undergraduate and graduate students. The majority of students are from El Paso County (79%), and Hispanic (79%; UTEP Fact Book, 2013-14). As UTEP continues to grow its research initiatives and aspire to Tier 1 status, it is critical to continue to invest in resources toward understanding student retention, persistence, and degree completion, as well as understanding the impact of Hispanic culture, family, and the need for student employment on such outcomes. This final section will offer recommendations for future research and practice.

It is recommended that UTEP continue to collect data from the student population. This can be in the form of electronic student surveys, written questionnaires, phone calls, and focus

groups. This data will provide the university insight to the student experience, expectations, and academic and social needs. In turn, this can assist the university in policy development and modification as it pertains to academic success, student persistence, student engagement, and graduation rates. Although NSSE is utilized nationally, UTEP would benefit from creating a survey based on NSSE, yet which addresses the unique issues facing students along the U.S.-Mexico border. For example, questions about family involvement, commitments to the home residence, and financial issues affecting students' households are important for understanding students in this region of the country. Student affairs professionals may need to investigate the modern college student's financial aid resources and the impact the immediate family has on incoming students. The information collected can inform the services provided to students, such as new student orientation, parent orientation, course scheduling, financial aid awards that include on campus student employment--all of which will contribute to student success.

Furthermore, additional data is needed on students living on campus. Data should incorporate both students who continue to live on campus and students who leave the housing complex. Exit interviews and/or surveys may be used to understand why students leave campus housing when the literature clearly indicates that living within residence housing is related to greater participation in learning communities and interactions with faculty and staff. From the data collected in this study, students living and attending college along the U.S.-Mexico border face similar, yet different experiences. For example, the Hispanic culture emphasizes the students' commitment and connection to the immediate family, especially if they chose to leave their home residence and live on campus. When living at UTEP's Miner Village/Miner Heights, students earned higher grade point averages, earned more degree hours, and were more engaged

with college life. It would be helpful for UTEP to assess how to keep students from leaving campus housing after making a significant financial, academic, and emotional commitment.

It is recommended that UTEP closely examine the students who depart student housing and develop practices that address the retention of students living at Miner Village and Miner Heights, and develop a student retention plan for its residents. As a preventive measure, housing administrators may consider a plan that is proactive in retaining students. The first line of defense is the Residential Living Assistants (RLA's). The University Counseling Center may provide monthly training for the RLA's to help identify students who are experiencing emotional difficulties. In addition, RLA's may be issued a list of university resources that are available to students at no cost. Most students are unaware of free services that are readily available to them. Another preventive measure administrators can take is designating a quiet study area where students can study and complete course assignments, use a computer, and have access to a trained academic tutor to assist with academic issues.

Another recommendation is that administrators should be more involved with students who choose to leave Miner Village or Miner Heights during the checkout process. This will allow them to conduct an exit interview. This interview may consist of a few questions that address the reasons for leaving, any unresolved issues with roommate(s) or staff, academic concerns, and personal issues. This will give the student one last opportunity to address their reasons for leaving by utilizing student support services at UTEP. The housing administrator may be able to direct students to appropriate departments for assistance, such as the University Counseling Center, the Office of Student Financial Aid, and the Academic Advising Center. The student may or may not be open to the intervention, but it is an effort to try to keep the student from leaving student housing. A post exit interview, which may include a phone interview or

online survey with the former resident may be conducted shortly after they checkout. With time passed since their departure, students would be better able to discuss the reasons for leaving Miner Village or Miner Heights. These recommendations may help the retention of students living at Miner Village, Miner Heights, and the new housing complex to be built in the near future.

Additional research using Nora's Model of Student Engagement is needed to address issues for Hispanic students attending colleges and universities along the U.S.-Mexico Border. Familial ties remain important throughout the entire time that Hispanic students are enrolled in college. It is essential that the university continue to connect parents with information on student success and persistence. This investment will help parents and students learn how to navigate the bureaucracy associated with higher education. Also, it will allow parents to offer more support to their children. A parent component may address key issues facing Hispanic students, such as: 1) how parents can support their children from a distance; 2) sensitivity training for staff members regarding Hispanic and El Paso culture that allows for more informed interactions with parents and students; and 3) university activities for parents and students that distinguish between students living within the El Paso region and students from outside the area.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

Students attending college and living on campus anticipate an experience that will last a lifetime. For many students, this will be the first time the student will live away from home and their parents. They look forward to the freedom of making their own choices and living independently. Students will go through various stages of growth and development as they make their way into the professional world. However, not all students live the college life as they see in the movies. Instead, they encounter unpleasant issues: the constant need for money to cover

unforeseen expenses, unwanted parental intervention, working part-time jobs, and unexpectedly departing from student housing. Colleges and universities must assess their policies and procedures for their student population, and make the necessary adjustments to better position their students for academic success.

