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A Case Study On Understanding How Servingness Is Enacted Through Undergraduate Academic Advising At A Hispanic-Serving Institution (hsi) On The U.s.-Mexico Border

Brenda Velazquez
University of Texas at El Paso

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A CASE STUDY ON UNDERSTANDING HOW SERVINGNESS IS ENACTED THROUGH
UNDERGRADUATE ACADEMIC ADVISING AT A HISPANIC-SERVING INSTITUTION
(HSI) ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

BRENDA VELAZQUEZ

Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership and Administration

APPROVED:

Edna Martinez, Ph.D., Chair

Jesus Cisneros, Ph.D.

Eduardo C. Arellano, Ph.D.

Jaime Mendez, Ed.D.

Stephen L. Crites, Jr., Ph.D.
Dean of the Graduate School

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2023

*Dedicado a
mis queridos padres Arturo y Rita,
mi esposo Mario,
y mis hijos Jr, Gizelle y Freddy
por su infinito amor, apoyo y aliento.*

“Todo lo puedo en Cristo que me fortalece.”

-Filipenses 4:13

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(HSI) ON THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

by

BRENDA VELAZQUEZ, A.A.S., B.B.A., M.A.

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Both undergraduate academic advising and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) play a key role in Latinx student success. The purpose of this intrinsic case study was to explore servingness within the context of undergraduate academic advising at Border University (BU) – an HSI on the U.S.-Mexico border. The overarching research questions were: 1) How is servingness enacted through undergraduate academic advising at BU? and 2) What role do academic advisors play in enacting servingness? Conceptually, this study was guided by Garcia et al.'s (2019) *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs* and the existing literature on HSIs.

Data was collected from twelve semi-structured interviews with BU academic advisors. Additionally, multiple publicly available institutional documents such as BU's strategic plan, mission and vision statements, advising websites, and advisor job descriptions were analyzed. Five interrelated themes were constructed: 1) committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning, 2) prioritizing academic advising, 3) allocating resources to support advising-related efforts, 4) (re) organization of academic advising, and 5) fostering validating experiences within the structures. This study provides implications for practice and policy and highlights areas for future research.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Most Latinx¹ students enroll at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs; *Excelencia in Education*, 2021). The U.S. federal government defines HSIs as accredited, non-profit, degree-granting institutions of higher education with 25% or more undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment and a high number requiring need-based assistance (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). Although HSIs represent only 19% of colleges and universities, they enroll 62% of all Latinx undergraduates (*Excelencia in Education*, 2023). Following a decrease in the number of HSIs in 2020-21 to 559, the number of HSIs increased to 571 in 2021-22 (*Excelencia in Education*, 2023).

Over the last fifteen years, there has been much discussion about what it means to truly serve Latinx students, given inequitable student outcomes at HSIs (Contreras et al., 2008; Contreras & Contreras, 2015). The lack of consensus on what it means to be an HSI has often led to a limited view of them as either “Hispanic-enrolling” or “Hispanic-serving” (Garcia, 2019, 2017; Nuñez et al., 2015). Garcia (2019), Torres & Zerquera (2012), Nuñez et al. (2016), and Doran (2023) have aimed to help the field of higher education recognize the diversity among HSIs and relatedly, the diversity within the Latinx groups they serve (Vega et al., 2022).

Given the lack of agreement on what it means to be an HSI, Malcolm-Piqueux and Bensimon (2015) argued that these institutions “...lack guidance on how to assess themselves on how well they serve Latino/a students” (p. 2). Scholars (Garcia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2019) and practitioners (Garcia et al., 2020) have begun to conceptualize what servingness means and looks

¹ I use the term “Latinx” as a personal/professional preference to refer to Latina/o in general to disrupt the gender binary and to disrupt the male normativity of the term “Latino” (Salinas, 2020).

like in practice. In this work, I aimed to add to our understanding of the concept of servingness within the context of undergraduate academic advising. Academic advising, which is one of the most commonly employed student retention strategies across colleges and universities (Hatch & Garcia, 2017), is concerned with helping students meet their academic, personal, and career goals (NACADA, 2006.). Academic advising occurs in "situations in which an institutional representative gives insight or direction to a college student about an academic, social, or personal matter and the nature of this direction might be to inform, suggest, counsel, discipline, coach, mentor, or even teach" (Kuhn, 2008, p. 3). In this chapter, I present the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, introduce the research questions guiding this work, and highlight the significance of the study.

Statement of the Problem

Many structural and institutional barriers exist in the lives of Latinx students interfering with their educational goals, such as institutions' lack of institutional practices that align with students' needs and realities, forcing them to withdraw from college or placing their academic goals last or on hold (Martinez et al., 2017). The 15.6% increase in the percentage of undergraduate students of color between 1995-96 and 2015-16 (29.6% to 45.2%) was due mostly to Latinx undergraduate enrollment (Espinosa et al., 2019). The growth in Latinx enrollment has contributed to an increase in HSIs and emerging HSIs. Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (EHSIs) are colleges and universities with a Latinx enrollment between 15% and 24%, which are close to meeting the HSI criteria (Excelencia in Education, 2019). According to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2019), HSIs represent 53% of Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs).

HSIs play a critical role in expanding access to higher education for Latinx students; however, in some cases, HSIs continue to produce inequitable outcomes in terms of persistence and retention (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Vega, 2016), which Garcia (2019, 2020, 2023) has argued are white normative measures of excellence. Institutions pose various barriers for first-generation college students (Nuñez et al., 2011). Institutions lack the social structure and cultural relevance to foster a sense of belonging necessary to promote persistence and retention among Latinx first-generation college students (Kiyama et al., 2015).

Low-income, first-generation college students face many barriers, which complicate their pathway toward enrollment and graduation. They are four times more likely to withdraw from college during their freshman year compared to others (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Banks and Dohy (2019) acknowledged “opportunity gaps exist well before students enter institutions of higher learning, which can ultimately impact access and achievement” (p. 118). Similarly, Saenz and Ponjuan (2008) argued, Latinx students “are disserved by an entrenched educational system that does not acknowledge—much less honor—their unique cultural heritage and distinct ways of knowing about the world” (p. 61). Experiences with cultural dissonance or the gap/disconnect between student and institutional culture (Garcia, 2020) can pose challenges for Latinxs as they acclimate to the college environment and can influence their decisions to persist (Gloria et al., 2005).

As the Latinx college population increases, HSI administrators within all functional areas, inclusive of student and academic affairs (Martinez & Gonzales, 2015), must pay close attention to the academic advising needs of Latinx students to help meet student success goals including degree completion (Hengesteg et al., 2020; Sanchez Ordaz et al., 2020). To increase the retention and persistence of all college students, support and guidance are key as soon as they

enroll in college (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Providing academic advising services to first-generation college students requires revisiting and rethinking existing models, policies, and practices (Peace, 2020), such as how advising will be delivered and the required number of meetings with an advisor (Swecker et al., 2013). Academic advising must be improved through professional development and effective training that helps advisors understand the barriers students face and alerts them of potential student dropout (Long & Kurlaender, 2009). In addition to understanding the challenges first-generation college students face, Pierce and Hawthorne (2011) contended that it is an advisor's duty to mentor students and have them understand the academic requirements and expectations throughout their educational process. Meaningful mentoring and advising relationships are essential for Latinx student success (Museus, 2021; Museus & Ravello, 2013; Torres & Hernandez, 2009).

According to Jimenez Hernandez (2020), "building meaningful relationships with students through intrusive advising embodies what it means for HSIs, to effectively serve students" (p. 215). Intrusive advising calls for active, intentional, caring, and consistent interactions with students (Varney, 2012; 2007). HSIs across the nation have recognized academic advising as a key practice to improve student success. They have invested resources and restructured academic advising, as well as other student support services, to support Latinx students (Santiago, 2008); however, more research is needed to understand academic advising as a structure for serving Latinx students at HSIs (Garcia, 2020; Sánchez Ordaz et al., 2020).

Purpose of the Study

Santiago et al. (2016) acknowledged how important HSIs have become in the educational pathways of Latinx and indicated that there is still much to accomplish to serve this population in higher education. The federal government's commitment to HSIs through formal recognition is

symbolically and economically important. Yet, educational equity gaps remain (Garcia, 2019). Despite the HSI designation and access to funds, most Title V awardees propose “colorblind” (Vargas & Villa-Palomino, 2019, p. 401) or “race evasive” projects (Aguilar-Smith, 2021, p. 1) and make little to no changes to organizational structures and practices. Yet, some have indeed implemented changes in practices to serve Latinx students, including academic advising practices (Carter & Patterson, 2019; Museus, 2021; Santiago, 2008). Garcia (2019) and Garcia and Koren (2020) identified academic advising as a “structure for serving” (p. 6) Latinx students and recognized that additional work was needed to understand servingness in practice within academic advising.

Accordingly, the purpose of this intrinsic case study was to explore servingness within the context of undergraduate advising at Border University (Garcia et al., 2019; Garcia & Koren, 2020). As indicated by Crowe et al. (2011), “intrinsic case studies are unique, not only because of the research being conducted but because of the researcher’s interest to conduct such research” (p. 5). I was intrinsically interested in studying servingness at BU because BU: 1) is a Hispanic-Serving Institution on the U.S.-Mexico border; 2) has a student body that is over 80 percent Latinx; 3) reaffirmed itself as leading the way in serving Hispanic students in its recent strategic plan; and 4) 50 percent of its students are first-generation (BU, 2022; The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2021).

Research Questions

As noted above, this study focused on understanding servingness within the context of academic advising at an HSI on the U.S.-Mexico border. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How is servingness enacted through undergraduate academic advising at BU?

2. What role do academic advisors play in enacting servingness?

Significance of the Study

As noted by Garcia (2019), “Moving from servingness as a theory to actual practice requires learning with and from HSIs that are currently implementing these practices” (p. 4). Thus, this study contributes to a growing, yet limited literature on servingness at HSIs (Cataño & Gonzalez, 2021; Garcia, 2019, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019) and on academic advising in HSIs in particular. This study is intended to help understand and inform academic advising practices at HSIs to promote culturally responsive, relevant, and affirming advising experiences and improve Latinx first-generation college student outcomes (Garcia, 2017, 2019; Garcia et al., 2019).

With the growing Latinx college student population, colleges and universities have a responsibility to ensure their success. Latinx first-generation students must be adequately served and feel a sense of belonging within their institutions (Hittepole, 2019). The main purpose of federal investments in HSIs is to increase educational opportunities for Latinx students by improving their academic achievements and services, such as program quality and institutional stability while supporting them throughout their degree completion (Santiago & Andrade, 2010). The presence and impact of HSIs cannot be denied within the larger population of postsecondary institutions, and as HSIs become more important, there is a need to understand them as organizations that are striving to serve underserved populations (Garcia, 2019). To support the significance of this study, I introduce the literature review in the following section.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

As Latinx students continue to enroll in higher education in greater numbers, most enroll at HSIs, which are broadly defined as institutions with at least 25% Latinx students (Cuellar et al., 2017; Excelencia in Education, 2023). As previously noted, HSIs represent the majority of MSIs (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019). Furthermore, HSIs enroll 62% of Latinx undergraduates, even though they only represent 19% of colleges and universities (Excelencia in Education, 2023). Most degrees earned by Latinxs are conferred by HSIs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Of all certificates, associates, and bachelor's degrees awarded at HSIs, 80% are completed by Latinx (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). To fulfill their role and responsibilities beyond the designation, some HSIs have revised their programs, practices, and services, including academic advising to enhance Latinx student success (Museus, 2021; Santiago, 2008).

Advising is considered one of the most effective student services used by institutions to help students set and achieve academic goals (Crocker et al., 2014). Academic advisors have a significant role in guiding students through their college experience. According to Jimenez Hernandez (2020), "building meaningful relationships with students through intrusive advising embodies what it means for HSIs, to effectively serve students" (p. 215). Intrusive advising calls for active, intentional, caring, and consistent interactions with students (Varney, 2007, 2012). Intrusive advising means having a close relationship with students, being involved in students' lives, and positively impacting them (Jimenez Hernandez, 2020). Emerging studies reference that

more research is needed to understand what servingness looks like in practice within the context of academic advising at HSIs (Cooper et al., 2020; Doran, 2023; Garcia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2019).

In the following literature review, I begin with an overview of Latinx students, who are largely first-generation college students (CLASP, 2015; Excelencia in Education, 2023; Reyes & Nora, 2012). I then highlight their educational experiences and discuss barriers to student persistence and retention. Further, I discuss student initiatives and student support services aimed at promoting Latinx first-generation college student success, with an emphasis on academic advising. I end with a discussion on HSIs and Garcia et al.'s (2019) *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs*, which served as the conceptual framework for my study.

Latinx First-Generation College Students

The academic achievement of Latinx first-generation college students has become of great interest to the U.S. Latinx population which has dramatically increased in California, Texas, Florida, New York, and Arizona. In 2019, 18% of individuals in the U.S. were Hispanic, totaling 60.6 million, compared to the 50.7 million Hispanic population in 2010 (Krogstad, 2020). As the Latinx population expands, researching the ways in which colleges and universities can support their educational trajectories has become more important than ever. According to Excelencia in Education (2021), 6.2 million Latinx students need to earn degrees by 2030 for the U.S. to rank number one in college degree attainment. Latinx degree attainment is both an economic and social justice issue.

Previous research indicates that most Latinx are first-generation college students (Bui, 2002; Cavazos et al., 2010; Excelencia in Education, 2023; Lohfink & Paulsen 2005). First-

generation college students are typically defined as those whose parents have not earned bachelor's degrees, compared to second-generation students, in which at least one of their parents has earned a bachelor's degree (Kouyoumdjian et al., 2017; Stebleton & Soria, 2012). Parental educational attainment matters because of the advantages it brings. According to Reyes and Nora (2012), only 65% of prospective first-generation college students who aspired to enter a four-year institution did so within two years of high school graduation, compared to 87% of similarly aspiring students whose parents held bachelor's degrees or higher.

From 1993 to 2014, Latinx college enrollment among 18- to 24-year-olds increased from 22% to 35% (Krogstad, 2016). Between 2000 and 2018, there was a college enrollment growth of Latinx students which increased from 22% to 36%, respectively (Hussar et al., 2020). As per the HACU 2020 Fact Sheet of Hispanic Higher Education and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), Hispanic enrollment in higher education is expected to reach 4.2 million by 2029, accounting for approximately 25% of all students. Hispanic degree attainment in STEM disciplines rose from 8.6% to 13.3% between 2008 and 2017, the largest increase of any category (HACU, 2020). Yet, they remain underrepresented among degree holders. Among Hispanics 25 years of age or older, only 23% had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher (Krogstad, 2016; Mora, 2022). Latinx students represent 27% of community college students nationwide (American Association of Community Colleges, 2021). Community colleges offer many benefits to Latinx in higher education. They serve as the initial college entry point by offering low-cost tuition as well as college readiness resources (Bouchrika, 2022; Long & Kurlaender, 2009; Martinez & Fernandez, 2004). It is common for Latinx to first enroll at community colleges and then transfer to four-year institutions as it is a stepping-stone to a bachelor's degree in comparison to other ethnic populations (Crisp & Nuñez, 2014; Martinez & Fernandez, 2004).

Therefore, it is no wonder that “since 2006, we have seen a 78% increase in the number of institutions classified as Hispanic-Serving Institutions, and a growing number of Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions” (HACU, 2017, para. 3). As a reminder, Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (EHSIs) are colleges and universities with a Latinx enrollment between 15% and 24% which are close to meeting the HSI criteria (Excelencia in Education, 2019). In the following sections, I elaborate on the educational experiences of Latinx first-generation college students, including the various structural and institutional barriers they face, which sometimes lead them to withdraw from college or place their academic goals last or on hold (Martinez et al., 2017).

Among first-generation college-going students, colleges graduate Latinx at lower rates than members of other racial/ethnic groups (Schneider et al., 2006), with graduation at rates of 55% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). As mentioned in Chapter One, being a first-generation college student poses various barriers (Nuñez et al., 2011) because institutions lack the social structure and cultural relevance (Kiyama et al., 2015) needed to foster a sense of belonging, which is necessary for student persistence and retention. The National Center for Education Statistics (2008) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) defined retention as an annual rate calculated to show the proportion of students who return to their studies from one year to the next. Additionally, persistence is defined as “the enrollment headcount of any cohort compared to its headcount on its initial official census date, and the goal is to measure the number of students who persist term to term and to completion” (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008, p. 3). To increase the retention and persistence of all college students, support and guidance are key (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015).

A considerable amount of research on academic persistence attributes low Latinx graduation rates to personal and academic issues associated with being first-generation students, including lack of academic support and not having a sense of belonging within the college environment (Otero et al., 2007). Institutions must serve students adequately by adjusting their policies according to Latinx needs, as one traditional framework does not fit all, mostly when it comes to a population that has increased in enrollment drastically (Arbelo-Marrero & Milacci, 2016). Even though the Latinx population has grown, and many have enrolled in college, colleges are not graduating them (Vega, 2016). Latinx student experiences reflect a failed institutional system that affects society economically and socially (Robbins et al., 2009). In the following section, I discuss the factors that affect Latinx first-generation college students' retention and persistence while drawing connections with their academic advising experiences.

Latinx First-Generation College Student Experiences

Latinx first-generation college students face various challenges in their pursuit of higher education, including financial barriers, cultural dissonance and a lack of sense of belonging, racism and discrimination, invalidating experiences, and familial obligations. Saenz and Ponjuan (2009) believed that “although it is necessary to focus on cultural norms and artifacts in a discussion as sensitive as this issue, it is not necessary to adopt a lens that assigns blame as a result of a students' gender, culture, language, or ethnicity” (p. 56). Taking Saenz and Ponjuan's (2009) stance, in the following subsections, I elaborate on these barriers.

Financial Barriers

Creamer (2020) stated that poverty data for Hispanics dates back to 1972. The poverty rate for Hispanics in 2019 was 15.7% compared to 17.6% in 2018 (Creamer, 2020). Manzano-

Sanchez et al. (2019) determined that the lack of family financial resources was the biggest barrier for college students, mostly when the primary family supporter was the student. According to Nuñez and Sansone (2016), “Latino students who do make it to college are more likely to work for pay than students from the other largest racial/ethnic groups in the U.S.” (p. 92). They added that “this is not surprising considering recent findings that Latinos are least wealthy among the largest racial/ethnic groups and that Latinos were most adversely affected by the financial downturn” (p. 92). Along with Engle and Tinto’s (2008) analysis, low-income, first-generation college students face many barriers which complicate their pathway toward graduation. Low-income, first-generation students disproportionately come from ethnically and racially minoritized backgrounds with lower levels of academic preparation due to educational inequities, and they also tend to be older, less likely to receive financial support from parents, and more likely to have multiple obligations outside the college; as a result, they do not get to experience the traditional college experience (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Data from the U.S. Department of Education’s 2003-2004 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) indicated an enrollment of almost 4.5 million low-income, first-generation college students (approximately 24% of the undergraduate population) (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Yet, “six years later, nearly half (43%) of low-income, first-generation students had left college without earning their degrees. Among those who left, nearly two-thirds (60%) did so after the first year. After six years, only 11% of low-income, first-generation students had earned bachelor’s degrees compared to 55% of their more advantaged peers” (Engle & Tinto, 2008, p. 2).

College tuition has increased nationally. For example, during the 2020-21 academic year, the total price increased to \$21,365, an 8% annual increase from the previous year (Hanson,

2021). Yet, the Pell Grant has not kept up with increasing tuition and fees (Katsinas et al., 2020). Also, familial financial support for first-generation college students has dropped considerably during the past 15 years (80.3% down to 65.5%) (Eagan et al., 2016). According to Eagan et al. (2016), in 2015, only one-third of first-generation college students were able to rely on at least \$3,000 from their parents to pay for their freshman-year expenses. Therefore, it is no surprise that students must work during their studies (Nuñez & Sansone, 2016) either on or off campus (Salazar, 2019).

In semi-structured interviews with 14 first-generation sophomores, Nuñez and Sansone (2016) found that working on campus led a greater sense of belonging among first-generation Latinx college students. Through working, students were able to integrate themselves into the campus community. A lack of sense of belonging, in general, is a common experience among first-generation Latinx college students (Strayhorn, 2012).

Cultural Dissonance and Lack of Sense of Belonging

As previously mentioned in Chapter One, Latinx students are poorly served by an entrenched educational system that does not acknowledge—much less honor—their rich cultural heritage and distinct ways of knowing about the world (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008) when it comes to higher education. Cultural dissonance describes the gap between student and institutional culture as it influences student experiences. According to Garcia (2017), cultural dissonance is “conflict or tension perceived and experienced by an individual as a result of inconsistencies between that individual’s cultural background and newly encountered culturally-specific information and experiences” (p. 217). McGovern et al. (2020) conceptualized culture as groups of people, for example based on ethnicity and/or race, who live their lives in unique ways, who interpret their life experiences, and/or context on how they have raised their children. Cultural

dissonance not only affects all entering college students, but in particular, Latinx students (Museus, 2008). Cultural dissonance emerges when students encounter unfamiliar cultural environments within a college or university. Museus (2008) further explained that “if the predominantly White cultures of a campus perpetuate values, beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions that are drastically incongruent with the precollege cultures of racial/ethnic minority students, the result can be a noticeably high level of cognitive dissonance among those minority students” (p. 217). High level of cognitive dissonance in turn leads to “misperception or misinterpretation of information, rejection or refutation of the information, seeking support from those who agree with one’s belief, and attempting to persuade others to accept one’s belief” (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019, p. 6). Consequently, Latinx students might feel unfairly treated and rejected due to their cultural background within institutions affecting their academic performance.

As a result, one part that is important to the adjustment of Latinx students to campus communities is a sense of belonging (Strayhorn, 2012), yet Latinxs are subject to experiencing lower levels of sense of belonging compared to their White peers (Johnson et al., 2007). Esquinca et al. (2021) defined sense of belonging to any type of institutional experiences that result in a positive aspect towards campus interactions. For students to feel welcome in a campus environment, they should first feel connected and worthy to the institution (Esquinca et al., 2021). As previously discussed, Latinxs’ enrollment rates in higher education continue to increase, but it is important to consider the ways in which sense of belonging shapes persistence and retention (Dueñas & Gloria, 2020).

As a basic human need, sense of belonging can affect well-being, motivate behavior (Strayhorn, 2012), and promote positive academic outcomes for college students (Hausmann et

al., 2007). As previously mentioned, when students enter college environments, conflict can arise from the differences between student culture and the dominant campus culture (Museus, 2008). Experiences with cultural dissonance and the lack of cultural fit (Gloria et al., 2005) can pose challenges for Latinxs as they acclimate to the college environment and can influence their decisions to persist. Even within HSIs, Latinx students might not experience culturally responsive, relevant, and affirming campus environments and advising experiences (Garcia, 2017).

Torres (2006) explored the ways in which Latinx culture was integrated into two HSIs and one Predominantly White Institution (PWI) and concluded that the Latinx culture positively impacted student persistence. Cultural affinity attributed to students' intent to remain in college. This included the importance of hiring Latinx faculty at institutions so that Latinx students could feel a sense of belonging as well as other Latinx students welcoming new Latinx students and the creation and inclusion of cultural Latinx organizations. In a similar study, Torres and Hernandez (2009) found that family influenced Latinx students' persistence; families served as motivation and a protective factor. As noted by Sy and Romero (2008), "despite the potentially conflicting demands from home and school, the connection to family seems to serve as a protective factor that helps Latina students maintain focus on their academics" (p. 215). Families foster conditions that promote student well-being. Similarly, Latinx students who had an identified advisor or mentor had high levels of cultural affinity, encouragement, and institutional commitment, which created a significant "total effect on the intent to persist in the first year" (Torres & Hernandez, 2009, p. 151). Advisors, mentors, and family play an important role among Latinx students as they help guide Latinx students through college.

Familial Obligations

In the transition to young adulthood, familial obligations tend to increase, particularly among Latinx youth (Sanchez et al., 2010). *Familismo* is characterized by a sense of duty to family and obligations to provide financial and emotional support (Fuligni et al., 1999). A positive influence of *familismo* is linked with support and care of family members and the involvement of parents in their children's lives (Campos et al., 2008; Ruiz, 2007). Within Latinx families, embracing *familismo* is important as they are attached to nuclear as well as extended family and emphasize cooperation and interdependence (Espinoza, 2010; Sy & Romero, 2008). According to Martinez (2013), "*Familismo* is the tendency to hold the wants and needs of family in higher regard than one's own and has been considered a common trait of Latina/o families" (p. 21). In other words, within Latinx families, family is priority. Furthermore, *familismo* is theorized as a core cultural value that requires the individual to submit to a more family group decision making where family members come together to brainstorm different approaches and responsibility for, and commitment to ensure the well-being of family members (this includes both nuclear and extended). *Familismo* values dictate expectations of family cohesion, loyalty, support, respect, and obligation (Stein et al., 2014).

Familismo is not a negative concept that should be seen as attributing to gaps in student persistence within Latinx families (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008). Research has shown that the more involved Latinx families, the more they positively impact Latinx students' academic status (Ceja, 2006; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Talavera-Bustillos, 1999). For example, in a study conducted by Person and Rosenbaum (2006), 60% of Latinx students reported that their decisions to attend college was influenced by their family and friends. Additionally, Rodriguez et al. (2019) discussed how family attachment and support influenced their decision to pursue degrees in

STEM fields and to persist to degree completion. Perez and McDonough (2008) discovered that Latinx students' college choices were not only influenced by the nuclear family but also by their extended family, which includes aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, and other important individuals that are considered family. Consequently, *familismo* is an asset to Latinx students when navigating their career pathways (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2008) and education in general (Yosso, 2006). Family obligations take much of a first-generation college student's schedule and make it difficult to find time to study or complete homework assignments, and that is only done after familial obligations have been addressed (Moody, 2019). As a result, a support system is needed outside of the classroom, which is where family support comes into place. Moody (2019) suggested the importance of communicating with family early on to make them aware of the importance and time that will be needed while attending college, as well as the sacrifices that will take place as a family to graduate.

Racism and Discrimination

School segregation, deportations, and “‘de-Mexicanization’ or subtracting students’ culture and language” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 336) are some of the racist experiences Latinx students have faced. These experiences have been consequential to their experiences and trajectories in both K-12 and higher education. During the Mexican-American War in 1848, the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo granted 55% of Mexican territory to the U.S. (Blackmore, 2018). Anti-Latinx racism grew along with immigration, and Latinx were denied entry to white businesses (Beckman, 2018).

According to the Bullock Museum, “when the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, racial tensions escalated as fear spread. Among those sent to control the area and purportedly make the border safe for settlers were the Texas Rangers” (Bullock Museum, n.d. para. 2). Unfortunately,

between 1915 and 1919, the Texas Rangers killed thousands of Mexican-Americans in the State of Texas, because the repression was directed at the Texas-Mexican population as a whole instead of the “bandits” or “Mexican revolutionaries” (Benavides, 2016, para. 6).

Furthermore, as the Great Depression spiked in the 1930s, about 2 million Mexican-American forced deportations took place, since whites accused Latinx of stealing their jobs, but others, to escape discrimination due to fear of removal, returned to Mexico voluntarily (Library of Congress, 2021). In the late 19th century during California’s Gold Rush, mob violence terrorized Latinx due to speaking Spanish (Benavides, 2016) as California became part of the U.S. Later, California officially ended all segregation in schools due to the *Mendez v. Westminster* School District lawsuit (California Office of Historic Preservation, 2015).

Though Latinx are the largest U.S. minoritized group, racism and discrimination against Latinxs persist. Anti-immigration and anti-Latinx sentiments proliferated during the Trump Era, which in turn impacted students’ sense of belonging and well-being (Andrade, 2019). Trump’s presidential victory exacerbated stress, fear, and sadness among undocumented students in particular, making validation key to their well-being (Andrade, 2019).

Invalidating Experiences

As originally conceived, “validation refers to the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) in order to: 1) validate students as creators of knowledge and as valuable members of the college learning community and 2) foster personal development and social adjustment” (Rendon Linares & Munoz, 2011, p. 12). The existing literature has highlighted the importance of both academic and interpersonal validation for Latinx students (Alcantar &

Hernandez, 2020; Andrade, 2021; 2019). Validation, which comes from validating agents such as faculty, staff, and administrators (Rendon, 1994), contributes to Latinx student success. Although Latinx students have received validation (Acevedo-Gil et al., 2015), they have also experienced invalidation, such as when faculty are condescending and do not contribute to students' engagement and academic self-concept (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020).

Another form of invalidation students experience is cultural invalidation. Durkee et al. (2019), conceptualized cultural invalidations as threats and insults against a person's social identity such as race/ethnicity, gender, religion and/or social class. Cultural invalidations such as allegations of "Acting White" (AW) are common experiences among Black and Latinx college students (Durkee et al., 2019). AW, for example, is a label that has been used to describe Latinx who intentionally avoid speaking Spanish or are unable to speak Spanish. As noted by Durkee et al. (2019), cultural invalidations may carry "significant psychological implications for individuals targeted by these threats" (p. 1). Thus, validation is key to fostering Latinx student success. Validation is a practice that supports Latinx student success (Santiago, 2008).

Latinx First-Generation Students' Support Services

The Educational Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, now the Higher Education Act, has enacted numerous federal support programs to assist Latinx first-generation students (Quinn et al., 2019). The Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO), which are funded through the federal government, identified and provide services to students with disadvantaged backgrounds such as Latinx first-generation students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021), there are eight federal TRIO Programs which are designed to provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to help with the

transition from middle school to postbaccalaureate programs. The U.S. Department of Education (2021) listed the available TRIO programs as follows: 1) Educational Opportunity Centers- counsels adult students on financial planning skills, 2) Ronald E. McNair Postbaccalaureate Achievement-prepares college students for graduate school, 3) Student Support Services (SSS)- increases student college retention through individualized counseling and academic advising, 4) Educational Talent Search (ETS)-provides academic, career and financial assistance, 5) Training Program for Federal TRIO Programs Staff-financially supports program directors/staff with professional development, 6) Upward Bound-provides high school students college readiness guidance, 7) Upward Bound Math-Science-encourages students to pursue STEM careers, and 8) Veterans Upward Bound-mentors veterans of basic academic skills.

TRIO SSS programs serve nearly a quarter of a million students in the U.S. each year and work to increase college retention and graduation rates of first-generation students (U.S. Department of Education, 2021). For example, the Division of Student Affairs at BU, SSS serves 200 students annually, and encourages its participants to improve their academic performance and enhance their college experience regardless of students' background up to graduation. As per Border University's SSS website, participant student services such as academic tutoring, individualized counseling and academic advising assistance are offered at BU through SSS.

TRIO SSS program structure and activities should maximize the interaction between student and staff through frequent contact, open-door policies, and the use of intrusive advising models. In addition, staff members can seek professional development activities that increase their ability to interact positively with first-generation college students, especially for those staff members who were not themselves first-generation college students. Increased understanding of the first-generation student experience will

positively contribute to the development of a supportive relationship between student and staff. (Quinn et al., 2019, p. 61)

TRIO programs such as SSS motivate students to graduate from college and individualized academic advising plays a big role in student academic success. Academic advising familiarizes students with personal/career options, academic information and mentoring programs to provide students with opportunities for educational development.

Academic Advising

Research has been conducted on academic advising for many years, and its definition continues to be a discussion in academia, which results in different academic advising roles and goals (Larson et al., 2018). For the purpose of this case study, I will use NACADA: The Global Community for Academic Advising's definition. Members of NACADA (2006) define academic advising in higher education as educational development for students.

Academic advisors have a unique opportunity to affect college student success by providing students a quality academic environment through the academic advising process (Young-Jones et al., 2013). According to White and Schuleberg (2012), academic advisors' responsibility is to teach and guide students through their educational career paths. Academic advisor duties comprise of helping students understand the career of their choice, which involves procedural information and developmental processes, so that they can become more independent (White & Schuleberg, 2012). Hemwall and Trachte (1999) indicated that:

...academic advisors should engage their advisees in dialogue about the purpose and meaning of course requirements. They should talk with advisees about the educational goals, and related values, of the curriculum. Advisors need to help students understand why "citizens of the world" should understand different ways of thinking about the world

. . . advisors [should] prompt advisees to engage in critical self-reflection or to see connection between ideas and consequent action (p. 8–9).

Considering these academic advisor duties and responsibilities, exploring academic advising between advisors and students can disclose findings of how advising supports students' developmental skills and knowledge for a successful degree completion (Young-Jones et al., 2013). Hunter and White (2004) added that academic advising shapes students' learning experiences, resulting in academic achievement, career, and life goals. What follows are advising models that are believed to be essential to an effective academic advising system.

Academic Advising Models

Academic advising has been an important component of student success since the presence of higher education in America and has evolved throughout the nineteenth century (Gillispie, 2012). From placing recruits into civilian occupations after World War I to the Progressive Education Movement focused on the self-direction of students and increased demand for advising during World War II, today, the advising services offered are a compilation of historical mechanisms (Gillispie, 2012). Academic advising has been conceptualized along a prescriptive-developmental field (Hart-Baldrige, 2020; Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Due to the multiple advising activities students experience, a combination of directive, unidirectional and informational advisor-student communication has taken place through the prescriptive-developmental continuum model (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). Despite various approaches to academic advising, prescriptive, developmental, and intrusive advising have dominated the field.

Prescriptive Advising

Prescriptive advising is a traditional advising style, because it entails an exchange of communication from a top-down hierarchical relationship between an advisor and student regarding academic matters such as degree requirements, course registration and processes, academic policies and educational progress (Harris, 2018). Since the 1970s, institutions have been moving away from the top-down model and have been calling for a different approach (Barker & Mamisieshvili, 2014; Crookston, 1994; Lowenstein, 1999). As a result, developmental advising was introduced not as a style but as a theory about the content of advising.

Developmental Advising

The developmental academic advising model was originally introduced in 1972 by Terry O'Banion which involved interaction between advisors and students to provide a holistic approach during the academic advising process to understand individual student needs (O'Banion, 1994). O'Banion (1994) provided five academic advising dimensions that assist throughout the advising process: 1) life goals, 2) vocational goals, 3) program choice, 4) course choices, and 5) scheduling courses. To apply such dimensions, O'Banion (1994) maintained that institutions should be responsible for providing students with such experiences. Moreover, Crookston (1994) presented at a conference on academic advising at Temple Buell College in Denver in July 1970 and explained that “developmental advising is concerned not only with a specific personal or vocational decision but also with facilitating the student's rational processes, environmental and interpersonal interactions, behavioral awareness, and problem-solving, decision-making, and evaluation skills” (p. 1). The “developmental” focus on the “whole student” has brought together those whose primary role is to advise (White & Schuleberg, 2012,

p. 3). In this method, academic advisors use specific approaches to guide students under an advising relationship.

Intrusive Advising

Intrusive advising began with the work of Robert Glennen in the mid-1970s which involved advising and counseling at the same time by providing students with information before they requested it while also establishing a relationship with the student equally (Glennen & Baxley, 1985). In 1988, Earl further explained intrusive advising as “a deliberate, structured student intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty in order to motivate the student to seek help by using the good qualities of prescriptive advising (experience, awareness of student needs and structured programs) and of developmental advising (relationship to a student’s total needs) (cited in Varney, 2012, p. 1).” Currently intrusive advising is now being called proactive advising which better identifies its advising model throughout the advising process (Varney, 2012).

Holistic Advising

Holistic advising involves providing students campus resources by networking based on their personal lives due to problems affecting academic progress during the advising period (Museus, 2021). Advisors are culturally involved in supporting students by getting to know their cultural backgrounds and environment (Museus, 2021). This is important to consider because academic advisors are linking student academic interests with their personal lives.

The research presented in this section suggests that advisors must always interact with students and establish a continuous relationship. It is important to identify each student’s strengths and challenges, and by also providing student tools as well as resources that will

support them throughout their college years and individual needs (Higgins, 2017). Higgins (2017) explains that it does take a lot of patience and understanding but this is one way that Latinx first-generation students may feel comfortable while pursuing a degree and successfully completing it. Academic advisors have the strategies that are needed to advise, build a relationship and mentor Latinx students towards degree completion (Vasquez et al., 2019).

Academic Advising Strategies

Dana Mohler-Faria, President of Bridgewater State College, in his keynote address at the 2010 NACADA Region 1 Conference in Newton, MA stated that “academic advising matters because it changes lives by taking people to places of their potential and that student success must be at the core of all institutional work and decision making; therefore, he concluded that academic advising is critical to the success of higher education” (Drake, 2011, p. 11). Leading this crucial work are academic advisors.

Academic advisors play an instrumental role in promoting student success and, consequently, help retain students by making them feel connected to an institution, feel cared about, understand their purpose, and have clear academic and career goals to persist in their educational goals (Ohrablo, 2017). According to Applegate and Hartleroad (2011), academic advisors are liable for students’ academic and personal development which results in overwhelmed advisors due to heavy advising loads of 750+ students. Based on NACADA’s 2011 National Survey of Academic Advising, the average student caseload for full-time academic advisors is 296, and the averages reported by public institution size were the following: 441 for 2-year colleges; 260 for bachelor; 300 for master and 285 for doctorate (Robbins, 2013).

Peters et al. (2010) listed the following creative ways advisors can meet first-generation students' needs regardless of their advising loads. First, it is important to change advisors' mind-set since characteristics of nontraditional students continue to evolve. Nontraditional students are first-generation students, students not enrolling in college immediately after high school graduation, working full-time, being financially independent, having dependents, being a single parent, or not possessing a high school diploma (National Center for Educational Statistics, n.d.). Pressuring nontraditional students to graduate from college can be overwhelming because of extraordinary instability inside this student population and advisors should utilize various contact strategies, including physical and virtual meetings, email and telephone. Additionally, it is recommended that the resources used are an assortment of learning styles. Determining student goals is also imperative and to determine this, a questionnaire provided to students can assist with accomplishing the objectives they desire by allowing their responses to build up a guide for aiding these students adequately to meet their objectives. If such questionnaire takes place to discover students' strengths and knowledge, it is important for advisors to include questions regarding students' skills and talents that will assist them during their college years for academic success. To assist students to balance their daily lives, needed insight needs to be provided by academic advisors (e.g., time commitment for an online course). Furthermore, it is important to determine factors that will interfere with students' educational experiences, this includes course load and provide the needed support. Advisors should also question themselves the following to better understand students: "How familiar are students with college expectations and its environment? Are students aware of what it takes to complete the degree of their choosing (e.g., major, timeframe, licensure, internship, or skills)? Is daycare needed for students to attend class? Do they know of available support services, both on campus and within the community that can

help students meet their goals?” (Peters et al., 2010, para. 8). Explaining college terminology is very important, since each college has terms and acronyms that are new to students, especially nontraditional students, which they may find intimidating. By providing new students with a department handbook or glossary of terms to help them adjust to the institution will help them feel more comfortable in seeking assistance. Not only that but communicating frequently is also helpful. Even though advising all students and keeping up with each can become a challenging task, finding ways to make it more pleasurable for both advisor and student makes the environment feel relaxed. For example, meeting in different locations around campus or meeting for lunch instead at the office, would benefit not only the advisor’s environment but the advisee as well. This technique might not fit all nontraditional students’ lifestyles due to their busy schedules but may show that advisors care (Ali & Johns, 2018).

Having a nontraditional student network on campus is very helpful (Peters et al., 2010). This can help Latinx first-generation students feel more at home in the higher education setting. Additionally, sponsoring family events or having a family cookout at a park by incorporating family into activities helps keep students engaged (Peters et al., 2010). These activities can make students feel like an advisor is interested in both their academic and personal lives. First-generation students appreciate incorporating technology into advising, since many social media providers have moved technology to a different level such as Facebook©, Twitter©, texting and chat rooms (Peters et al., 2010). These are some helpful ways to incorporate frequently used technologies into interactions with students. It is important to help students understand the cultural norms within the college, and advisors need to make sure these learners understand their roles in communication, social, and professional contacts with peers, faculty, and staff. Some students are used to being independent and may need a reminder that academic staff are always

available to assist them and make them feel comfortable during their interactions with staff. Student life experiences should not affect advisors and should feel knowledgeable to the point that they feel confident in assisting students. Lastly, students may be comfortable in challenging what they hear, and advisors should be professional as they implement certain policies and procedures through the advising process (Peters et al., 2010).