Once students enroll in the college or university of their choice and make the crucial decision to live on campus, the institution must make every effort to set the stage for students to become engaged in campus life, create a comfortable student atmosphere within the housing component, and provide students with options to pay for housing. Today's campus housing facilities, policies, and personnel must possess a multicultural flexibility in serving students who come from various backgrounds. It is essential for college administrators to deepen their understanding of how to help students succeed in the classroom and within their dorm/apartment while living on campus. In addition, administrators must commit their resources to developing new strategies in helping students persist and eventually graduate from their institution.

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Appendix A

Student Survey for Residential and Former Residential Students

Q1. Student classification:

Freshman
Sophomore
Junior
Senior

Q2. Gender:

Male
Female
No answer

Q3. Ethnicity:

White
Hispanic
African-American
Other
No answer

Q4. Hometown:

El Paso County
Hudspeth Country
New Mexico city/town

Q5. Which of the following best describes your martial and dependent status?

I am single and do not have children
I am single and have children
I am married and do not have children
I am married and have children

Q6. Are you currently enrolled in college?

Yes
No

Q7. Where are you enrolled in college?

UTEP
EPCC
Other college

Q8. Do you plan to enroll for the 2014 spring semester?

Yes
No

Q9. Which of the following best describes your current living arrangement

On campus
With parents/family
With my children AND/OR spouse/partner

Q10. Currently, how many hours per week do you work for pay?

None, I do not plan to work for pay.

1-19 hours per week

20-29 hours per week

30-39 hours per week

40 or more hours per week

Q11 Household income: (If you are living with your parents, include their income. If you are living independently, do not include your parents' income.)

Less than \$10,000

\$10,000 to \$19,999

\$20,000 to \$29,999

\$30,000 to \$39,999

\$40,000 to \$49,999

\$50,000 to \$59,999

\$60,000 to \$69,999

\$70,000 to \$79,999

\$80,000 to \$89,999

\$90,000 to \$99,999

\$100,000 to \$149,999

\$150,000 or more

Q12. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - The distance between campus and my house was a significant factor in deciding to live at Miner Village.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q13. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Living on campus took me away from my family obligations.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q14. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Living on campus was too expensive for me.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q15. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Living on campus was too much of a charge for my family and I.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q16. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Living on campus gave you more time to study.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

17. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I could have saved money by living at home with my family.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q18. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My family preferred that I live at home.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q19. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My family values were left behind by going to college.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q20. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I had a difficult time maintaining relationships with my family.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q21. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I was able to talk to my family about my struggles and concerns at school.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q22. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My family responsibilities limited my involvement in campus activities.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q23. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My family responsibilities made it difficult to do well in class.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q24. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In my family, I thought of myself as someone who provides care for others (e.g. children, elderly or younger family members, disabled family members.)

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q25. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My role as a care provider conflicted with my college work.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q26. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I needed to work (part-time or full-time) to cover my college and personal expenses.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q27. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - In my family, I thought of myself as the primary wage earner.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q28. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My role as the primary wage earner conflicted with my grades.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q29. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I had plenty of available time to study after working hours.

Strongly disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly agree

Q30. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I had the energy to study after working hours.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q31. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I felt that I should hold a job while enrolled in school.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q32. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - My parents expected me to earn money while enrolled in school.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q33. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I earned money in order to have and maintain a car.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q34. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - It was important to have spending money of my own.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q35. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - Schoolwork was more important than earning money.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q36. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements: - I participated in class discussions

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q37. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. : - I joined a student organization/club.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q38. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. : - I made an effort to meet with faculty and staff to improve my grades.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q39. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. : - I sought academic assistance before my grades went down (tutoring, meeting with an advisor, or an individual meeting with the professor/instructor).

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q40. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. : - I was able to successfully balance school, family and friends.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q41. Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. : - I saw myself as part of the UTEP community.

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Agree
Strongly agree

Q42. Please list three reasons that made you leave Miner Village/Miner Heights:

Q43. Please list one factor that would keep you from leaving Miner Village/Miner Heights:

Appendix B

Focus Group Prompt Questions

- I. Living at Miner Village
 - a. Tell me why you chose to live at Miner Village.
 - b. Tell me about your first semester living at Miner Village
 - c. Tell me about some positive experiences you had while living at Miner Village.
 - d. By living at Miner Village, tell me about your relationships with faculty and staff.
 - e. What are some of the advantages or disadvantages to living at Miner Village?
- II. Academic Impact by living at Miner Village
 - a. Tell me about your interactions with other students living on-campus.
 - b. Thinking about the interactions between faculty, students, and staff you have witnessed so far at UTEP, what impresses you the most?
 - c. How did Living at Miner Village impact your grades and academic performance?
 - d. Tell me if you feel that you were engaged to the UTEP community by living at Miner Village?
- III. Other Variables (impact) on Academic Success (employment, family, finances)
 - a. Tell me about any jobs (employment) you held that were needed to help pay for any school or personal expenses while attending UTEP and living at Miner Village?
 - b. Tell me about your family commitments while living away from home?
 - c. Tell me how you balanced being a student and staying connected with your family.
 - d. Tell me how you paid for your rent at Miner Village.