As per Frey (2007), the outcomes from a pilot survey she conducted were further explored through focus groups with first-generation college students at three colleges that participated in the Adult Learning Focused Institution (ALFI) Assessment Toolkit project. This toolkit included two assessments for adult learners regarding their life experiences compared to questions regarding perceptions of institutional programming (Frey, 2007). The project comments from students revealed how the issues of advising, accessibility and educational experience impact students' daily lives. According to student responses, advisors are critical to their educational career pathways. It is vital for advisors to be proactive in reaching out to students to be knowledgeable about programs and requirements, and to provide guidance on transfer issues. Students noted that effective advisors, with the skills mentioned above, made a difference during their course selection as the classes accommodated their scheduled and earned credit.

One important issue that students identified was poor advising when it came to sharing their experience in these student success stories. For these students, advising was one of the main reasons they were not able to successfully progress academically. Advisors lacked knowledge when advising them and affected their transition from a two-year institution to a four-year institution due to not being well advised. The students recommended advisors to provide different academic pathways so that students could select the best option to help reach

their academic goals (Frey, 2007). Advisors are a key to student success; not only because they are knowledgeable but also because they offer encouragement and support. Advisors can be most effective if they identify nontraditional students as soon as possible. Faculty and staff need to be educated about the special needs of nontraditional students by assisting students in making connections on campus with student services which not only helps students succeed in college, but also in life.

Every student deserves to make educational decisions based on clear and accurate information. It is important for higher education leaders to recognize that students have options for education. First-generation students need to be provided with different options to make the best, decisions regarding not only their education but personal life to clearly understand what pathway to take. According to Pierce and Hawthorne (2011), it is an advisor's duty to mentor students and have them understand the requirements and expectations that are entailed throughout their educational process. Providing a flow chart would help students to visually determine their timeframe and crucial milestones and realize how long it will take to graduate from college (Pierce & Hawthorne, 2011). Yet, institutions sometimes lack the total learning environment that facilitates and enhances adult learners' chances for success, since supporting and guiding this population of students can be challenging (Frey, 2007). The advising process is complicated and not all advisors are equipped to deal with first-generation students such as communication skills, training and/or knowledge. Current advising techniques and goals, reviewing the transparency of the advising process, and closely tying advising efforts to student needs that continuously serve students throughout their college experience is important.

Benefits of Academic Advising

Since the 1970s, retention and persistence have become priority to higher education institutions due to students leaving school and increased accountability (Burkholder & Holland, 2014). Research studies have shown that student persistence entails the following three key elements: 1) available learning support systems to reach out to students promptly by offering tutoring and supplemental instruction programs early in the year; 2) incoming freshman programs to establish learning communities and first-year workshops, and 3) placing academic advising as priority to retain students (Burkholder & Holland, 2014). There are many benefits to academic advising, such as improved retention and persistence, feeling welcomed, a sense of belonging, and personal development. According to Thomas (2017), “advising, as a professional field, helps students reach graduation by providing a forum and context in which individual experiences that could be confusing, discouraging, or alienating can instead be opportunities for developing self-awareness, resilience, and expertise” (p. 1). Academic advising has been viewed by institutions as a unique and helpful contribution since the 1970s, and it is crucial when achieving goals of persistence and timely graduation, as well as students’ personal goals which include self-realization and growth (Thomas, 2017). Degree completion can be improved if there are enough full-time academic advisors who are trained and willing to engage in student personal development during students’ first years in college, resulting in an increase in student persistence (Thomas, 2017). In summary, advisors must always respect individual differences and take time to learn each student’s story. It is important to identify each student’s strengths and challenges and provide students with tools that will support them throughout their college years and individual needs.

Martinez and Fernandez (2004) explained that community colleges serve as the point of entry for most Latinx in higher education providing preparation for four-year colleges and universities. As previously mentioned, community college advisors play an important role in students feeling welcomed and a sense of belonging in a community college (Makela, 2006). Advising practitioners provide a positive experience by offering a productive and positive setting for self and academic discovery. Makela (2006) explained that community colleges work with many first-generation students as they are often students' first contact, and they have the appropriate skill set to prepare students for college and assist them with needed skills and abilities. Taking immediate action early in the first year of college and continuing to serve students with support, such as being well-advised, guided, and informed, is very important to their college experience. Counselors and administrators at 4-year colleges and universities may therefore benefit from consulting with counterparts at community colleges, sharing ideas, and working toward better serving nontraditional college students (Bundy & Smith, 2004).

Academic advising must be improved through professional development and institutions should provide competent advisors and staff efficient training to help them identify students' needed additional support (Allen, 1993; Long & Kurlaender, 2009). One of the most important positions needed to support and serve first-generation students are academic advisors. It is critical that advisors reflect upon advising preparation and expectations if they are to help students succeed. Sharing ideas between institutions is important, but we must not adopt a one approach fits all since institutional context should be taken into consideration, such as HSIs accommodating the cultural and sociocultural needs of Latinx students served (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Latinx and Advising

For Latinx students, navigating the college environment can be a challenge because institutions of higher education, including HSIs, are grounded in and continue to value Whiteness (Garcia, 2019). According to Matias et al. (2014), whiteness is “a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions, and experiences, epistemology, emotions, and behaviors... whiteness is normalized because white supremacy elevates whites and whiteness to the apex of the racial hierarchy” (p. 290). Further, colleges and universities have done a poor job of making college information and guidance available to Latinx students and their families (Martinez et al., 2017). Due to inaction or a lack of college-going culture in K-12 schools, Latinxs might not know when to ask questions or whom to ask questions to, and in some cases, cannot turn to their parents since they are most likely the first person in their families to attend college (Torres & Hernandez, 2009).

According to Lance (2009), “academic advisors are the information agents most knowledgeable and capable to connect students to institutional values, structure, resources, and student services” (p. 4). Given the wealth of information academic advisors possess, they are important to Latinx student success (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Thomas, 2017). Through face-to-face semi-structured interviews with 20 first-generation Latinx commuter undergraduate students, Thomas (2017) found that academic advisors contributed to their ability to persist to degree completion. Latinx advisors offered support and served as role models and a cultural connection for participants. Yet, some studies have found that Latinx students, particularly those who are first-generation, may be reluctant to seek out help from faculty or academic advisors (Anaya & Cole, 2001; Haskins, 2016; Torres et al., 2006). Therefore, as Rendon (1994) and others have suggested, advisors must actively reach out to students (Martinez & Gonzales, 2015). Advisors

taking a pro-active role to support students' academic goals has been documented at HSIs (Grafnetterova & Banda, 2021; Martinez & Gonzales, 2015). According to Jimenez Hernandez (2020), "addressing the advising structure at an HSI means problematizing the current (White) advising structure as it relates to serving Latinx students at an HSI" (p. 215).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

In the broadest definition, Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) are exactly what the name implies; they are institutions that enroll a large number of self-identified Hispanic or Latinx students (Cuellar et al., 2017; Garcia et al., 2020; Laden, 2004). According to *Excelencia in Education* (2019), in the 1980s, higher education leaders and policymakers recognized a group of colleges and universities that served a large percentage of Latinx students but with limited resources for their students. Educational leaders and advocates fought a long legal battle regarding hearings related to the Higher Education Act (Valdez, 2015; cited in Mendez et al., 2015) starting in 1979 with the Hispanic Higher Education Coalition (HHEC). HHEC became known as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU), founded in 1986 in San Antonio, Texas, and it assumed much of the advocacy work for HSIs (MacDonald et al., 2007; Santiago, 2006). In 1992, the 25% HSI enrollment threshold was approved and resulted in a victory, but it was not established until 1998 under a separate section of the HEA known as Title V (Santiago, 2006).

To recall, HSIs are defined in federal law according to *Excelencia in Education* (2021) as public or private colleges and universities which are accredited and degree-granting institutions with 25% or more Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment of undergraduate students, has an enrollment of disadvantaged students and has average educational and general expenditures of which are low, per FTE undergraduate student. While several federal agencies

have programs targeting HSIs, the first and most recognized federal program to invest in HSIs is Title V, which is the Developing HSIs Program (implemented by the U.S. Department of Education). The main purpose of the federal investment in HSIs is to increase educational opportunities for Hispanic students by improving their academic achievements and services such as program quality, and institutional stability while supporting them throughout their degree completion (Santiago & Andrade, 2010). More than eighty percent of these HSI institutions, which 571 met the HSI enrollment criteria in 2021-22 (Excelencia in Education, 2023) operate in urban areas and places with a high Latinx population located in five states and one territory as follows: California, Florida, Arizona, New York, Texas and Puerto Rico (PNPI, 2021). Excelencia's analysis of 2019-20 IPEDS data lists a total of 362 emerging HSIs in 38 states (102 from two-year public, 93 from four-year public, 13 from two-year private and 154 from four-year private institutions). Emerging HSIs are those institutions with a 15-24.9% undergraduate Hispanic FTE student enrollment. Given the growing Latinx population the number of HSIs is expected to increase. Excelencia in Education (2020) reported a 93% increase in the number of HSIs in the last decade. The presence and impact of HSIs cannot be denied within the larger population of postsecondary institutions and as HSIs become more important, there is a need to understand them as organizations striving to serve underserved populations (Garcia, 2019). Historically, HSIs have offered educational resources to first-generation college students (Tello & Lonn, 2017), but institutions are still struggling with retention and graduation rates. At HSIs, Latinx first-generation students are at higher risk of completing a degree longer than six years (Martinez, 2018). To help address these struggles, HSIs have turned their focus to "servingness," which Garcia et al. (2019) contend is "a multidimensional and conceptual way to understand what it means to move from simply enrolling Latinx students to actually serving them" (p. 1). In

the following section, I elaborate on servingness, the existing literature on servingness in practice, and Garcia et al.'s (2019) *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs*, which served as the conceptual framework for this study.

Conceptual Framework

Conceptually, this study was guided by Garcia et al.'s (2019) *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs* and the existing literature on servingness in practice (Deeb-Sossa et al., 2021; Garcia, 2020). According to Garcia (2019), “servingness was conceptualized as the ability of colleges and universities that meet the 25% Latinx and 50% low-income enrollment threshold to become HSIs to enroll and educate Latinx students through a culturally enhancing approach that centers Latinx ways of knowing and being, with the goal of providing transformative experiences that lead to both academic (e.g. graduation, post-baccalaureate degree enrollment, job placement) and nonacademic (e.g., civic engagement, leadership identity, graduate school aspirations) outcomes” (p. 1).

With the rapid growth of Latinx students, it is expected that institutions should rapidly modify current practices and policies to meet the needs of those students (Santiago & Andrade, 2010). With the growth in research centering on HSIs, a conversation has emerged in the literature about what it means to serve Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2019). Some scholars point to graduation growth as serving Latinx students, but others indicate the need to not only produce equitable student outcomes, but also provide an organizational culture that reflects Latinx (Garcia, 2016; 2017).

In efforts to move beyond a limited view of HSIs as either “Hispanic-enrolling” or “Hispanic-serving,” Garcia (2017) presented a typology of HSI organizational identities, which

incorporates both outcomes and culture. Garcia (2017) demonstrated that there are multiple ways in which HSIs can serve Latinx students by advancing the Typology of HSI Organizational Identities. “The typology considers academic and non-academic outcomes for Latinx students as well as the institution’s ability to provide a culture that enhances their racial/ethnic experience” (Garcia, 2017, p. 2). Institutions must continue to address racism and inequity to be supportive and inclusive. The typology consists of four quadrants: Latinx-Producing, Latinx-Serving, Latinx-Enrolling, and Latinx-Enhancing (Garcia, 2017; see Figure 1).

Latinx-producing suggests an institution enrolls at least 25% Latinx students and produces a significant number of outcomes for Latinx students (Garcia, 2017). The institution, however, might lack a culture for supporting the success of Latinx students (Garcia, 2017).

Latinx-enrolling suggests that an institution enrolls the minimum 25% Latinx students needed to become federally designated as an HSI but does not produce equitable outcomes for Latinx students (Garcia, 2017). Furthermore, it may not have an organizational culture that supports Latinx students (Garcia, 2017). *Latinx-serving* institution is one in which an institution enrolls 25% Latinx students, produces an equitable number of outcomes for Latinx students, and enacts a culture that enhances the educational and racial/ethnic experience of Latinx students (Garcia, 2017). *Latinx-enhancing* is based on enrolling a minimum of 25% Latinx students and enacting a culture that enhances the educational and racial/ethnic experience of Latinx students (Garcia, 2017). The institution, however, may not produce an equitable number of outcomes for Latinx students (Garcia, 2017).

Flores and Leal (2020) also presented a typology. They proposed the following HSI orientations to show how HSIs serve their students: 1) Latinx-ghosting, 2) Latinx-leaning, and 3) Latinx-serving. Latinx-ghosting institutions outlined institutional goals but left out Latinx

students. Latinx-leaning institutions were aware of their Latinx student population but used vague language when referring to their goals. Lastly, Latinx-serving institutions enacted a culturally enhancing and welcoming environment for Latinx students, implemented innovative technology and developed bilingual-bicultural programs to serve Latinx students by including such practices in their strategic plans. Flores and Leal (2020) found that some institutional goals in strategic plans did not align with student support services provided to students. As a result, Latinx-serving organizational structures served as an example to current and emerging HSIs.

Organizational Outcomes for Latinxs	High	Latinx-Producing	Latinx-Serving
	Low	Latinx-Enrolling	Latinx-Enhancing
		Low	High
Organizational Culture Reflects Latinxs			

Figure 1: Typology of Hispanic-Serving Institution organizational identities. Source. Reproduced from Garcia, G. A. (2017).

To better understand how researchers conceptualize the idea of servingness, Garcia et al. (2019) conducted a systematic review of the existing literature on HSIs, resulting in a multidimensional conceptual framework for understanding servingness. The framework’s main purpose is to use it as a resource to help shape policy, practice, and future research with HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019). The framework emphasizes both indicators of serving and structures for serving. Indicators of serving are measurable variables, including both academic outcomes and non-academic outcomes. According to Garcia (2021), “indicators of serving are things HSI leaders can measure to assess servingness” (p. 3). Academic outcomes for indicators of serving include “retention, persistence, graduation, transferring, course completion, STEM degree completion, post-baccalaureate enrollment, and labor market outcomes” (Garcia, 2021, p. 3).

Non-academic outcomes include “academic self-concept, social agency, leadership identity, critical consciousness, grad school aspirations, civic engagement, and social justice orientations” (Garcia, 2021, p. 3). Indicators of serving include student outcomes as well as experiences that students and non-students, such as faculty, staff, administrators, and other important stakeholders have at HSIs (Garcia & Koren, 2020).

Structures for serving are “tangible organizational elements” (Garcia, 2021, p. 4), which are challenging and not easy to assess throughout research and practice (Garcia & Koren, 2020). To serve Latinx students, structures for serving need to be adjusted to meet Latinx student needs. According to Garcia (2021), “mission and purpose statements, HSI grant activities, leadership, policies, curricular and co-curricular structures, institutional advancement activities, compositional diversity of faculty, staff, and administrators, and graduate students, community engagement, and external boundary management” are all structures for serving (p. 4).

Garcia and Koren (2020) concluded that the structures for serving and indicators of serving Latinx students are very important concepts and should be taken into consideration to provide opportunities for Latinx students to succeed. Garcia et al. (2019) further recognized that HSIs are shaped by external forces like federal, state, and local legislation, among other forces. Spanning these different elements of the framework is white supremacy (Garcia et al., 2019). As noted by Garcia (2019), HSIs, as well as other minority-serving institutions, “...are subject to the ill nature of racism and white supremacy in the United States” (p. 137). In the following sections, I present literature on how servingness has been enacted at different institutions.

Enacting Servingness

Enacting servingness in practice takes more than understanding theory as it is a learning process and requires a transformative approach (Garcia, 2019). Garcia (2019) recommended that to define and enact servingness, HSIs must honor Latinx race, ethnicity, language, and cultural backgrounds. The following are examples of enacted practices that are currently being implemented at HSIs to serve Latinx college students.

With the increasing number of HSIs and the need to increase Latinx Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) degree attainment, Kato and Marinez (2020) explored the ways in which HSIs can better serve Latinx STEM students and support them to degree completion. Kato and Marinez (2020) examined Latinx STEM transfer students in the STEM field after participating in a grant-funded STEM transfer learning community. The purpose of their study was to understand Latinx students' sense of belonging on campus by feeling represented as a non-academic outcome that leads to degree completion. Kato and Marinez's (2020) work had several implications for practice at HSIs as they aim to better serve Latinxs.

First, as HSIs aim to promote equitable educational outcomes for Latinx students, they must implement practices and provide resources specific to this population of students such as a student center for Latinx students. Two areas in which HSIs can increase Latinx transfer students' sense of belonging is through academic and social integration (Kato & Marinez, 2020). For example, Kato and Marinez (2020) indicated that programs should facilitate relationships between students and faculty, such as workshops or class sessions that teach students how to initiate undergraduate research and share the importance of attending office hours to not only better understand course content but also to connect with their professors. This study highlighted

the need to bridge academic and student affairs efforts, which is an important step toward addressing student success.

Relatedly, Martinez and Gonzales (2015) examined collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs at six HSIs through the lens of validation (Rendon, 1994) to identify ways HSIs might intentionally build pathways filled with support and validation along the higher education continuum to advance Latinx student success. Common strategies or validation practices Martinez and Gonzales (2015) observed to support Latinx students included: attempts to create a family-like environment, integrating students' families into programming, fostering student-faculty relationships outside of the classroom, and providing financial assistance. According to Martinez and Gonzales (2015), an important example of an academic family environment is when there is a welcoming and kind environment among faculty, staff, and students. In addition, faculty play an important role in building meaningful student-faculty interactions by mentoring students (Martinez & Gonzales, 2015).

While HSIs can serve their Latinx first-generation students by aiding their academic integration, and thus increasing their sense of belonging, HSIs must also make a commitment to training faculty on cultivating welcoming environments for Latinx students, increasing a sense of belonging between students and their majors (Cole & Espinoza, 2008), hiring diverse faculty, and supporting resources for minoritized students on campus. Secondly, programs should allow opportunities for students to integrate socially (Kato & Marinez, 2020). Clubs, organizations events, and even student centers on campus specifically for Latinx nontraditional students can help students feel that they belong on campus (Kato & Marinez, 2020). Thus, Kato and Marinez (2020) explained that a key element of servingness is assessing the outcomes of HSI grant activities by collecting data and learning from grant funded activities that are essential for

increasing servingness at HSIs. Analyses can help provide data for institutional self-assessment which will help allow universities to examine key problem areas and in turn, fund successful interventions (Dowd et al., 2010). As HSIs continue to examine ways in which they can serve their Latinx population, enhancing students' sense of belonging is a key way to increase servingness for Latinx students (Kato & Marinez, 2020), such as the following advising strategy opportunities below.

Sanchez Ordaz et al. (2020) designed the Multicultural Advising Conference (MAC) and invited advisors across the University of California at Santa Cruz (UCSC) by offering the opportunity to advisors to observe through campus events of Latinx and minoritized student experiences as well as the opportunity to reflect on advising strategies that contributed to students' sense of belonging. Sanchez Ordaz et al. (2020) provided an example of operationalizing servingness through academic advising towards Latinx students' sense of belonging at HSIs by using a holistic advising model in the academic advising process to understand individual student needs that contributes to advisor's cultural humility. According to Duntley-Matos (2014), "cultural humility requires an active and disciplined effort to open ourselves to the experiences and wisdom of others in an attempt to transcend our own cultural privilege" (p. 456).

The purpose of Sanchez Ordaz et al.'s (2020) initiative was to survey advisors regarding harmful effects of microaggressions in advising and provide them with professional development to continuously serve Latinx students at HSIs. Defined by Solorzano et al. (2020), a microaggression is unintentional racism caused through demeaning verbal, nonverbal and/or visual insults. As a result of the initiative, advisors understood how their involvement with students could create a sense of belonging in holistic advising practices (Sanchez Ordaz et al.,

2020) by increasingly validating students and further developing as effective institutional agents, advisors can better align the HSI campus identity of opportunity and service with the socially-constructed daily experiences of students (Garcia, 2016). Academic advisors serve students by assisting them with college persistence and helping them reconnect with the college environment by developing and identifying relationships with other students when they feel disconnected from academics (Roll, 2015). The daily communication between students and advisors impact students' decisions to persist in college. "As a result, academic advising delivers an opportunity by which universities can improve student satisfaction and retention and help students in choosing and completing a major" (Vasquez et al., 2019, p. 2). Therefore, creating a Latinx-serving identity by providing opportunities to Latinx students. In the end, available academic advising programs reflect an institution's interest to the success of its students and should be prioritized.

In this literature review, I provided a general overview of the demographics of Latinx first-generation college students at HSIs. I highlighted their educational experiences and discussed barriers to their persistence and retention. Specifically, student initiatives and student support services regarding Latinx first-generation student success with an emphasis on academic advising. Lastly, I introduced my conceptual framework by discussing HSIs and servingness which guided my study. In the following chapter, I discuss the research design and methodology I used to conduct my research.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Servingness is multidimensional; it entails both structures for serving and indicators of serving (Garcia, 2019; Garcia et al., 2019). According to Garcia (2021), “structures for serving are best understood as tangible organizational elements, that are not necessarily measured, but can be observed” (p. 4) and “indicators of serving are best understood as measurable variables” (p. 3). As discussed in Chapter Two, “servingness was conceptualized as the ability of HSIs to enroll and educate Latinx students through a culturally enhancing approach that centers Latinx ways of knowing and being, with the goal of providing transformative experiences that lead to both academic and non-academic outcomes” (Garcia, 2020, para. 2). In this chapter, I reintroduce the purpose of the study and research questions. Second, I identify the research design, discuss the methodology, and elaborate on my data collection methods. Furthermore, I discuss the following: case setting, participants, data analysis, and trustworthiness. Lastly, I include my positionality statement, which is key in qualitative research (Holmes, 2020).

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

To recall, the purpose of this study was to explore servingness within the context of undergraduate advising at BU (Garcia et al., 2019; Garcia & Koren, 2020). The following research questions guided this study:

1. How is servingness enacted through undergraduate academic advising at BU?
2. What role do academic advisors play in enacting servingness?

As with qualitative research, I refined and refocused my questions as I engaged further with this work (Agee, 2009; Stake, 2000). As Agee (2006) noted, “good qualitative questions are usually developed or refined in all stages of a reflexive and interactive inquiry journey” (p. 432).

Research Design and Methodology

My work was grounded in the interpretivist paradigm. I was trying to understand academic advising as a structure for serving from the point of view of those doing the work (Sipe & Constable, 1996). Given the purpose of my study, a qualitative approach was most suitable, because it allowed for an in-depth exploration of academic advising at BU with professional academic advisors. According to Bhattacharya (2017), qualitative research “aims to work within the context of human experiences and the ways in which meaning is made out of those experiences” (p. 6). To conduct this qualitative inquiry, I selected an intrinsic case study, because I was intrinsically interested in understanding servingness within the context of advising at BU. I conducted an intrinsic case study because of my interest to understand how servingness was enacted within the context of advising at BU in particular. An intrinsic case study is not generalized but rather specific and unique to other case studies (Stake, 2000). As stated by Crowe et al. (2011), “intrinsic case studies are unique, not only because of the research being conducted but because of the researcher’s interest to conduct such research” (p. 5). As discussed in Chapter One, I was intrinsically interested in studying servingness at Border University (BU) for the following reasons: 1) it is a Hispanic-Serving Institution on the U.S. Mexico border; 2) it has a student body that is over 80 percent Latinx; 3) it reaffirmed itself as leading the way in serving Hispanic students in its recent strategic plan; and 4) 50 percent of its students are first-generation (BU, 2022; The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2021).

Participants

As noted by Patton (2002), “there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry. Sample size depends on what you want to know, the purpose of the inquiry, what’s at stake, what will be useful, what will have credibility, and what can be done with available tools and resources” (p. 242-243). A total of 12 academic advisors participated in the study. The participants of this study were professional academic advisors at BU. I did not include faculty advisors in my study because, unlike professional advisors, faculty are not hired for the primary purpose of performing advising and advising-related activities (Self, 2008). To participate in the study, professional advisors had to complete their probationary period (6 months of employment as BU advisors) because they would be able to speak to some of the changes academic advising was undergoing. Plus, they would feel more protected or comfortable participating in the study given they were no longer in probationary status. Academic advisors were invited to voluntarily participate in this study from various academic colleges/departments on campus.

Advisor participants were purposefully recruited within two weeks through a paper flyer (see Appendix B) and email (see Appendix C). Flyers were placed throughout the BU campus at staff congregates such as the library and recreation center. I identified potential participants by reviewing academic advising offices’ websites. If participant contact information was not available on departments’ websites, their email addresses were obtained via BU’s public directory. Participants were also recruited through snowball sampling (Glesne, 2011). I asked all participants and personal contacts to refer me to other advisors they knew who met my research criteria. I identified 32 academic advisors and emailed them individually to invite them to participate in my study and offered remote or face-to-face interviews. Some advisors responded in agreement, others expressed that they were not allowed to participate in this study by upper

administration, and others did not respond at all, unfortunately. The fact that some potential participants expressed that they were not allowed to participate in the study by upper-level administration raises questions regarding organizational culture and commitment to servingness as this study aimed to inform advising policies and practices to serve Latinx and other minoritized students. With this context in mind, as well as per my IRB approval, I chose to omit potential identifiers such as length of time as an academic advisor at BU.

Table 1

Participant Table

Participant	Gender	Interview Choice
Griselda	Female	Remote
Rosa	Female	Remote
Jennifer	Female	Remote
Rita	Female	Remote
Delilah	Female	Remote
Gizelle	Female	Remote
Ximena	Female	Remote
Angela	Female	Remote
Mario	Male	Face-to-Face
Fatima	Female	Face-to-Face
Esmeralda	Female	Face-to-Face
Carmen	Female	Remote

Note. Total participants interviewed in this case study.

Methods

I relied on two sources of evidence (Stake, 2000) which included semi-structured interviews and document analysis. I elaborate on each method below.

Semi-Structured Interviews

To understand the ways in which BU aims to serve Latinx first generation students through academic advising, I conducted semi-structured interviews that lasted between 45-60 minutes per research participant. An interview protocol (see Appendix A) was used to help guide

the interview process, then 15-30 minute follow-up conversations a week later were incorporated to help provide additional details (Hart-Baldrige, 2020). This helped with the probing so that more details about participants' thoughts, feelings, and perspectives were shared. All interviews were either audio or video recorded then transcribed by a secure transcription service provider. Nine interviews were conducted through remote conversation via Zoom and three interviews were conducted face-to-face (see Table 1).

Advisors were asked about their experiences in academic advising. Example interview questions included: "How would you describe your work with Latinx first-generation college students?" and "From your perspective, what does servingness look like in practice (within the context of academic advising)?" These questions were aimed to understand how academic advisors carried out their work with students, and how they felt supported by BU or the department in their advisor role to fulfill servingness.

Document Analysis

According to Bowen (2009), "the rationale for document analysis lies in its role in methodological and data triangulation, the immense value of documents in case study research, and its usefulness as a standalone method for specialized forms of qualitative research" (p. 29). In the study, I reviewed multiple publicly available institutional documents, see Table 2 below. To begin with, I reviewed BU's strategic plan. The strategic plan helped me understand the commitment to the academic advising model planned for the next decade. The University's mission and vision statements helped me understand BU's goals and commitment to its Latinx community. According to Garcia (2023), "the mission represents who we serve and what we value as an organization" (p. 35), and "the vision statement can move the organization toward a more transformative mission in the future" (p. 39). The academic advising website offered in-

depth information regarding the number of academic advisors, location of academic advising centralized locations, resources available to Latinx students at BU. Finally, the academic advisor job description was used to understand the roles academic advisors play in enacting servingness, the expectations of their job, and the policies and guidelines specific to their organization. Such policies and guidelines articulated expectations regarding their advising responsibilities.

Table 2

Institutional Documents

Document	Rationale
Strategic plan	Institutional goals
Mission and vision statement	Understand mission and vision
Central academic advising website	Advising resources
Academic advisor job description	Role of academic advisors, expectations

Note. Publicly available institutional documents

Case Setting

This case study was conducted at Border University (BU), a Hispanic-serving research university located on the U.S.-Mexico border. The region is bilingual, multicultural, and culturally rich. BU enrolls more than 25,000 students. Over 80% of BU students are Hispanic (BU, 2021). More than half of students classified as seniors in 2018-2019 were first-generation college graduates (BU, 2020). During BU’s strategic plan campus presentation, BU’s President introduced strategic goals and identified initiatives that are high priority to accomplish the University’s mission. In addition to priding itself as a premier HSI, BU committed itself to holistic advising. Additional context regarding BU is discussed in Chapter Four.

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis took place at times simultaneously throughout this study. As recommended by Saldaña (2016), once the data was collected, transcription was completed and documents were analyzed. I coded the data manually by organizing, labeling, and categorizing the data. I then identified different themes. Example codes included holistic advising, servingness and professional development.

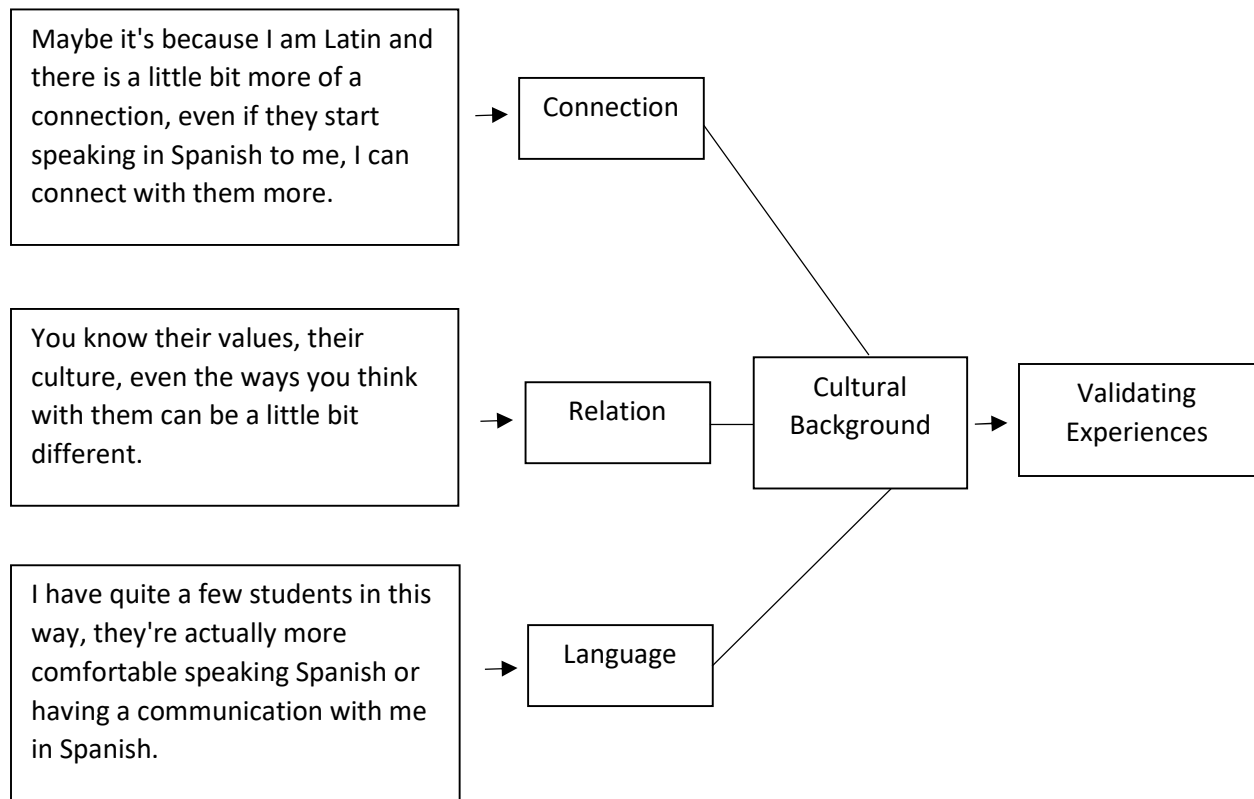
According to Saldaña (2021), there are different coding methods, and the researcher should choose the appropriate ones for each study. Saldaña (2016) stated that “one coding method may suffice for a study, or a researcher may need to select two or more coding methods to meet the needs of the study” (p. 234). In my case, the coding methods that I used were InVivo Coding, Process Coding, Inductive Coding, and Emotion Coding. Saldaña (2021) explained that InVivo Coding, also known as Literal Coding and Verbatim Coding, is a method used for interview transcription by using participants’ own language/words. It was important to me as the researcher to pay special attention to those words that seemed to call for attention. Process coding, also known for action words, is useful when the response entails handling problems (Saldaña, 2021). Most of the time, process coding involves movement and demonstrates changes in life circumstances when it comes to life events. Some examples of process coding involved people’s way of thinking (Saldaña, 2021).

Meanwhile, “Coding inductively is entering the analytic enterprise with as open a mind as possible, a learn as you go approach that spontaneously creates original codes the first-time data is reviewed” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 41). I did not assume anything and was open to new discoveries. As a result, new lists of codes, such as caring, advocacy, and caseload were created based on the research participants’ feedback which facilitated the coding process (Saldaña,

2021). Finally, emotion coding recalls participants’ emotions and/or experiences. “Emotion coding is particularly appropriate for studies that explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 67). Insights from life perspectives and experiences were shared by participants as well. See Table 3 below for an example of my coding process. From my codes, I developed categories and then themes.

Table 3

Code to Theory Model



Note. Saldaña’s (2016, p. 14) streamlined codes-to-theory model for qualitative inquiry.

Trustworthiness

The strategies that I used to ensure trustworthiness in my study were maintaining an audit trail, triangulation, and monitoring my subjectivities. The audit trail is a record of my work,

which enables my readers to trace all the steps I took throughout the entire research project and identify areas for further inquiry (Carcary, 2009). Also, the various forms of data I collected assisted with triangulation, which occurs when two or more sources of data "...converge on the same conclusion, then the conclusion will be more credible" (Tracy, 2010, p. 843). My interview data, as well as my document analysis, supported each other and increased the credibility of my study.

Lastly, I monitored my subjectivities (Peshkin, 1988). This process "helps to understand the object of investigation and it helps to understand how the significant personal relationships may influence data analysis and understanding" (Bumbuc, 2016, p. 423). I also positioned myself in this work and in relation to my participants, which I discuss below.

Positionality Statement

My research interests as a Latina first-generation student were a direct reflection of my personal identity and career experience. As a Mexican-American immigrant, young single mother who was first in my family to attend a community college then transferred to a four-year HSI, I am aware of the barriers a Latinx first-generation student confronts, and I have come across many obstacles, such as lack of academic advising and was underserved during my educational career pathway. Working in academia for almost twenty years, I have come across many Latinx first-generation students that seek assistance on a daily basis to be able to graduate from college. For this reason, I hope this study will assist BU and other institutions by shedding light on how academic advising can be a structure for serving.

I was raised in a low-income community and graduated from a school district made up of immigrants (this includes first and second-generation Mexican-American immigrants) and White

ranchers, even though today, it is predominantly Mexican-American. Over 47% of my school district's students originate from homes where English is not the first language and are identified as "English Language Learners." Further, approximately 96% of my school district's student population is Latinx, 4% White, with African-American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Native American populations each comprising under 1%. Not knowing what an HSI and servingness were, my interest in this research initiated right after my high school graduation as I experienced extreme disappointment in our educational system. There was a lack of support on behalf of high school counselors in getting high school seniors ready for college, and college academic advisors not providing sufficient college readiness support to students. As a first-generation college student (being a single parent and working full-time), I was misguided by the one and only Hispanic-serving community college academic advisor and missed scholarship opportunities. The academic advisor assumed that because I was a single working parent, I was not worthy of enrolling full-time and, therefore, I was not eligible for an automatic full-ride scholarship opportunity for recent [state] high school graduates.

I was then motivated to assist my Latinx immigrant community by obtaining a work-study position at my community college Centers for Education and Career Development. As an English Tutor, I helped improve English language skills for non-native speakers, acquire academic English skills, including reading, writing and grammar, vocabulary, increase conversation skills, listening comprehension and life skills. Through my interactions with the Latinx adult learners, I witnessed how they struggled to adapt to the "American" life. Their efforts to learn English as a Second Language (ESL) was more than the language barrier itself, it was to create a better economic opportunity for their immigrant families. As their tutor, many of these adult learners became first-generation students and even reached their educational goals

and obtained college degrees. Throughout their college experience, they reached out to me many times to obtain academic advising as students and even to the point of helping guide their first-generation children who were entering college for the first time.

As I assisted with more frequent requests from my ESL students to help their Latinx children with academic advising, I had obtained a new position right after college graduation with the TRiO Educational Talent Search (ETS) Program. We worked in middle schools and high schools giving support to low-income students by providing tutoring, mentoring and other programs to help enrich children's education. By doing this, I was able to ensure that my students had the skills necessary to succeed in college by the time they graduated as this was something that I continuously observed was missing.

Later, I moved on to teaching Business courses at my community college. This is where I experienced first-hand situations of Latinx first-generation college students' barriers as I had in the past. Many of my students were single parents, worked and attended night classes part-time. Their class attendance depended on family support such as having someone to take care of their children while in school. Some graduated, some did not, and financial barriers were always an issue. Once again, the educational system disappointed me since nothing had changed from when I graduated from high school. My same undergraduate academic advisor continued to advise new generations of students, and the way the community college served students was not enough. The holistic approach was missing and that reflected on student persistence. I personally continued to academically advise as many students as I could, but one person can only do so much.

At this point, I had finished graduate school, and obtained a position as a Scholarship Advisor. I was in a position where I could actually make a difference, financially. As I continued to observe BU's Hispanic population, my frustration continued to increase, since we could only

assist so many students financially. Protocols needed to be followed and many students with financial burdens were left behind. As a Scholarship Advisor, it was my duty to sit down with students, listen to their financial problems and help them apply for scholarship opportunities.

I have shared my identity with each high school and college student I have ever talked to (both in English and Spanish) and helped. I relate my story to theirs and know that I have made a positive impact in each of their lives. For this reason, I am here today, as a higher education administrator continuing to reach my academic goals by obtaining a leadership position in the near future. A position that will permanently make a difference in Latinx first-generation students' lives personally, academically and financially by adequately serving them.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

In this chapter, I present and discuss the findings of the study. As a reminder, the purpose of the study was to understand how “servingness” is enacted through academic advising at Border University (BU) – an HSI on the U.S.-Mexico border. Due to BU’s geographic location on the U.S.-Mexico border, the student body is mostly Mexican/Chicano. I was particularly interested in understanding the structures and indicators that exist for serving Latinx students within the context of academic advising. According to Garcia (2021), “structures for serving are best understood as tangible organizational elements, that are not necessarily measured, but can be observed” (p. 4), and “indicators of serving are best understood as measurable variables” (p. 3). Garcia et al. (2019) described structures for serving as mission and purpose statements, HSI grant activities, leadership decision-making policies, curricular and co-curricular structures, institutional advancement activities, diverse faculty, staff, and students, community engagement, and external boundary management. Additionally, indicators of serving include both academic and non-academic outcomes, which are influenced by “time spent within the structures of HSIs, and are affected by experiences, structural elements, and external forces” (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 772). Some common academic outcomes include Grade Point Average (GPA), course completion, six-year graduation, transfer and STEM degree completion rates, post-baccalaureate enrollment, and labor market outcomes (Garcia et al., 2019). Non-academic outcomes include academic self-efficacy, social agency, racial and leadership identity (Garcia et al., 2019). Also, experiences can be both validating and racialized. Validating experiences constitute positive experiences; meanwhile, racialized experiences are negative (Garcia et al.,

2019). The following two research questions guided this study: 1) How is servingness enacted through undergraduate academic advising at BU? and 2) What role do academic advisors play in enacting servingness?

Based on my analysis, I constructed five interrelated themes. These themes highlight what servingness looks like in practice and the existing organizational structures and indicators of serving Latinx students within the context of academic advising at BU. The five themes are: 1) committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning, 2) prioritizing academic advising, 3) allocating resources to support advising-related efforts, 4) (re) organization of academic advising, and 5) fostering validating experiences within the structures. I discuss each theme and various related subthemes below. In addition to university efforts as well as those of academic advisors to better serve Latinx students, I discuss some of the challenges that were encountered.