Dear Student,

I am a doctoral student working on my dissertation in Educational Leadership and Administration at the University of Texas at El Paso. I have received authorization to conduct a survey and a focus group among undergraduate students (150 commuter students and 150 residential student; 5-7 residential students at Miner Village). The purpose of my dissertation is to examine student success and engagement of undergraduate students. The objective of conducting this survey is to obtain detailed information about the student involvement on campus activities and the utilization of student support services. This survey will also be used to measure student engagement of on-campus activities. In addition, your input on this survey will add to the knowledge the differences in student success and engagements between commuter and residential students at UTEP. A focus group with residential students will consist of questions on student life at Miner Village.

I request that you take 1-2 minutes to complete the survey. Completing this survey is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. You will not be compensated for taking part in this research study. Please be advised that the information gathered will be anonymous; there are no risks in disclosing personal views because all your responses will remain confidential. Data will be transcribed, coded, and will be appropriately protected to ensure a controlled and lawful release. The results of this study will be shared with you at your request. The information will be kept in a secure file, with limited access to my dissertation chair, and will be destroyed after two years of completion of the study.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your participation in it, please contact me at (915) 740-9649 or via email at rmoreno@utep.edu; and/or my Dissertation Chair Dr. Penelope Espinoza, Assistant Professor, Center for Research on Educational Reform, (915) 747-8784 or via email at ppespinoza@utep.edu.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Rueben Moreno
Doctoral Student

Informed Consent

I agree to complete a survey being conducted by Rueben Moreno from the University of Texas at El Paso. I understand that the completion time for this questionnaire is approximately 1-2 minutes.

My participation is voluntary and refusing participating will not cause a penalty. I understand that there are no known risks or benefits involved in my participation in this study.

I understand that the purpose of this survey is to obtain detailed information on student engagement at the University of Texas at El Paso.

If I have any questions concerning the procedures of this study I can contact to Rueben Moreno at (915) 740-9649 or via email at rmoreno@utep.edu and/or my Dissertation Chair, Dr. Penelope Espinoza, Assistant Professor, Center for Research on Educational Reform, (915) 747-8784 or via email at ppespinoza@utep.edu.

In compliance with the IRB protocol approved for this project, any information I provide will be kept confidential. Any questions regarding the conduct of this research or your rights as a research participant may be directed to the IRB Administrator at (915) 747-7939. I have read and I have understood the above. Completion of the survey is deemed consent to participate.

Authorization Statement

I have read and I have understood the above. Completion of the survey and interview is deemed consent to participate.

Participant Name (print): _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____ Date: _____

Vita

Rueben Moreno was born and raised in El Paso, Texas. He is one of six children born to Anselmo and Carmen Moreno. He attended and graduated from Thomas Jefferson High School, enrolled at the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in the spring of 1986, was active in Intramural Sports-Basketball, and graduated in 1991 with a Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice. His professional career consists of working as a Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor, Case Manager for individuals with developmental disabilities, and as the Director for Life Management Center – Northeast Development Training Services Unit. He attended and graduated from Webster University with a Masters Degree in Counseling Psychology in 1998. He also worked as Licensed Professional Counselor (L.P.C.) by providing individual and group therapy

In 2000, Rueben began his career in higher education by working as an Admissions Counselor Supervisor for the UTEP Office of Admissions and Recruitment. He served on various committees within the Division of Student Affairs, recruited local students to UTEP, and collaborated with El Paso Community College with the Transfer Center. In 2002, he was hired as the Program Coordinator for the College Assistance Migrant Program (CAMP). He assisted first-year, first-time students, who had a background in seasonal and/or migrant farm work, with the transition from high school to the college environment. In 2006, Rueben was hire as the Director for CAMP, and wrote the grant renewal in May 2007 for the amount of \$ 2.13 million over a five-year period. The grant award period was from 2007-2012. He was also awarded a grant from the Texas Workforce Commission, \$70,000, for the summer bridge program for first generation students. In 2012, he was hired as the Associate Director for GEAR UP at UTEP.

Since working at UTEP, Rueben has served on various committees such as Financial Aid Appeals Committee, Student Affairs Staff Recognition Committee, and the UTEP Scholarship Committee. The U.S. Department of Education-Office of Migrant Education recognized Rueben as Top 10 CAMP Performer has recognized him in 2011 and 2012. He has also presented at the Office of Migrant Education Directors Meeting on the effectiveness of summer bridge programs and academic assistance with incoming freshman students. In November 2013, Rueben presented his preliminary research findings from his dissertation at the UTEP Graduate Research Expo.

Rueben continues to research topics associated with first-year, first-time minority students, academic success, persistence and retention practices.

Permanent address: 2328 Hannah Leigh
El Paso, Texas 79938

This dissertation was typed by Rueben Moreno.