Committing to HSI Roles and Responsibilities via Strategic Planning

Intentional efforts to enhance advising to better serve its students were explicitly stated in the University's strategic plan. As noted by Allison and Kaye (2005), strategic planning is "a systematic process through which an organization agrees on – and builds commitment among key stakeholders to – priorities that are essential to its mission" (p. 1). Similarly, Martin and Birkholz (2000) defined strategic planning as "a formal process designed to help an organization identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements of its environment" (p. 87). These actions by BU underscored its commitment to its HSI designation and related roles and responsibilities.

BU's commitment to its HSI designation and related roles and responsibilities was highlighted in its strategic plan and public events. According to BU's (2021) most recent strategic plan, "[BU] will take a national leadership role and facilitate learning to improve higher education for underrepresented students" (p. 44). Based on Flores and Leal's (2020) typology of strategic plan orientation (i.e., Latinx-ghosting, Latinx-leaning, and Latinx-serving), which I discussed in Chapter Two, Border University's strategic plan exemplified a Latinx-serving orientation. In other words, in addition to mentioning its HSI designation, BU understood its geographic region, articulated its student characteristics, and operated from a knowledge capitalization, skills and abilities to serve its Latinx students. BU believes in their students' potential and serves them depending on where they are academically and personally to help them graduate.

In addition to BU's HSI status being emphasized and embraced in its strategic plan, half of my participants noted how BU's HSI status was increasingly reinforced by BU's leadership during meetings. Jennifer explained:

We all know that we're a Hispanic Serving Institution with a high degree of success for our graduates. And that does get reinforced semi-regularly at large congregations, large meetings of advisors and other staff. Which is a really valuable thing, because it helps us to really visualize our mission in terms of advancing the economic success of the [city] and of the families that live in [the city], and of our students.

Jennifer highlighted the importance of BU's leadership intentionally promoting its mission and vision which focused on serving its students and its border community. Similarly, Ximena noted the following:

Anything needs to accommodate to the student because of the HSI status or even for the first-generation students, everything, I guess. It is made to be accommodating for every student that we have here in the region.

Ximena believed that BU's leaders made decisions in ways to better serve BU's Latinx student population, in particular. By explicitly embracing and acknowledging its HSI role and responsibility to students and the community, BU's leadership generated a common understanding and willingness among advisors to actively support its mission and latest strategic plan. In fact, participants recognized the central role they played in carrying out BU's strategic plan. Ximena added the following regarding BU's HSI designation and its impact on academic advising:

I'm sure BU's HSI designation shapes academic advising policies and practices, it's up to the people that are in charge of all of the programming and so forth. I know that it's upper front, because this is our population. It's the largest population of our campus. So, I'm sure that's a high on the list of priorities.

Ximena, like Jennifer and Delilah, agreed that BU's HSI designation is important to its student population and that leadership was involved in carrying out its HSI status beyond simple enrollment thresholds. Although Jennifer was under the impression that everyone knew about BU's HSI status, during the interviews, I learned that not all participants were aware of BU's official HSI federal designation, which, as highlighted in the literature, is not uncommon (Garcia, 2017). I asked participants, "How does [BU's] HSI designation shape academic advising policies and practices, if at all?" Griselda, for example, answered, "can you please explain the HSI designation please. Similarly, Rosa said, "Can you- ... explain a little bit more?" and Rita asked, "What is that?" Although a bit troubling because BU has proclaimed itself as a

leading HSI, this scenario is not exclusive to BU. As Garcia (2018) noted, a constant question facing HSIs is, “what does it mean to be Latinx-serving?” (p. 112).

Nonetheless, participants fully understood and knew that BU served and was responsible for ensuring the success of its predominately Latinx population. Even though about half of the participants were unfamiliar with BU’s HSI designation when asked, they still had a commitment to serving their Latinx students. Some participants often stated that Border University was the standard when it came to serving Latinx students through academic advising within the larger university system because both students and academic advisors were mostly Latinx and there was better communication when speaking Spanish when serving them.

Higher education leaders are critical institutional agents (Espino & Camarillo, 2021) who facilitate college access and success for students (McCallen & Johnson, 2019) and enable academic advisors to understand and build on structures that result in serving Latinx students (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). Leadership is a powerful way to nurture transformation and successfully manage change within the institution (Sanaghan & Napier, 2002). BU leaders understand that academic advisors are a central part of meeting the university’s strategic goals and prioritized academic advising.

Prioritizing Academic Advising

Specifically, BU committed itself to building on its integrated and holistic advising model that extends beyond traditional academic advising. By moving beyond traditional academic advising, which tends to be prescriptive in nature, BU recognized the needs of its students. Holistic advising, which I discuss further below, not only provides an engaged academic advising experience for students but also serves as an opportunity for students to

connect with academic and personal resources and build formative relationships with advisors (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2022). In general, a holistic approach involves career counseling, financial coaching, incorporates activities and programs to encourage student academic success and addresses student needs (Chamberlain & Burnside, 2022). Chamberlain and Burnside (2022) indicated that “articulating a clear vision of the ideal, holistic advising experience is a core component of institutional transformation (i.e., building capacity to improve student outcomes and eliminate racial and income gaps)” (p. 13). This ideal state of advising reflects what BU is doing under a holistic advising model intended to support students’ educational journey taking into consideration their personal needs and goals. BU’s commitment to enhancing academic advising was also reaffirmed at public events hosted by the university. During a BU public event, the President described new student-centric initiatives that lead to student persistence and graduation, including holistic advising (BU, 2021).

To advise and support students, all BU colleges were required to take a holistic advising approach through implemented policies and practices. Jennifer shared the following about BU’s holistic model:

The Academic Advising Center was the first unit, as far as I know, to begin working on this model, which incorporates the idea of a relationship between advisor and advisee, and the ability of the student to go to that one person, that advisor, for anything that comes up for them. The expectation that a greater degree of insight on the part of the advisor will be developed over time as to that individual's goals, assets, and weaknesses, so that we can advise more holistically, rather than solely academically. So, that's the vision and that's why it was successful. They believe that at the Academic Advising Center. And that's why

when they came up with their strategic plan, the University, for these 10 years that we are commenced in, one of the important aspects of the strategic plan was advising to support student success.

Jennifer described how BU has prioritized its holistic advising model based on the University's strategic plan goals. Due to this, academic advising has become a central part of Border University's student success. Delilah and her colleagues agreed that academic advising was at the forefront of university efforts to serve its students and the community. Of this, Delilah stated:

Border University definitely is focusing on the importance of advising, which would definitely lead to retention, which will definitely have a great economic impact in our, well, they say community. But I would like to say our world because yes, our BU graduates can go anywhere and can achieve great things.

Delilah described how imperative advising is at BU. She explained how the work of academic advising trickles down to its community, but the region considering that the majority of BU's students are from the local community. Participants understood the importance of community, which includes families. Participants' discussion of family speaks to Garcia's (2023) push to extend and complicate HSI membership. Indeed, while some graduates stay and serve locally, other BU graduates move away and continue making an impact around the world. Therefore, BU allocated various resources to academic advising, which I discuss next.

Allocating Resources to Support Advising-related Efforts

To meet its strategic goal of increasing academic outcomes such as retention and persistence, the university allocated resources to advising-related efforts including: 1) hiring

academic advisors, and 2) building academic advisor capacity through professional development. Even so, participants expressed the need for more resources to help them carry out their varied roles and responsibilities and heavy caseloads.

Hiring Academic Advisors

Historically, according to participants, academic advisors at BU have held various roles and responsibilities. The varied roles and responsibilities have come with little to no reward, recognition, and training. As Ximena explained, “We do play a lot of roles, but it's not in the job description. I've seen students that come here really stressed, depressed and you try to lead. I don't know, someone that they can trust and try to guide them as much as you can.” Similarly, Gizelle noted:

There's just a bunch of different titles that come along with advisor. Aside from just advising, there's different things that we always have going. We do orientations, whether it's transfer students, incoming freshmen, and I believe early college ones that we're doing now, we do presentations. We help the student organizations and we're always just making sure everything is meant for the program and the deadlines that we're trying to meet. Whether it comes to list students who are not in good academic standing or students who are enrolled in the classroom that shouldn't be. There's just always something to do.

Gizelle explained that advisors are always busy no matter what their job duties entail. Not only do they advise students academically and holistically but also participate in campus events and student organizations, which exceeds the job description expectations.

In addition to varied roles and responsibilities, participants relayed that academic advisors at BU have carried high advising caseloads. Indeed, as documented in the literature, this scenario is not exclusive to BU (Borgert Baird, 2020; Khalil & Williamson, 2014). During the interviews, participants reported caseloads ranging from 250 to almost 700 students. The highest number was a unique case, because it involved advising what is commonly referred to as a special population of [students]. High advising caseloads have countered university efforts to provide students with a holistic advising experience by limiting advisors' ability to connect with students, have more time available to build valuable relationships with students, and respond to emails. Jennifer discussed the issue of BU advisors carrying high caseloads as follows:

It's a question to me how much "servingness" can be offered to an individual student when you have a huge caseload. So, I've been assigned [said number of students] to advise from now on until they graduate. And I'll be getting all of the incoming ones on that particular degree, and in those particular last names in [major]. And I've just received [said number of students]. So, that gives me a load of students to provide "servingness" towards that is not within my capacity as a human being. So, how has the university helped me with this? They haven't helped me with this. I'm sorry. But there are limits to what the university can do. We have limited numbers of dollars.

Jennifer described how a high caseload assigned to only one advisor is not feasible to advise each student one-on-one. She powerfully questioned how she could possibly truly serve students if she was expected to maintain a high advising caseload. She also critiqued the university for their limited support in light of financial constraints. To provide students with a

meaningful holistic advising experience, Jennifer and other participants discussed the need to hire more advisors, which is what the university was currently doing to a limited degree. Gizelle further explained the current academic advisors' caseloads at her [college] and the hiring of new advisors as follows:

Well, currently our cohort load for each advisor right now is about almost [said number] each. So with this additional advisor, the idea behind the university's push for advisors is that each advisor would only have about 300, 350 students per advisor. Our team would still need an additional advisor for that to come into play. So eventually, maybe it would.

Gizelle indicated that even by hiring a new advisor to distribute the caseload set by the Border University was not enough in her case. Her college was still going to be short staffed because the current caseload per academic advisor exceeded not only the 1:296 caseload provided by NACADA (2019) but also the University's goal. According to participants, part of the (re) organization of academic advisors included the University set standard of a 350 caseload of students assigned per academic advisor starting in the summer. As a result, not only one but two advisors needed to be hired for Gizelle's department to be fully staffed. Esmeralda shared her understanding of the new caseload distribution below:

So, the 350 right now is based off the current numbers for the college, right, and based on the number of advisors we have. Primarily, they want the... It has to be a university-wide change, so whether it's an advisor from [any college] they want it to be at 350. Of course, we don't have the same numbers coming in than we do at my [college]. If at one point, let's say, we end up with a caseload of 375, that's still

okay. But if it goes over to 450, either we have to hire a new advisor or we just have to do changes in the caseload, right?

At BU, academic advisors dedicate at least 45 minutes to each student during an advising session. Esmeralda was concerned and further asked if it was even possible to dedicate 45 minutes to each student and fulfill a 350 caseload by advisor before the registration period ended. Mario confirmed that “you need to have more time for those first-generation, since they don't have a guidance of what they need to do or how they need to do it. It will be more of your time to put into that student.”

Participants made it clear that if caseloads continue to increase and advisors are still expected to conduct 45-minute advising sessions with each student, there will not be enough time during the advising/registration period to offer the deep personal holistic advising goal the strategic plan is trying to reach. NACADA (2019) considers caseloads by the type of students being advised, such as Latinx first-generation college students attending BU, their needs, and the additional responsibilities advisors might have. Per the 2011 NACADA National Survey of Academic Advising, the median number of advisees per advisor for a full-time advisor is 296 students (NACADA, 2014).

Participants were vocal about the need for additional support to cover the new caseloads and carry out their varied roles and responsibilities if they want to serve every enrolled student on a one-on-one basis. For example, Esmeralda noted that advisors used to do group advising, because they had a high load of students coming in but had come down to doing one-on-one due to the new strategic plan initiatives. Participants felt over-burdened, which as Jennifer noted is not exclusive to BU and the field of education at large. However, given the demands advisors

face, such as providing students emotional support and helping them overcome real-life challenges, Jennifer was emotionally exhausted too. She shared her frustration as follows:

There's a big problem with burnout, and that's also across the board in education. It's part of what we've been all going through. But also being an advisor, speaking from the point of view of an advisor, it's a very emotionally exhausting job. It's intellectually exhausting also. But it's emotionally exhausting because there is a lot of emotional content that comes up in our meetings with students. And there's also a lot of emotion coming from the students. We have a lot of really upset students, some very depressed students, some students are suffering a great deal, some students are extremely angry.

Jennifer described how emotional advising sessions can get with students when a holistic approach is integrated. Not only does she advise students academically, but also assist them on a very personal level. This is important to consider, since participants were not trained to assist students on an emotional level. Jennifer indicated that all of the emotions that come with advising, to some degree, they have to navigate themselves. Participants got emotionally involved because they care. Therefore, advisors' experiences must be considered, and BU needs to help address their well-being. Besides conducting the essential functions of holistic academic advising, advisors also needed to track and assess students' academic progress, maintain student records and complete academic reports. Advisors were expected to communicate regularly with assigned student cohorts by mentoring students who were in their 45-60 credit hours of enrollment as they completed their core curriculum courses.

To support academic advisors, Border University committed to hire 16 to 18 professional advisors who would be fully trained by Summer 2022. Integrating academic advisors into the

institution and its commitment to promoting equitable outcomes for Latinx students through onboarding experience practices is also important. According to BU's Academic Advisor job descriptions posted Summer 2022, the average salary was \$40,000 annually, which pays lower than the national average (Salary, 2023). The national academic advisor salary ranges from \$45,000 to \$58,000 salary with an average salary of \$51,000 annually (NACADA, 2023 via Salary, 2023).

As presented in BU's most recent academic advisor job description, the expectations are high. The job description reads as follows:

Through a standard holistic model, this position delivers personalized advising and support to an assigned cohort of students to enhance the student experience.

Advisors are responsible for developing academic and co-curricular plans that create meaningful pathways to degree completion, promoting student engagement in high-impact practices, bridging students' academic, financial and social realities through social and financial literacy resources to ensure successful advising, retention, and student success strategies within cohort assignment. To carry out the aforementioned responsibilities and accomplish positive student outcomes such as high graduation rates, advisors need professional development. The success or failure of advising efforts depends upon a strong training and professional development program (Voller, 2011).

Building Academic Advisor Capacity through Professional Development

To carry out its stated strategic plan and goals, BU's current leadership built on previous leadership initiatives and launched an Advising Institute during the Spring 2022 semester. To

build academic advisor capacity, the university allocated resources to the Advising Institute. The Institute was implemented to support academic advisors to standardize its advising structure and centralize units. According to academic advisor participants, a three-day non-consecutive training was conducted in three stages by Border University's Academic Advising Center leaders. Participants indicated the first day of training focused on emotional intelligence and the Clifton Strengths Assessment and how to use those strengths to become better advisors. The second day, the training was geared more toward networking, academic advising goals, and plans. Lastly, the third training took place three weeks later and covered the current advising software. Griselda thought that the three days of training was beneficial, useful and shared the following:

The one that we had a couple weeks ago, well, three weeks ago, it was more of an overall of what we're going to do, because a lot of people came. A lot of new advisors were hired, campus-wide. So that's why we had that one kind of as a welcome, and this is our plan, these are our goals, basically. The one we had yesterday was a little bit more specific because it was only geared towards learning about [advising software system]. So, it was just a little bit more about the software that we use.

Griselda shared that the three-day training created a networking environment between advisors and strengthened their advising software skills. The most common mechanisms used among Border University academic advisors to help students was [University software]. The majority of the participants believed that the trainings were helpful to them, since the institution's goal was to centralize academic advising across campus. Advisors used terms like "pride," "appreciated" and "resourceful" to describe their experiences with the Institute. Rosa expressed

her feelings towards the training by indicating that it made her feel more important to the institution, and it instilled a lot more pride in her job. Mario described the trainings offered below:

Right now, the advisors are going through an intense training so that way we can help the student, better help the student. That's something that I've greatly appreciated, because the more training we get, the better that we can serve our students. So, that's something that I hadn't experienced before, so [Border University] is doing a good job at assisting advisors know the resources and the type of methods of advising to help our students get to the next level.

Mario continued to describe why communication and breaking down of silos was key during the reorganization of academic advising. He stated:

Just the Institute in itself is a big help because before we didn't really have a whole lot of communication amongst all the advisors. It was just like "No" within departments. So, it was two days, and we were all together, all day, for two days. So, it was kind of nice. So, I think that in and of itself, we were able to really expand our resources just by opening up to each other and creating that line, those lines of communication amongst all the departments. And I think that's kind of the goal too, of the institute, is to kind of connect us and make us feel like one big unit. In order to help students more and more efficiently.

For Mario, the Institute was significant, because he was introduced to other BU advisors for the first time in his position. Mario was able to share his ideas, knowledge, and resources that he had not had the opportunity to do in the past. He noted that “at Border University, it's been a lot

of self-learning.” Meaning there was little guidance and training in his role as an academic advisor. He tends to learn as he goes. Other participants, including Jennifer, recognized the newness of professional development opportunities across all advising areas on campus. She referred to the institute as something “very new and different.” Jennifer stated:

So, that's very new and different for us and very exciting. We do believe it will provide more continuity for the students and greater coherence and cohesion of their program, as well as the deeper possibility for mentoring and developing that relationship between advisor and advisee. Which is so important for our first-gen students.

Jennifer was notably excited during the interview. She believed that trainings and the reorganization of academic advising would strengthen the relationships between the students and advisors by better serving their needs, particularly in the area of mentoring.

The participants appreciated the professional development trainings being offered to new and current advisors. Academic advisors had the opportunity to network and share their knowledge and ideas with each other, which as per some advisors, this had never happened before at Border University. Not because academic advisors were purposely working in silos, but because the only networking they would experience was when they would come across student issues and had to reach out to other colleagues to help guide students. While most advisors felt that professional development had not been implemented at BU in the past, Fatima shared her own professional development experience at BU as follows:

Predominantly, it's here at the [University]. We do participate in... There's NACADA... and then there's TEXAN, which is the Texas chapter. And, there's

also regional conventions also. But, those are sometimes just once or twice a year. But, most of our trainings are held in house with the professional advisors that have already been here at the advising center and through our management team. We do meet here in the [city]. We will meet once a year with the [community college] as a whole. Now, our management team and some of our other higher-level advising positions, they might meet with the [community college] a little more often than that, depending on the situation. But, we do meet with them about once a year, just to go over, make sure we're on the same page and we're trying to help the students stay on path.

According to Fatima, professional development does take place at Border University but for many of the other participants, it was non-existent. Therefore, the majority of participants hope that starting the next academic year, the university will provide the support that advisors need through the Advising Institute. Participants look forward to trainings that will be provided regarding the student, how students are being treated, and how to approach the different types of students. Esmeralda advocated for training on academic policy as follows:

When it comes to academic policy... then again, I don't think I've really been trained in that. It was more kind of like-do what you think is right, right? I feel like at that point it was more personalized in the sense of, this is what I wish I was told. This is what I'm going to do for them.

Given limited or lack of training, Esmeralda found herself relying on her own personal experiences and knowledge as a former student to serve her advisees. Training or more specifically cross-trainings with other key departments and services students rely on are also key. Of this Angela said:

Sometimes we're not too well informed on what's going on with financial aid or what other departments have to offer to the students. So, I guess it's going to really help to have those trainings and to really find out what we can offer to our students.

According to Angela, academic advisors at Border University are not informed of all the resources available to serve students. In some cases, if they are aware, it is because they were students in the past and got to use such resources personally. Furthermore, participants recognized that additional training and reference materials such as an academic advising handbook would be needed should the university fully adopt a centralized advising model as was being discussed. BU was awarded a \$1.2 million grant to redesign campus wide (University Communications, 2017). The funds provided will be used to strategically redesign academic advising campus-wide to deliver a centralized, cohort-based advising model that has been initiated through the Border University Academic Advising Center. The mandatory Advising Institute trainings are believed to continue throughout the year to support academic advisors to standardize its advising structure and centralize units, but the next scheduled training was not determined. Meanwhile, Delilah mentioned that Border University's academic advising leadership such as assistant deans, managers and directors will continue to have weekly meetings to internally disseminate information to their staff regarding advising updates to validate academic advisors. As a result, the (re) organization of academic advising at BU was expected to happen in Summer 2022.

(Re) Organization of Academic Advising

Of the three organizational structures for delivering academic advising services (Pardee, 2004; i.e., shared, centralized, decentralized), at the time of the study, Border University had a

shared model and as discussed by participants and revealed in university documents, its goal was to move to a centralized model (University Communications, 2017). In the current shared model, some advisors are located and guided by BU's academic advising center and others advise and are guided by their respective departments/colleges. Further, according to participants, while some colleges have a central advising office, others do not.

Under the centralized model, although not in one location alone, all BU advisors will fall under the same leadership and operate as one unit to meet the needs of BU students. The centralized approach will allow academic advisors to provide students with more consistent information about requirements, regular advising about academic programs, and future career goals, all of which impact student success (Chiteng Kot, 2014).

According to participants, each college at the university has carried out advising in its own way to this point. Gizelle explained:

Our supervisor is very knowledgeable, [their] background. But as far as a structure, our structure has come from our supervisor and from the college itself. The institution itself is barely implementing the whole structure for advisors as we speak. So, we are barely going to be starting to, institution-wise, have a structure for advisors. And as far as now, advising has varied throughout the college.

During the time of the study, participants believed a centralized location in each college is crucial to better serve students and to provide them with all the guidance that is needed in just one place. They believed that Border University's reorganization of advising was necessary because there was no consistency in approach, information, and delivery leading to inequitable experiences. "Lack of consistency, for example, offers students different inequitable

experiences, leading to frustration,” Delilah explained. It is essential to provide students with adequate information equally.

Esmeralda elaborated on the different approaches to advising across the university. Similar to other participants, Esmeralda emphasized that BU colleges were doing their own thing, meaning that “some colleges have centralized advising offices while others do not.” It is imperative to have one main location at each college to help serve students through their academic advising. Griselda shared that “some offices have walk-ins and others do not or others are fully virtual right now.” Participants believed in and supported a standard procedure to avoid miscommunication with students. Delilah described how “students are running around campus without proper guidance” and explained the runaround experienced:

First of all, everybody was on the same page to stop doing what we so and so called the runaround, the Border University runaround. So being on the same page was actually great. One, to put a face with the contact that you have in the university, maybe you just know them via email, but now, "Oh okay. Now I officially introduced myself to that person." So that definitely, that is something just stopping that Border University runaround, which is absolutely ridiculous. Some students are just sent everywhere and they're not giving a response and then that frustrates them a lot.

The runaround that Delilah described above happened frequently and throughout campus. Delilah was grateful that everybody was now going to be on the same page so that academic advisors may avoid a lot of miscommunication with students. Rosa described the University’s overhauling of academic advising below:

All the advisors on campus are currently going through an overhaul. We're having all new training sessions. Actually, in February, we have two full days of training off campus for, it's called the Advising Institute. So, I know Border University is kind of leading the way on that when it comes to academic advising in the [University system].

When Rosa referred to the overhaul, she meant that the institution was currently implementing changes from its academic advising structure to mentoring students. All academic advisors were being trained the same on both professionally and personally so that any advisor can help students in a standard way. Before the reorganization started to take place, the main Academic Advising Center was in a centralized building on campus where academic advisors advised students in certain areas of study up to 45-60 semester credit hours (SCHs). Additionally, to this Center, each college had its academic advisors distributed throughout its disciplinary departments and in different buildings across campus. With the (re) organization, currently, BU's academic advising structure has kept its Academic Advising Center, and additionally established each respective college with its own academic advising center by relocating the distributed academic advisors from each college and centralizing advisors in an advising center at each college. The overhaul meets students' needs by enhancing the student experience. To attain this, validating academic advisors' experience is also important.

Fostering Validating Experiences within the Structures

Validating experiences within the structures and indicators of servingness in practice are a key component of Garcia et al.'s (2019) *Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs*. According to Garcia et al. (2019), "the notion of validating experiences was based on Rendón's (1994) concept of validation, meaning academic or social recognition or

affirmation of the backgrounds of diverse students and personnel, such that these individuals can feel more seen, heard, and supported in these particular educational settings” (p. 28). Such experiences include interactions with same-race/same-ethnicity individuals, such as with academic advisors, cultural validation on campus, Spanish-speaking peers, faculty, and staff, and mentoring and support groups (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 27). The ways in which BU fostered validating experiences within its structures and indicators of servingness were: 1) adopting a holistic advising model, and 2) advisors as validating agents.

Adopting a Holistic Advising Model

Changing the HSI advising model positively affects academic advising outcomes such as persistence when intrusive advising (Jimenez Hernandez, 2020) and/or holistic advising is incorporated. Under a holistic advising model, advisors reflect on their own knowledge and ability to address unequal institutional systems to better serve students (Sanchez Ordaz et al., 2020). Advisors adopt a holistic advising model by taking a one-on-one holistic advising approach that focuses on students’ academic and non-academic issues (Sanchez Ordaz et al., 2020).

Most advisors agreed that their role as academic advisors is to produce academic outcomes by highlighting student strengths and providing campus resources as early as possible with the goal to help them graduate with a high-Grade Point Average (GPA). Advisors work with students and make sure they provide resources to be successful not only in their academic pathway, but also in their personal, work and in everyday life. Intrusive and holistic advisors are invested in caring for their students beyond their job (Jimenez Hernandez, 2020).

Many participants mentioned that Latinx first-generation college students face many challenges, including various systemic issues, that interfere with student success. Rosa shared some of the concerns advisors have experienced with their students while serving them below:

We definitely see some areas where they'll struggle. And it's definitely because of either their culture or the struggles that we see socioeconomically when it comes to Latinx students. Something that I see a lot of, let's say I'm talking with a student and their GPA is kind of low and they'll tell me, you know what... especially because since COVID, they'll tell me, "You know what? Things have been kind of crazy at home. I am the sole care provider for so-and-so," or you can see that there's multi-generational homes. So, "I have to take care of my grandparents or my..." The other day I had a student who was like, "My husband, he has cancer, so I'm taking care of him." So, I to tell her, "Maybe it's best not to overload yourself."

Rosa as well as the other participants in this study, recognized and empathized with their students' realities and advised them accordingly. This is an example of how holistic advising allows advisors to learn about the personal struggles their students face and therefore make efforts to support and help them overcome the barriers. Ximena added the following:

Seeing some of them may have struggles, sometimes I see students go through pregnancies, go through grief, go through financial needs, and being able to help them in a system or even just being someone for them to talk to and share their struggles or share their goals and being able to work those things out with them. And then at the end, when they're graduating, we look back, and it's like, "Wow. You really went through a lot."

A holistic advising approach helps advisors understand their students' realities and recognize their own individual experiences. Jennifer described holistic advising as follows:

Everybody is different. And everyone's path is different. And that is also a big part of what we have to break down for the students. Because students come to college thinking that they're on a timeline, and that they have to be at a certain point by a certain time. And that's completely inaccurate. That's an illusion. And so, we try to talk with the students about, "Hey, this is your path and you're navigating it. And you're going to encounter different obstacles and challenges, and surprises as you go along. And we are here to help you with that navigation. And every step along the way is going to add who you are.

Jennifer provided a breakdown of her holistic advising approach, which in many ways aligns with servingness. Through holistic advising, she recognized students' individual stories, their experiences. She also recognized their ability to succeed. She stressed the importance for students to understand that they should not compare themselves to their classmates and that they have their own career path to focus on. Based on students' academic and personal goals, academic advisors are there to holistically guide them and serve as validating agents.

Advisors as Validating Agents

While practicing holistic advising and viewing students from an asset-based lens, advisors served as validating agents. Additional ways in which advisors served as validating agents was through their cultural connections and interactions, including sense of belonging and speaking Spanish. Delilah described her interactions with students as follows:

So, one, they see me as more approachable and then two, they feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts or asking questions that maybe they wouldn't be asking because they just simply perhaps wouldn't even know how to ask.

Delilah explained how students feel about her being Latina, and how students relate to her. Just by knowing that she is Latina, one of them in a sense, students seem to feel more comfortable asking questions. Participants welcomed their students with open arms even before a student- advisor connection was made. They provided them with all the opportunities that the university had to offer, to their knowledge. They strived to make sure Latinx students were being served. The cultural connection that Rosa had with her students was more family-based, which she discussed as follows:

I do have a little bit more of a connection with them because I was one. I was the first in my family to graduate as well as to graduate with my masters. So, I definitely understand the struggle, but not just the struggle, but the pressure. You're the first. You want to do well for your family. You want to set a good example. For me, it was for my sister, for my little sister, for my cousins, because I was the oldest. So I can understand when they are really freaking out and really... especially the ones who don't need to be.

As a Latinx first-generation student, Rosa knows the pressure to finish school while facing life struggles. Therefore, when she meets with her Latinx students, and they share such experiences with her, she can immediately connect due to her own similar cultural background. She shares her experiences as tools for learning and supporting students. Even if they have the extra support at home, advisors' positive guidance is important. "You know their values, their culture, even the ways you think with them can be a little bit different," Griselda explained her

connection with students as she related to them. Similarly, Delilah explained her connection to her students' Latinx culture as follows:

It's very easy for me to work along with Latinx students, because I know exactly where their family's coming from and then I know where they're coming from, and then the importance that that culture is with them in all aspects of their life. So, Latinx culture influences their work, their family, their health. So, it's a lot of things. So yeah, I feel very comfortable.

Border University academic advisors were appreciative when it came to their students' cultural background. Many advisors related to the Latinx culture, such as Delilah, and understood the systemic struggles and barriers being first-generation and Latinx brought to their students. Struggles such as lack of financial support, limited guidance, and even language barriers were identified. Angela put herself in her students' place as follows:

I may not have experienced or have experiences in some of the things that they go through, but I'm definitely relatable as far as just a bunch of different... I can put myself into their shoes and understand where they're coming from and I can always not twist it but have a little story or something that is very similar to their situation. They feel comfortable when they walk in here.

Angela has an open-door policy and when students visit her office, they feel extremely comfortable sharing their personal experiences with her. Most of the situations shared, Angela related to because at one time she experienced such situations herself as she was walking through the same Latinx first-generation footsteps during her college years. Due to those experiences, it becomes natural to mentor students.

Gizelle noted that since Border University is here in the [city], it is on the border of U.S.-Mexico, and as a result makes academic advisors' culture impact the way academic advising is holistically approached by serving Latinx students' needs academically and personally. Rita further described how she related with her Latinx first-generation students below:

Being open to them about me being bilingual, so they can have reassurance that I can go ahead and help them either in English or in Spanish. And same thing not only for the students, but for the parents that come in looking for information for their students that are barely in high school in [Mexico]. They want to take them here because they see the opportunity here. Border University is always providing them the knowledge and also for them to relate with me in the sense that I also studied at the high school in [Mexico], so they can know that the opportunity is there for them.

Rita described her reflection with her Latinx students as being very similar to what she had experienced academically. Not only does she offer to be bilingual but also offers the opportunities she had as a student and shares her experiences with her students that are currently taking her same path. Rita further shared the following:

They do identify with me, some of them in a sense, that they feel the close proximity, since I live in [Mexico] and cross every day to campus. They don't ask me directly, but they tell me, and I'm like, "Okay, I also know about that, because I cross to [Mexico] every day." And they feel more confident or to express their ...I don't know, for example, their worries about their class schedule.

Rita understood her Latinx students' experiences of living across the U.S.-Mexico border. She related to their everyday commute, and how important it was to consider such struggle when scheduling classes. Due to this open communication, students felt more confident that Rita would be able to serve them to the best of their personal interest. For Latinx students, being able to speak Spanish to them was very important, as it is a special connection they share with their academic advisors. Delilah shared her connections with students below:

I have quite a few students in this way, they're actually more comfortable speaking Spanish or having a communication with me in Spanish. So, I think that, specifically, my approach to them is actually being very welcoming on that. If you're more comfortable speaking your first language, which definitely Spanish is my first language as well, I think it has a plus because we're able to have that connection, which definitely helps us out in the advisor-student relationship.

Delilah made her Latinx students feel comfortable by being able to speak their primary language, in this case Spanish, and by doing so, the connection was immediate. Additionally, Angela below explained how her connection with students was initiated:

Maybe it's because I am Latin and there is a little bit more of a connection, even if they start speaking in Spanish to me, I can connect with them more. I can tell them more freely, because my first language was Spanish, and I think that talking to them in Spanish is more comfortable. It's not all of them, but most of my Latinx students first generations they have a lot of questions.

Being able to communicate with students in their primary language was a plus for academic advisors. Students are able to open up and share their personal lives to better determine the best career pathway for them to take. Gizelle also shared the following:

I grew up speaking, my first language was Spanish, but as I went to school, it became Spanglish. But as I meet with the students, and I see that they're more comfortable in Spanish, I'll throw in some Spanish in there. And then I feel like it allows them that comfort level for them to go ahead and speak, because then they become more comfortable, and they are actually able to tell me exactly what they want, rather than maybe hindering it a little bit.

Gizelle, as other advisors, understood the importance of being able to speak Spanish to her Latinx students. Students felt more comfortable; they opened up and allowed them to better communicate with their advisors. It was important for students to overcome the language barrier. Jennifer explained the language barriers her Latinx students face below:

Not only are they first generation to a large degree, but they're also English learners to a large degree. And the Spanish language, the mother language, also amongst most of the students, is not known at a high level, at an academic level of Spanish. And that affects the students' ability to acquire academic levels of English expression. And this goes to reading, writing, and speaking. And all of those things are, of course, so vital to being a successful college student and to being able to successfully portray one's self to future employers, or program directors, or admissions committees, or whatever the next step for that student might be.

It was convenient for Border University Latinx first-generation college students to communicate with advisors in their native language. One issue was students easily interacting in Spanish with advisors and another issue was applying English into their academic studies. This was one of many struggles that Latinx students confronted. But with the guidance of academic advisors, this can be accomplished. Furthermore, Jennifer described the following:

It's challenging as well, because our students generally need support in understanding, evaluating, interpreting, breaking down, analyzing, and just really coming to understanding of what it means to be, what I would call a professional college student. What it means to be at a university, it's very different from community college, it's very different from dual credit. It's different from early college high school, which all of those things have impacted our students' educational paths a lot here in the [region].

Jennifer shared language barriers and the importance of mentoring students above. Students need all the support that they can get from academic advisors to succeed in college. Mario mentioned the importance of mentorship as follows:

I know a lot of departments on campus. I'm able to reach out to them so that way I can help the student know. But I think, also, it's the willingness of individuals at Border University who are willing to mentor and being able to assist me and remind me why our work is important, knowing what we do can transform lives. So, that's something that I've definitely enjoyed about being an academic advisor, knowing that that's a help that I can get.

Mario believed that mentoring students was important but mentoring advisors continuously was extremely important too, since they impact students' lives. By being mentored, this helps advisors obtain the resources needed to better serve students. In addition to serving as mentors, and institutional agents, advisors aimed to serve as cheerleaders for students. By serving as a cheerleader, Mario, for example, helped validate his students:

A lot of the time it's really hard because working with first-gen students, it can be challenging, because they're not traditional students where their family comes from experiencing college, right? So, we're their cheerleaders, and we're the individuals who need to give them some confidence, right?

Helping build students' confidence is a main aspect of validation theory (Rendón, 1994, 2002). Being a cheerleader came natural to academic advisors, knowing that first-generation college students needed that extra push.

As expressed by participants, academic advising has its rewards. Jennifer expressed her reward working as an academic advisor in the following statement:

It's very rewarding to work with mainly young people, but some of them are not at traditional college age. It's very rewarding to work with these individuals who have not had the opportunity in their family to develop an understanding of higher education, and who have begun that journey into the unknown for themselves. That journey, that those students undertake, is worthy of admiration because it takes some courage. And it's very rewarding to be able to support them as much as possible in that undertaking.

Mario also shared the following:

And at the end of the day, it's like, I'm grateful for those conversations that I was able to experience, because at the end of the day, it's a transformation in my life, being able to know that I did my best to serve a student in whatever aspect of their life that they were facing.

Academic advisors such as Jennifer and Mario are examples of how servingness is enacted through academic advising. Despite the fact, Latinx first-generation college students face many barriers, they overcome them with the holistic guidance of academic advisors.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I presented the findings of the study. Based on interviews with academic advisors and review of organizational documents, I constructed five main themes: 1) committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning, 2) prioritizing academic advising 3) allocating resources to support advising-related efforts, 4) (re) organization of academic advising, and 5) fostering validating experiences within the structures of servingness. Leadership and decision-makers developed a strategic plan that recognized its HSI roles and responsibilities and centralized academic advising. Border University implemented an Advising Institute initiative that will help provide resource allocation, (re) organization of academic advisors and academic advising through servingness by adopting a holistic advising approach.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study sought to understand how “servingness” is enacted through academic advising at Border University (BU) – an HSI on the U.S.-Mexico border. I emphasize BU’s geographic location in that “the borderland context is important because of its bi-national, bi-cultural, and bi-lingual existence” (Villarreal, 2022, p. 3). As discussed in Chapter Three, I used an intrinsic case study approach to understand the structures that exist for serving Latinx students within the context of academic advising. I was intrinsically interested in BU, because 1) it is a Hispanic-Serving Institution; 2) it has a student body that is over 80 percent Latinx; 3) it reaffirmed itself as leading the way in serving Latinx students in its recent strategic plan; and 4) 50 percent of its students are first-generation (BU, 2022). Conceptually, this study was guided by the Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs (Garcia, 2019; 2020; Garcia et al., 2019) and the existing literature on servingness in practice (Deeb-Sosa et al., 2021; Garcia, 2020). The findings of the study support the current literature on servingness which emphasizes that HSIs must be intentional about creating organizational structures such as strategic plans, leadership decisions, and curricular and co-curricular structures, including culturally relevant academic advising (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015) that support Latinx students (Garcia, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019; Martinez & Gonzales, 2015). Further, structures require frequent review and assessment for servingness (Garcia, 2020). In this chapter, I provide a summary of the findings from Chapter Four in relation to the existing literature and my conceptual framework, followed by recommendations for policy, practice, and future research.

Summary of Findings

Based on my data analysis, I constructed five interrelated themes. The five themes were: 1) committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning, 2) prioritizing academic advising, 3) allocating resources to support advising-related efforts, 4) (re) organization of academic advising, and 5) fostering validating experiences within the structures. The findings are briefly reviewed below.

Organizational structures, such as strategic plans and mission and values statements for serving, shape HSIs' capacity to address the needs of Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2019). *Committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning* is important to Latinx first-generation students, since academic advisors play a critical role in promoting student success and, as a result, help to retain them (Ohrablo, 2017). Defined by Allison and Kaye (2005), strategic planning is “a systematic process through which an organization agrees on – and builds commitment among key stakeholders to – priorities that are essential to its mission” (p. 1). Garcia (2023) explains that having a strategic purpose “describes how the mission and identity are enacted, measured and assessed” (p. 35). BU leaders prioritized academic advising and committed to HSI roles and responsibilities via its strategic plan. BU took up its HSI identity beyond the designation and explicitly committed itself to a holistic advising model to impact Latinx student success. BU aimed to ensure that every student was assigned an advisor and received personalized holistic advising that was attuned to their realities and academic and co-curricular pursuits (BU, 2022).

As more Latinx students enroll at Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), literature stresses that “it is important for institutions of higher education to intentionally engage in strategic planning that aligns their mission, values, and goals with their changing environments” (Flores &

Leal, 2020, p. 1). Based on Flores and Leal's (2020) typology of strategic plan orientation discussed in Chapter Two, BU's strategic plan demonstrated a Latinx-serving orientation. As a reminder, according to Flores and Leal (2020), HSIs with a Latinx-serving orientation "a) mention of their HSI designation, b) mention of their Latinx student population, c) demonstrate an awareness of their community and geographical region, and d) capitalize on the unique strengths, talents, or skills of Latinx students" (p. 7).

In its strategic plan, BU recognized its HSI status as a "responsibility." Further, BU recognized the diversity of its people and the cultural richness of the region, which has been historically underserved. BU acknowledged its Latinx student population and the assets they carry and committed to serving them under a culture of care. The importance of practicing an ethic of care when working with Latinx students (Hurtado et al., 2011; Rendón, 1994; 2002; Rendón Linares & Muñoz, 2011) and at HSIs (Dayton et al., 2004; Martinez & Gonzales, 2015) is well documented in the higher education literature. Care from all campus community members, including faculty, is key to student development and success (Alcantar & Hernandez, 2020).

Participants understood the importance of community, which includes families. Participants' discussion of family speaks to Garcia's (2023) push to extend and complicate HSI membership. Some believed that BU was setting an example for other institutions about what it actually means to be Hispanic-serving; however, they pointed to a continuous underfunding of academic advising and academic-advising-related efforts. Thus, participants were concerned about being unable to serve each student and fulfill their advisor roles and responsibilities.

To serve students, during the time of the study, BU *allocated resources to support advising-related efforts*. In addition to hiring more academic advisors, BU focused on building

advisor capacity through training and professional development. Participants openly shared that they have carried high advising caseloads at times ranging from 250 to 700, which is not feasible to advise students holistically in a 4-year public institution (Robbins, 2013). High advising caseloads are consistently discussed in the literature. Advisors continue to identify that ‘caseloads for advisors are too high’ as a persistent barrier to improving advising (Shaw et al., 2021, p. 3). Based on NACADA 2011 National Survey of Academic Advising (Carlstrom, 2013), “the median case load of advisees per full-time professional academic advisor is 296, or a ratio of 296 students to one full-time advisor” (para. 1). A caseload is one of many considerations when designing an effective advising program to meet student needs and institutional goals (Shaw et al., 2021). According to participants, to better serve students and relieve the burden on advisors, BU set a new standard caseload of 350 students per academic advisor regardless of the college. As such, BU hired additional advisors to help meet the new caseload standard and adopted a cohort model where every advisor is assigned a cohort of students for whom they are responsible for providing personalized advising (BU, 2022; Schroeder & Terras, 2015).

Organizational documents revealed that BU hired 16-18 new academic advisors across campus. According to participants, in some colleges, the new 1:350 ratio was accomplished, while in other cases, the 1:350 standard was not met. In other words, some advisors were still assigned to more than 350 students. Although the 350-caseload goal was not fully met during this study, BU made important strides in reducing caseloads. Still, there was a problem with academic advisor burnout. Advisors expressed exhaustion due to persistent high student caseloads. Recall Jennifer, who stated that academic advising was emotionally and intellectually

exhausting. To support academic advisors and promote the delivery of the new advising model to improve the student experience, both training and professional development started to take place.

BU launched an Advising Institute. According to participants, the Advising Institute was launched to ensure academic advisors had the skills and resources needed to serve BU students and facilitate the (re) organization of its advising structure. Participants revealed that the institute entailed networking, academic advising goals, plans to build communication amongst advisors, a review of advising software, and the Clifton Strengths Assessment. Some participants, such as Ximena, greatly appreciated the Advising Institute because of the pieces of training. Recall her statement: “the more training we get, the better that we can serve our students... that's something that I hadn't experienced before, so [BU] is doing a good job at assisting advisors to know the resources and the type of methods of advising to help our students get to the next level.” Based on the findings in Chapter Four, although some participants found the Institute helpful, most did not. Academic advising must be improved through professional development and institutions should provide competent advisors and staff, and effective training that can be applied to advise students and help them understand the barriers students face and alert them of potential student dropout (Long & Kurlaender, 2009).

Further, my analysis revealed that aspects of the Institute were grounded in whiteness, which contradicted the very advising model/framework BU was asking advisors to deliver. According to Matias et al. (2014), whiteness is “a social construction that embraces white culture, ideology, racialization, expressions, and experiences, epistemology, emotions, and behaviors.... whiteness is normalized because white supremacy elevates whites and whiteness to the apex of the racial hierarchy” (p. 290). Whiteness was reinforced through activities such as the StrengthsQuest, a Gallup-created tool for strengths-based leadership education, otherwise known

as CliftonStrengths or StrengthsFinder. StrengthsQuest is advertised as a universal tool to help all individuals understand their strengths in different settings. Yet, scholars such as Tapia-Fuselier and Irwin (2019) and Dugan (2017), are critical of both the tool itself, and the ways educators utilize StrengthsQuest as it “fails to address issues of context, and how social stratification and power may shape how strengths operate” (Dugan, 2017, p. 103). Tapia-Fuselier and Irwin (2019) reported racism’s influence on student leadership development and concluded that these gaps eliminate ethnic and cultural differences as a possible White supremacist ideology. The same argument can be made regarding staff leadership development. This finding aligns with the HSI literature, which highlights that whiteness is perceived as the standard and “continues to be valued” at HSIs (Garcia, 2019, p. 11). By valuing whiteness, HSIs fail to value and honor staff experiences (Garcia, 2019) and their value to the institution. Instead of relying on StrengthsQuest, HSIs, for example, could organize activities focused on helping individuals identify their individual and collective community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Participants looked forward to intense training to learn about the resources available and the most suitable methods of advising to help students achieve their goals and meet their aspirations. Participants indicated that the more training they received, the better they serve their students because different academic advising practices and lack of training often resulted in a runaround for students as each advisor was “doing their own thing.” Recall Delilah, who described how students were running around campus without proper guidance. Delilah added that some students were just sent all around campus and were not given a correct response, creating frustration and a lack of consistency in the information and services being received.

Unsurprisingly, being bounced back and forth from office to office negatively affects students (Felix & Lerner, 2017). To address the runaround, the *(re) organization of academic*

advising at BU started to take place during the time of the study. Participants were in favor of a centralized location under each respective college to help them serve their students better, such as providing consistent information to start with. BU academic advisors believed that the structure of the institution was not well organized prior to the (re) organization to support their everyday roles and responsibilities to serve students. They were looking forward to the new changes. Currently, BU's academic advising structure has a main Academic Advising Center in a centralized building on campus where academic advisors advise students in certain areas of study up to 45-60 semester credit hours (SCHs). In addition to a central advising center, each respective college has its academic advising center. Before the reorganization started to take place, each college had its academic advisors distributed throughout its disciplinary departments and in different buildings across campus. To physically centralize academic advisors, BU allocated space to each college, which signaled priority. Space is an important aspect of supporting the advising mission, goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes to help advisors work efficiently and effectively with students (Folsom, 2011) in a caring environment. "The students who enroll in HSIs deserve an educational infrastructure that acknowledges their sociohistoric contexts, centers their identities and ways of knowing, and is validating, humanizing, and liberating" (Garcia, 2023, p. 88).

Advisors aimed to create strong relationships with students by caring and *fostering validating experiences within the structures* (Garcia et al., 2019). In addition to adopting a holistic advising model, advisors served as validating agents. As Garcia et al. (2019) maintained, validating experiences are important indicators of serving. As stated before, BU adopted holistic advising to address the lack of an existing framework. By adopting a holistic advising approach, advisors were able to focus on Latinx first-generation college students' academic and personal

goals (Ordaz et al., 2020). Even so, it is important to note that holistic advising is not new to the field of academic advising. It is commonly employed across colleges and universities. Given the students BU and other HSIs serve, holistic advising should look different. HSIs should incorporate specific elements that we know are influential in Latinx student success, such as family and language preferences (Covarrubias et al., 2022; Martinez & Gonzales, 2015). A key question for HSI leaders to consider is: What makes holistic advising Hispanic-serving?

Again, although some participants were not familiar with the term “servingness” or BU’s HSI designation, it was very clear that most academic advisors went above and beyond to serve students every day by building a personal and meaningful advisor and advisee relationship. Therefore, addressing a broken educational system and using academic advisors’ abilities to serve students (Ordaz et al., 2020). Participants passionately described themselves as cheerleaders and students’ resources to serve them.

The notion of validating experiences is based on Rendón’s (1994) concept of validation, meaning “academic or social recognition or affirmation of the backgrounds of diverse students and personnel, such that these individuals can feel more, seen, heard, and supported in these particular educational settings” (p. 28). According to Rendón (1994), students believe they are successful when considered important and equal and when academic advisors take the initiative to validate them both academically and personally. Participants validated and aimed to foster a sense of belonging among Latinx students (Garcia et al., 2019). They strove to make students feel comfortable at BU and build *confianza* or trust (Rivera & Nuñez, 2022). As noted by Nuñez et al. (2021), “building mutually beneficial and trusting interpersonal and community connections, or *confianza*, is critical for Latinx students to succeed in postsecondary education” (p. 11).

Participants believed students trusted them because of their shared experiences and cultural backgrounds. Academic advisors' cultural backgrounds impacted the way they approached holistic advising. Advisors viewed their backgrounds as an asset. Recall Delilah, who explained that she found it easy to work with and connect with her majority Latinx students because she knew exactly where their family was coming from, and where they were coming from. Most participants identified and saw themselves in their Latinx first-generation college students as they, themselves, were Latinx and first-generation students who had attended, and in some cases, graduated from BU. Most academic advisors understood their students beyond school and connected with them in all aspects of their lives. One important way in which participants interacted and connected with their Latinx students was by speaking Spanish during their advising sessions. Participants indicated that some of their students were more comfortable speaking Spanish or having a conversation in Spanish. Being able to communicate with students in Spanish is important, because it challenges deficit thinking, honors students' language, and can be empowering (Garcia, 2019, 2020; Garcia et al., 2019; Yosso, 2005). Acknowledging and valuing the Spanish language as a legitimate language of communication in educational settings is a way to disrupt Whiteness and serve Latinx students effectively (Garcia, 2019).

Most participants believed that their role was to be the advisor they had, or wish they had, and go above and beyond when serving Latinx first-generation college students by putting on their advocate hats. Some ways participants advocated for their students were by helping them navigate the University, providing support, showing their commitment to them, and providing referral assistance during advising sessions. When advisors advocate, they “look for opportunities to connect and share not only concerns but proposed solutions to leaders within departments, divisions, and colleges” (Nguyen, 2015, para. 4). Participants searched for

resources on their own to support student concerns. This resulted in referring students to campus and community resources that support student success, which can serve to enhance the educational and ethnic experiences of Latinx students (Garcia, 2017).

In conclusion, findings showed that BU is prioritizing academic advising and committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning, allocating resources to support advising and advising-related efforts, (re) organizing academic advising, and providing validating experiences within the structures for serving Latinx first-generation students. These efforts are expected to provide equitable access to quality affirming academic advising for undergraduate students. With this in mind, I provide the following implications for practice, policy and future research.

Recommendations for Practice

Below, I present recommendations for practice organized around the following topics: strategic planning in higher education, developing hiring strategies, effective onboarding practices, training and professional development, culturally relevant and affirming practices, promoting academic advisors' well-being, reference materials, and reward system.

Strategic Planning in Higher Education

Committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning is important. Assessment is also key. BU and other institutions that make such commitments should engage in annual evaluations and present the results to academic advisors, and the rest of the campus community. This is important since it can be used to plan resources, policies and program design (Bresciani, 2010). Strategic planning and assessment efforts can be guided by the academic outcomes (i.e., graduation rates) and non-academic outcomes (i.e., graduate school aspirations)

highlighted in the Multidimensional Conceptual Framework of Servingness in HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019). The framework's main purpose is for it to be used as a resource to help shape policy, practice, and future research with HSIs (Garcia et al., 2019).

Developing Hiring Strategies

Who carries out academic advising on campus is vital to Latinx student success. Strategies for hiring academic advisors are essential to consider when attempting to enact servingness. Asking applicants to explicitly discuss their commitment to Latinx first-generation students and other minoritized groups, as well as emphasizing bilingualism as a requirement in the job description as part of the hiring process, is strongly recommended and would help applicants understand expectations.

Examples of advisors' experiences of serving Latinx first-generation students could include appreciation for a Latinx U.S. Mexico border community, support in serving Latinx students through a holistic advising approach, and their contribution to BU's strategic plan. Similar approaches are taken by faculty search committees to create a more racially diverse faculty (Liera, 2020). Although state colleges and universities are facing pressure to move away from diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts in recruiting and hiring (Mcgee, 2023), institutions must find a way to push back. Garcia (2023) recommends "including an intentional focus in the campus strategic plan about how to move the institution toward the goals of equity, justice, and liberation" (p. 59). Additionally, integrating academic advisors into the institution and its commitment to promoting equitable outcomes for Latinx students through onboarding experience practices is recommended.

Effective Onboarding Practices

Onboarding is an opportunity for employers to teach skills, share information, and outline behaviors that will set the new hire on a path toward job success (Bannon & Brewer, 2019). It is recommended that institutional leaders inform academic advisors, regardless if they are new or not to their advising role, about its HSI designation, commitment to Latinx-servingness, and what that means in academic advising taking into consideration students' backgrounds. To ensure academic advisors learn about their expectations, HSIs, at a minimum, should implement onboarding practices recommended by NACADA for newly hired academic advisors. Some recommendations include a team welcome, meetings with key people and student campus offices contacts, technology training and access, training materials such as a training calendar and an advising handbook as well as one-on-one meetings with the hiring supervisor (Miller, 2021). As a reminder, NACADA is the leading association of the Global Community for Academic Advising of higher education academic advising for student success.

Providing new hires with the time to learn, be introduced to key people on campus, complete their hiring paperwork, gain access to credentials, and acquire specific training to be fully prepared for the needed roles they will face will impact how academic advisors serve students. Further, advisors can be certified as ASPIRA Academic Advisors by successfully completing an academic advisor curriculum through distance learning (ASPIRA, n.d.). ASPIRA's program covers academic advising competencies and provides the basic knowledge and skills to academic advisors to effectively serve Latinx college students (ASPIRA, n.d.). It is important for HSI leaders to empower academic advisors by providing them with the training and professional development necessary to serve students.

Training and Professional Development

Higher education leaders are critical institutional agents (Espino & Camarillo, 2021) who facilitate college access and success for students (McCallen & Johnson, 2019) and enable academic advisors to understand and build on structures that result in serving Latinx students (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). This includes extending efforts to those charged with advising graduate students. Once hired, it is recommended that academic advisors receive formal training from their units, either by their supervisor and/or colleagues, and be provided continuous training and culturally affirming workshops to learn about the lived experiences of racially minoritized students (Almanzar, 2021). The following workshops may be provided for academic advisors to adopt into their advising practices: 1) using an asset-based mindset towards students, 2) educating racially minoritized students towards success, 3) practicing critical self-reflection and 4) enhancing interpersonal skills (Almanzar, 2021). Poe and Almanzar (2019) indicated that for academic advisors to be effective, they should be given on-the-job training, professional development, mentoring opportunities, and training on institutional policies and procedures related to NACADA's core competencies and build strong relationships. A three-day institute alone will not suffice. Recommended readings for academic advisors include *A leadership journey: How advising shapes an institutional culture* (Jones et al., 2021), *Is "Business as Usual" Enough to Be Hispanic Serving? Becoming a Hispanic-Serving Research Institution* (Marin, 2019), *Culturally Relevant Practices that Serve Students at a Hispanic Serving Institution* (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015), and *Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). These readings, which can be completed as part of monthly reading groups or brown bag meetings, are important to academic advisors because Latinx students' educational journeys are critical, and advising strategies are difficult to

implement (EAB, 2018). The readings provide studies of the development and execution of leadership initiatives, seek to understand the Hispanic-serving identity, the importance of serving Latinx students, and acknowledge students' community cultural wealth.

Out of all participants, only one BU academic advisor discussed participating in professional development opportunities with NACADA, which supports academic advising to enhance student development (NACADA, 2023). This underscores the lack of opportunities for professional growth and development for academic advisors (Voller, 2011). It is recommended that BU academic advisors participate with external organizations, such as NACADA and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), which represents student affairs administrators. Participation would provide professional development opportunities to new and current advisors so that they can continue growing and developing as academic advisors. More importantly, membership and partnerships should be established with organizations focused on HSIs, such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and the Alliance for Hispanic Serving Institution Educators (AHSIE).

HACU is a national association that represents HSIs which has led efforts in Congress and partnership agreements with federal agencies. Funding has been allocated to HSIs due to HACU's advocacy, providing conferences and workshops, managing internship programs, and conducting research related to Hispanic student success. Similarly, AHSIE supports higher education administrators who serve Latinx students. HACU and AHSIE are spaces where academic advisors can learn more culturally relevant and affirming practices. It is important for academic advisors to practice critical self-reflection to help Latinx students grow both personally and professionally to engage in cultural competency training and professional development opportunities (Almanzar, 2021).

Training incorporated during professional development regarding students' cultural backgrounds will help academic advisors understand and carry out a holistic and integrated advising model. It is imperative to implement a cultural awareness program for academic advisors to understand and serve their Latinx students and other minoritized groups. It should not be assumed that advisors of the same cultural background value and/or honor their Latinx student population. It is important to recognize that whiteness ideology can be internalized by People of Color (Matias, 2016). Also, it is important that we not essentialize or treat Latinxs as a monolith (Vega et al., 2022).

Culturally Relevant and Affirming Practices

Since academic advisors are among the first people that Latinx students have contact with (Almanzar, 2021), it is important for advisors to serve Latinx students using an asset-based mindset by critically examining and analyzing how policies, programs, and procedures hinder the success of Latinx students. To do this, institutions need to recognize Latinx students' cultural backgrounds and guide students toward success by honoring students' language, culture, and family (Yosso, 2005). By operating from an asset-based perspective and honoring Latinx language, fostering a culturally enhancing advising experience by advising in Spanish (Garcia, 2019), HSIs may institutionalize Spanish advising sessions. Institutional leaders have the responsibility to support, encourage, and listen to academic advisors (Espino & Camarillo, 2021). It is imperative to implement a cultural awareness program for academic advisors so that they may understand who they are working with, Latinx first-generation students and other minoritized groups. Training and resources are needed that build on academic advisors' strengths. If campuses are committed to using tools like StrengthsQuest, then it is essential to be critical and acknowledge the limitations and flaws of the tool. This serves both to "undermine the

normalization of Whiteness and to amplify the experiences of marginalized identities” (Tapia-Fuselier & Irwin, 2019, p. 39). As noted above, instead of relying on StrengthsQuest, HSIs, for example, could organize activities focused on helping individuals identify their individual and collective community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

Promoting Academic Advisors’ Well-Being

Garcia (2019) explained that “to become truly transformative spaces of serving, HSIs must consider the experiences of all people within the organization, particularly as faculty, staff, and administrators at HSIs can ultimately influence the experiences and outcomes of students” (p. 772). Given the experiences advisors face, such as providing students emotional support and helping them overcome life challenges, these may result in burnout. If advisors are not well then, they cannot support students. Indeed, “there is more to servingness than what happens to students...the experiences of all members within the organization shape servingness” (Garcia et al., 2019, p. 16). Therefore, advisors' experiences must be considered as BU moves forward with its strategic goal of becoming the leading HSI in the U.S.

Reference Materials

During the participant interviews, participants were asked to share any pertinent reference materials related to their roles and responsibilities as academic advisors. Not one advisor shared an academic advisor handbook or manual. If institutions do not have an academic advising handbook, one should be developed. The handbook could serve as a quick reference for useful and pertinent information such as mission and vision statements. Miller et al. (2021) provided recommendations regarding factors to consider when (re) organizing academic advising. It is recommended that a formal and written academic advising mission and vision statement be

available within the handbook to all academic advisors as this serves as a guide not only to meet students' needs but also for future advising. Since participants did not speak about a mission and/or vision statement during the interviews, and one was not found in the organizational documents reviewed, academic advisors and BU leaders would need to be involved to commit to academic advising within the institution's strategic plan and develop a mission and vision statement by providing such structures that validate students' experiences. In addition, include objectives, definitions, roles, and job responsibilities in the handbook. More importantly, the handbook should avoid a deficit-based perspective, since students' cultural strengths and lived experiences are important. Additionally, this handbook should include resource materials on the advising process and possible advising situations when advising Latinx students, for example, language barrier scenarios. If the advisor is unable to communicate in Spanish, but that is the student's native language, then a protocol should be in place to provide that student the opportunity to be advised in Spanish. Ultimately, it is important to include university regulations and advisor campus contacts for advisors to become advocates. Currently, NACADA offers a sample academic advising handbook that assists academic advisors in their new roles (Ford, n.d.).

Reward System

Academic advisor roles vary. Garcia (2023) suggests that “decision makers and leaders must scrutinize their budgets...and provide incentives to those most committed to the mission, identity, and purpose” (p. 60) of the institution, such as academic advisors. The implementation of a fair reward system for academic advisors to recognize their contributions as professional educators is important (Museus, 2021). This is significant because, according to some participants, their job is taken for granted at BU. Financially rewarding academic advisors fairly

encourages continuity and stability in the advising core (O’Connell, 2010). For example, identifying outstanding advisors by respective Colleges and recognizing them with other faculty and professional staff awards that are presented annually at BU would be a good start. This includes monetary awards, salary merit increases, and promotions. Publicizing the efforts of outstanding academic advisors of the year is a way to recognize their efforts in public. Retaining academic advisors is needed for student success.

Recommendations for Policy

My recommendations for policy center on the inclusion/incorporation of family in Latinx first-generation college students’ advising experience. As stated by Garcia (2023), “families may be some of the most important members that a transformed HSI can embrace” (p. 69).

Recognizing the importance of *familismo* is vital to Latinx student success. As a reminder, *familismo* is characterized by a sense of duty to family and obligations to provide financial and emotional support (Fuligni et al., 1999).

Parents place a high value on their student’s education and try to support them any way they can, this includes financially and emotionally (Harper et al., 2020). Thus, Latinx first-generation students believe that their parents need to be more involved in the college-going experience (Sax & Wartman, 2010). Yet, Latinx parents, whose primary language in most cases is Spanish, have limited opportunities to participate in the college experience of their students (Dietrich & Hernandez, 2022). Therefore, in addition to being intentionally included and invited to campus, HSIs must provide communication to families in Spanish. All organizational forms should be translated into Spanish. Also, all parent-centered activities, such as parent orientation, should have a Spanish option. Due to BU being an HSI on the U.S-Mexico border, it is recommended that all policies be available in Spanish as well. This is important when academic

advising is involved, and parents need to communicate with students' assigned academic advisors.

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) is especially important in this scenario and should be reviewed with parents during parent orientation. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2021), "FERPA gives parents certain rights with respect to their children's education records and transfers to the student when he or she reaches the age of 18 or attends a school beyond the high school level" (para. 2). To allow Latinx parents to access or request information from their student's education records, the student's written consent needs to be on file (BU, 2018). Currently, BU has the FERPA notice posted on the Registration and Records Office website in English, and a Spanish version is not available. In fact, BU's Handbook of Operating Procedures has the Educational Records section available only in English.

Recommendations for Future Research

My study focused on undergraduate advising. As with undergraduate academic advising at HSIs, research on graduate advising is also limited. A 2020 NACADA research report on advising sessions indicated that 57% of undergraduates are advised by a primary role advisor (Troxel & Kyei-Blankson, 2020), meaning a staff member whose exclusive role is to advise students. Graduate students on the contrary are served and advised academically by faculty members (Barnes & Austin, 2009). Thus, future research should take place to understand how servingness is enacted through graduate student academic advising, since more than half of graduate students do not complete their degrees, and this concern needs to be addressed (Burt et al., 2021).

Another area for future research is student experiences with academic advising at HSIs explicitly committed to servingness. The students' perspective is "integral to genuinely hear from the student population their recommendations for change as producers of their own success" (Allen & Nichols, 2017, p. 127). Often, student feedback is provided from course evaluations; however, the feedback is limited (Allen & Nichols, 2017) when it comes to servingness.

Relatedly, studying the implementation and institutionalization of Spanish advising sessions and student experiences with advising sessions in Spanish and the impact of such sessions would be beneficial to inform future practice. As stated by Petrov and Garcia (2021), "There is a "a growing need to focus on the diverse language needs of students at HSIs while acknowledging that an "English only" mentality is a reflection of whiteness and coloniality" (p. 2). Latinx students at HSIs may need to communicate both formally and informally in Spanish through the advising process and this option should be made available to them.

Concluding Thoughts

Finishing this dissertation was a life experience. I have come a long way to be where I currently stand in my educational goals. Being a non-traditional first-generation, Latina has not been easy. Mostly when it entailed being a young mother and working multiple jobs to survive throughout my career. With that being said, I did not give up on my educational goals even though balancing work, home and personal life resulted in motivational barriers. This led to procrastination, feeling incompetent and a sense of isolation as well as feeling that there was no end to this.

Experiencing academic advising from the student perspective and having 20+ years of work experience at HSIs, with this study and the guidance of my Dissertation Chair, I have come to understand the importance of structures for serving Latinx students at HSIs. I believe that this case study can be a benefit to HSIs that are currently revisiting their academic advising structures as they might consider 1) committing to HSI roles and responsibilities via strategic planning, 2) prioritizing academic advising, 3) allocating resources to support advising-related efforts, 4) (re)organizing academic advising, and 5) fostering validating experiences within the structures. According to Garcia (2023), “HSIs must be willing to adapt to their students, not vice versa” (p. 35). Adaptation must begin by revisiting and redefining our values and investing in academic advising to enhance servingness and Latinx student success.

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GLOSSARY

Academic Advisor	It is an advisors’ duty to mentor students correctly and have them understand the requirements and expectations throughout their education process (Jimenez Hernandez, 2020)
Academic Advising	Educational development for students (NACADA, 2006)
Aspirational Capital	Being resilient to reach your goals no matter the barriers (Yosso, 2005)
Culture	Groups of people based on ethnicity and/or race, who live their lives in unique ways, who interpret their life experiences, and/or context on how they have raised their children (Jensen, 2015)
Cultural Affinity	The theme, “not expected to succeed,” illustrates some of the aspects of academic difficulty and satisfaction with faculty and interplays with the comfort level students feel within their environment (Torres, 2006)
Cultural Capital	Inherited through personal or community experiences such as skills and abilities and not just inherited or possessed (Yosso, 2005)
Cultural Dissonance	Conflict or tension perceived and experienced by an individual as a result of inconsistencies between that individual’s cultural background and newly encountered culturally-specific information and experiences (Museus, 2008a)
Cultural Humility	An active and disciplined effort to open ourselves to the experiences and wisdom of others to transcend our own cultural privilege (Duntley-Matos, 2014)
Cultural Invalidation	Behavior that is supposed to be normal for White culture (Durkee et al., 2019)
Developmental Advising	Interaction between advisors and students to provide a holistic approach during the academic advising process to understand individual student needs (O’Banion, 1994)
Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions (EHSIs)	Colleges and universities with a Latinx enrollment between 15% and 24% which are close to meeting the HSI criteria (Excelencia in Education, 2019)
<i>Familismo</i>	The tendency to hold the wants and needs of family in higher regard than one’s own and has been considered a common trait of Latina/o families” (Martinez, 2013)
First-generation	Those whose parents have not earned bachelor’s degrees, compared to traditional students who once graduated from high school, attend college and at least one of their parents has earned a bachelor’s degree (Stebleton & Soria, 2012)
Hispanic-American	Latino/a hereafter (Brown, 2008)
Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)	Public or private colleges and universities which are accredited and degree-granting institutions with 25% or more Hispanic full-time equivalent (FTE) student enrollment of undergraduate students, has an enrollment of disadvantaged students and has average educational and general expenditures of which are low, per FTE undergraduate student (Excelencia in Education, 2021)
Holistic Advising	Focuses on students’ academic and non-academic issues (Ordaz, Reguerin, & Sanchez, 2020)

Intentional Leadership	Doing the work and taking responsibility for the strategy (Bolden et.al. 2015)
Intrusive Advising	A deliberate, structured student intervention at the first indication of academic difficulty to motivate the student to seek help by using the good qualities of prescriptive advising (experience, awareness of student needs and structured programs) and of developmental advising (relationship to a student's total needs) (Earl, 1988)
Latinx	Refers to Latina/o in general to disrupt the gender binary and to disrupt the male normativity of the term "Latino" (Salinas, 2020)
Latinx-serving institution	One in which an institution enrolls 25% Latinx students, produces an equitable number of outcomes for Latinx students, and enacts a culture that enhances the educational and racial/ethnic experience of Latinx students (Garcia, 2017)
Linguistic Capital	Interprets the idea students enter higher education with multiple language and communication skills developed through personal experiences (Brooks & Karathanos, 2009)
Nontraditional Student	Not enrolling in college immediately after high school graduation, working full-time, being financially independent, having dependents, being a single parent, or not possessing a high school diploma (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2002)
Persistence	The enrollment headcount of any cohort compared to its headcount on its initial official census date and the goal is to measure the number of students who persist term to term and to completion (Voigt & Hundrieser, 2008)
Prescriptive Advising	A traditional advising style, because it entails an exchange of communication from a top-down hierarchical relationship between an advisor and student regarding academic matters such as degree requirements, course registration and processes, academic policies and educational progress (Harris, 2018)
Retention	Annual rate calculated to show the proportion of students who return to their studies from one year to the next (National Center for Education Statistics, 2008)
Sense of Belonging	Any type of institutional experiences that result in a positive aspect towards campus interactions (Esquinca et al., 2021)
Servingness	The ability of colleges and universities that meet the 25% Latinx and 50% low-income enrollment threshold to become HSIs to enroll and educate Latinx students through a culturally enhancing approach that centers Latinx ways of knowing and being, with the goal of providing transformative experiences that lead to both academic (e.g. graduation, post-baccalaureate degree enrollment, job placement) and nonacademic (e.g., community engagement, critical consciousness, racial identity development) outcomes" (Garcia, 2019)
Social Capital	Social networks are used to obtain educational and community resources that includes instrumental and emotional support (Yosso, 2005)
Validation	The intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class agents (i.e., faculty, student, and academic affairs staff, family members, peers) (Rendon Linares & Munoz, 2011)

APPENDIX A

Interview Protocol

Interview description: Interviews will be semi-structured. The interview process will follow the subsequent protocol.

- 1) Introduction
- 2) Share purpose of study and provide informed consent form to interviewee
- 3) Provide interviewee with the opportunity to ask questions and express concerns
- 4) Upon completion of consent form begin recording and proceed with interview

Questions:

1. Describe your job.
 - a. What are your roles and responsibilities as an academic advisor?
2. How would you describe your work with Latinx first-generation college students?
3. How does [BU] help you carry out your work?
4. How would you describe your relationship/interactions with Latinx first-generation students as compared to non-Latinx first-generation college students?
5. How do you support Latinx first-generation students' during their first year of college?
6. How would you describe your approach to advising in relation to [BU's] HSI designation?
7. How does [BU's] HSI designation shape academic advising policies and practices, if at all?
8. What does servingness mean to you?
9. From your perspective, what does servingness look like in practice (within the context of academic advising)?
10. What mechanisms are in place at the university to help you enact "servingness" as an academic advisor?
11. If you could offer any recommendations to [BU's] leadership about serving Latinx first-generation college students and academic advising, what would you tell them?
12. Is there anything else you would like to add that would help me understand how academic advising serves [BU] Latinx first-generation college students?

Interview Follow-Up Questions

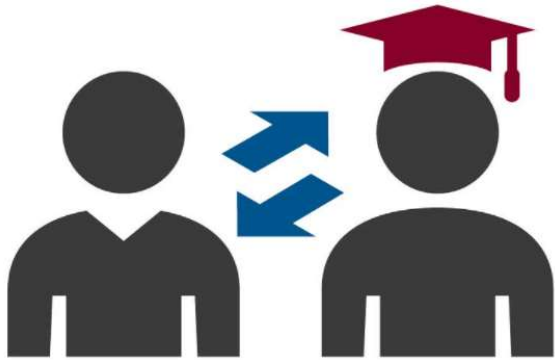
1. During our interview, you mentioned that you took an Advising Institute training in January and then another was going to take place in February.
2. Did you attend the training this February after all?
 - a. If so, can you please describe your experience with the training as an academic advisor.

3. Do you think this training will help academic advisors serve Latinx First-Generation College Students at [BU]?
 - a. If not, why?
 - b. If so, in what ways?
4. Would you mind sharing any presentations or documents that were shared with you during the training?

APPENDIX B

Advisor Flyer

Seeking Professional Staff Advisor Volunteers for a Research Study



ARE YOU AN ACADEMIC ADVISOR WHO ADVISES LATINA/O/X FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENTS AT [BU]?

If so, I would love to hear about your academic advising experiences.

The study explores the ways in which academic advising serves Latinx first-generation college students.

As a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 30-45minute audio-recorded Zoom interview. Your participation is voluntary and confidential. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved this research study.

If interested, please contact Brenda Velazquez at bvelazquez@utep.edu.

Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu	Brenda Velazquez bvelazquez@utep.edu
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APPENDIX C
E-mail Invitation

Dear (Participant),

My name is Brenda Velazquez, and I am a doctoral student at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) in El Paso, TX. I am conducting interviews as part of a research study entitled “A Case Study on Understanding the Ways in which Academic Advising Serves Latinx First-Generation College Students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) on the U.S.-Mexico Border.” The main purpose of the study is to understand academic advising as a structure for serving Latinx first-generation college students from the perspective of academic advisors. Attached to this email are the details of this research study including the informed consent form. The eligibility requirements are to be a full-time academic advisor who has met [BU’s] employment probationary period of six months. If you agree to be part of this study, the interview takes around 30-45 minutes. The interview may take place through ZOOM or face-to-face on the [BU] campus. I am trying to capture your thoughts and perspectives on academic advising at [BU].

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However, your participation will be a valuable addition to my research and findings could lead to greater understanding of serving Latinx first generation students in higher education. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at bvelazquez@utep.edu.

Thanks in advance for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Brenda Velazquez

APPENDIX D

Institutional Review Board



Institutional Review Board

Office of the Vice President for Research and Sponsored Projects
The University of Texas at El Paso IRB
FWA No: 00001224
El Paso, Texas 79968-0587
P: 915-747-7693 E: irb.orsp@utep.edu

Date: January 20, 2022

To: Brenda Velazquez

From: University of Texas at El Paso IRB

Study Title: [1854645-1] A Case Study on Understanding the Ways in Which Academic Advising Serves Latinx First Generation College Students at a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) on the U.S. Mexico Border

IRB Reference #: College of Education - Educational Leadership & Foundations

Submission Type: New Project

Action: EXEMPT

Review Type: Exempt Review

Approval Date: January 20, 2022

Expiration Date: January 19, 2024

The application for the above referenced study has been reviewed. This study qualifies as exempt from review under the following federal guidelines:[45 CFR 46.104(b)(2)&(4)].

If Institutional data (secondary or other) will be used for this research project please verify with the applicable department that such data may be used. Additional institutional clearances and approvals may be required. Accordingly, the project should not begin until all required approvals have been obtained.

Exempt protocols do not need be renewed. Please note that it is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to resubmit the proposal for review if there are any modifications made to the originally submitted proposal. This review is required in order to determine if "Exemption" status remains.

This exemption does not relieve the investigators of any responsibilities relating to the research subjects. Research should be conducted in accordance with the ethical principles as outlined in the Belmont Report.

If you have any questions, please contact the IRB Office at irb.orsp@utep.edu or Bernice Caad at (915) 747-6590 or by email at bcaad@utep.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. Torres", with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Dr. Lorraine Torres, Ed.D, MT(ASCP)
IRB Chair



APPENDIX E

Informed Consent Form for Research Involving Human Subjects

Protocol Title: A Case Study on Understanding the Ways in Which Academic Advising Serves Latinx First-Generation College Students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) on the U.S. Mexico Border

Principal Investigators: Brenda Velazquez

[BU] *Educational Leadership and Foundations*

Introduction

You are being asked to take part voluntarily in the research project described below. You are encouraged to take your time in making your decision. It is important that you read the information that describes the study. Please ask the study researcher to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand.

Why is this study being done?

The purpose of this study is to explore academic advising as a “structure for serving” Latinx first-generation college students at a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI) in the U.S. Mexico border.

You are being asked to participate in the study because of your role as an academic advisor at [BU]. ***To participate in this study, you must have completed your probationary period (6 months employment as a [BU] advisor).***

Approximately 25 participants will be enrolling in this study.

If you decide to enroll in this study, your involvement will last about an hour. The hour is nonconsecutive.

What is involved in the study?

I would like to interview you about your academic advising with [BU] students. Your

participation in the interview will require approximately 30-45 minutes. Depending on the format, time, and location preferable to you, the interviews will be conducted either face-to-face or remote conversation using Zoom. With your consent, all interviews will be audio recorded with a handheld digital voice recorder or through Zoom video recording. All interviews will be audiotaped then transcribed by a secure transcription service provider.

Following the interview, you could be contacted via e-mail with follow-up or clarifying questions. Such an exchange would require no more than ten minutes. Follow-up/clarification will occur within one month of the interview. You will also be given the opportunity to review findings to make sure I am representing you and your ideas and experiences accurately. This process, known as member checking (Glesne, 2006), is optional and should require no more than 20 minutes time.

If you choose to share public documents such as academic advising policies and practices, advising handbooks, and job descriptions during the interview, I will also consider them in my analysis (Stake, 2000). These materials will be collected and retained and used to gain greater insight into academic advising at [BU].

What are the risks and discomforts of the study?

Answering questions about personal and professional experiences may cause discomfort. However, you will not be identifiable by name. You also have the option to skip questions or opt out of the study at any time.

Should you need to speak to someone about your experiences at any time, an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides free and confidential assessments, short-term counseling, referrals, prevention, and education services for staff and their dependents. The benefit is provided through Deer Oaks EAP Services. Contact information is available on the Informed Consent Form and can be reached at EAP Helpline 1 (866) 327-2400, email eap@deeroaks.com or website www.deeroakseap.com.

Are there benefits to taking part in this study?

I do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, the research will help inform, policies, practices, and structures for serving Latinx first-generation college students at HSIs.

What are my costs?

There are no direct costs.

Will I be paid to participate in this study?

No, you will not be paid to participate in this study.

What other options are there?

Your participation is completely voluntary. You do not have to be in this study, and you do not have to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. You may skip or not answer any questions and can freely withdraw from participation at any time. There will be no penalties involved if you choose not to take part in this study.

Choosing to withdraw or not participate will not affect your employment or your university standing.

What if I want to withdraw, or am asked to withdraw from this study?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You have the right to choose not to take part in this study. If you do not take part in the study, there will be no penalty or loss of benefit.

If you choose to take part, you have the right to skip any questions or stop at any time. However, I encourage you to talk to the researcher so that it is known why you are leaving the study.

Choosing to withdraw or not participate will not affect your employment or your university standing.

Who do I call if I have questions or problems?

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions or concerns, or if you have a research-related problem you may contact Brenda Velazquez at [email redacted] or [phone number redacted].

You can contact the Human Subjects Protection office to speak to someone independent of the research team if you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact the [BU] Institutional Review Board (IRB).

What about confidentiality?

I will do everything to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Specifically, your name will never be used in any dissemination of the work (e.g., articles and presentations). In addition to using pseudonyms, specific titles, departments, and academic profiles will be further disguised.

In efforts to protect confidentiality, any data collected will be kept under lock, key and in a password protected computer file. Only I will have access to the recordings. The audio recordings will be destroyed 3 years after the study has ended.

Authorization Statement

I have read each page of this paper about the study (or it was read to me). I will be given a copy of the form to keep. I know I can stop being in this study without penalty. I know that being in this study is voluntary, and I choose to be in this study.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date

CURRICULUM VITAE

Brenda Velazquez was born in El Paso, Texas and raised in Anthony, New Mexico. She is the eldest of five children of Arturo Vaquera and Rita Valenzuela. She attended Gadsden High School and graduated in May 2000. Brenda is a Latinx nontraditional first-generation college student. She obtained an Associate of Arts, a Bachelor of Business Administration and a Master of Education in Educational Administration. During Summer 2011, Brenda Velazquez was admitted to the Educational Leadership and Administration doctoral program.

Brenda served in various organizations at The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP). She has been a Scholarship Advisor at the Office of Scholarships and Program Coordinator/Manager at the Campus Office of Undergraduate Research Initiatives. Brenda was then offered a position as an Administrative Analyst then promoted to a Business Center Manager at the College of Science. Currently, Brenda Velazquez is employed at the College of Liberal Arts as a Business Center Manager.

Additionally, Brenda Velazquez has served in other several positions at UTEP from being a Staff Council Member, a CAMP Program Mentor, Awareness Member, co-founder of the First Year Incoming (FYI) Mentor Program and Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Subcommittee Chair. Furthermore, she has served her community by becoming La U Soccer Club Secretary, Religious Education Program Coordinator and Danza Catequesis Owner/Captain. Brenda Velazquez has 20+ years of higher education experience, has a passion for serving Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) and leading with a purpose to inspire and motivate others.

Contact Information: Brenda Velazquez
bvelazquez@utep.edu