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CHICANA/O STUDENT RETENTION AT CSUN:
WHY CHICANA/O STUDIES AT CSUN MATTERS

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ABSTRACT

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Chicana/o Latina/o students compose the largest ethnic group at the California State University Northridge (CSUN), representing 36% of the campus population. Yet, they have the second lowest retention rate of all ethnic groups. This qualitative case study employed Critical Race Theory (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001) as a theoretical framework and in-depth individual interviews of six recent graduates of the (CSUN) Chicana/o Studies (CHS) BA Program to explore the following research questions: 1) How does majoring in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN impact the student's college experience? and 2) How do CHS majors perceive the CHS environment and how is this related to their college retention? All participants reported that majoring in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN helped them stay in college and graduate. Participants identified three factors 1) their service learning in the community 2) the collegial professor-student relationship, and 3) the critical pedagogy practiced in the classroom -- as helping them form a sense of purpose. Findings are concurrent with existing literature indicating a positive relationship between Ethnic Studies and retention. The results of the current study have implications for the study of college Chicana/o Latina/o college retention.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2009), the number of Chicana/o Latina/o students attending the California State University Northridge in the last fifteen years has increased by over 200%, becoming the largest racial/ethnic group on campus. In 1993, Chicana/o Latina/o students represented 18% of the campus population, with 3,826 enrolled students. For the first time in 2008, Chicana/o Latina/o students represented 30% of the campus population with 9,139 enrolled (California State University, Northridge, 2009) and currently they represent 36%, the largest ethnic group enrolled at CSUN (collegeportraits.org). The U.S. Census (2012), reported that 38% of the California population is composed of Chicanas/os and Latinas/os. Clearly CSUN demographics have shifted to reflect the growing Chicana/o Latina/o population in the state of California. While strides have been made in the admissions of Chicana/o Latinos in California higher education institutions, the retention rates at the university level are a problem (Pizano, 2009).

In the 2003-2004 Academic year, 1,399,542 Bachelor's degrees were conferred in the United States. Of those degrees, 1,026,114 were granted to white students, while only a mere 94,644 bachelor's degrees were granted to Hispanic students, a total of 6.8% (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (2012) reported that between the academic years 1999-2000 to 2009-2010, the number of bachelor's degree awarded to Hispanic students increased by 87 percent. However, from 1980 to 2011, the gap in the attainment of bachelor's degrees or higher between whites

and Hispanics between the ages of 25-29 widened from 17 to 26 percentage points (NCES, 2012). At CSUN, the six-year retention rate of Latino students who enrolled as first time freshmen in 2006 is 43.9%, making it the second lowest retention rate of all ethnic groups. White students at CSUN have the highest school retention rates, with 57.7% of them receiving their bachelor's degree within six-years. When compared to their white counterparts, who only represent 26% of the undergraduate population, a problem of retention for Chicanas/os and Latinas/os is apparent.

Daniel Solórzano and Tara Yosso's (2006), *Leaks in the Chicana and Chicano Educational Pipeline*, policy brief demonstrated the unique inequalities a Chicana/o student faces as she/he progresses through the educational pipeline. They find that the problem begins in the K-12 system, as only 46 of every 100 Chicanas/os graduate from high school. The other 54 students are "pushed out" of the system due to factors such as overcrowding in the school or "subtractive schooling," which is the assumption that Chicana/o students have cultural deficits rather than cultural advantages. Other factors that contribute to the leak in the Chicana/o educational pipeline include placing them into remedial courses, making it almost impossible to be put on a college track and to receive college advisement. This is attributed to the discriminatory practices that exist in the system (Solórzano & Yosso, 2006). This data is very connected to their future successes, including their retention in higher education.

Of those 46 Chicana/o students who do graduate from high school, only 26 move on to some form of post-secondary education. Of those 26 high school graduates, only 9 enroll in a 4-year institution, the other 17 enroll in a community college. Of those 17 community college students, only one transfers to a 4-year institution. Furthermore, of

those Chicanas/os who enroll in a 4-year institution, only eight attain a bachelor's degree. This information is critical in demonstrating that the educational system is not functioning for Chicanas and Chicanos and, furthermore, solutions must be implemented at all levels to ensure success of Chicana/o students (Solórzano & Yosso, 2006).

The inequalities that are contributing to the low retention rates of Chicanas and Chicanos in the university include, Chicana/o students finding out that their professors and classmates do not believe that they belong in four-year universities. This leads to Chicana/o students experiencing higher levels of stress in comparison to their white counterparts in college as they attempt to negotiate their place on campus (Delgado Bernal, 2002) (Hurtado & Carter 1997) (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005). Non-academic responsibilities, such as work, also add additional stress in the life of the Latino college student. Sedlacek, Longerbeam, and Alatorre (as cited in Hernandez & Lopez, 2005), reported that Latino college students were more likely to have a job, work longer hours, and drop out of college due to financial issues when compared to non-Latino college students. Balancing the academic responsibilities with non-academic responsibilities limits their time receiving academic advising, attending office hours, and receiving tutoring. Lastly, the disproportionate number of faculty of color, specifically Chicana/o faculty, affects the retention of Chicana/o students in higher education (Delgado Bernal, 2002) (Hurtado & Carter 1997) (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005).

At the end of Solórzano and Yosso's (2006) policy brief, several recommendations are outlined to address the leaks that exist in the educational system. Two recommendations that are important, as they relate to the problem of retention of Chicanas/os in higher education, are to "take an affirmative step to support Chicana/o

students by cultivating race conscious admissions and retention programs,” and to “recruit, retain and support Chicana teachers, counselors, faculty, and administrators (p.3).”

As a first generation college graduate who has experienced firsthand the difficulties of navigating through the educational system, my story resonates with Solórzano and Yosso’s policy brief. I grew up in a very small town in Indio, California and moving away from home to attend UCLA was a big change. Although I graduated in the top of my high school, college was another playing field for which I was not prepared. During my first year of college, I experienced culture shock, felt out of place, did not connect to the material I was learning, and had no professors providing any mentorship or support. I felt very isolated at UCLA and as a result, did poorly academically. However, after years of struggling to stay in college, I realized that my retention in the university was not just dependent upon my intelligence, but many other factors, like having a relevant education. I decided to become a Chicana/o Studies major at UCLA and became involved with student initiated retention programs. It was through these experiences that I have gained interest in issues of retention of students of color in higher education and how ethnic studies/Chicana/o studies may be a tool for retaining students in higher education.

In an attempt to continue exploring the problem of Chicana/o retention in higher education, through a qualitative method, I will research the questions: 1) How does majoring in Chicana/o Studies at the California State University, Northridge impact **the student’s** college experience? and 2) How do Chicana/o Studies majors perceive the Chicana/o Studies environment and how is this related to their college retention?

Already, the White House Initiative for Educational Excellence of Hispanic Americans (Community at CSUN, 2009) has highlighted CSUN as a Hispanic Serving Institute, which houses the largest Chicana/o Studies program in the nation and graduates some of the largest numbers of Latina/o students in the nation. Understanding the problem is important in this qualitative research, but creating solutions is equally important. Through exploring the impact of majoring in Chicana/o studies, I hope to further understand how culturally relevant education may help retain students of color in higher education.

As the Chicana/o Latina/o population continues to increase, it is becoming more important for institutions of higher education to focus on creating and implementing solutions that will support the retention of students of color, as the future of this country will largely depend on this segment of the population. The retention of Latinos must be placed at the forefront of the university agenda and considered as one of the most pressing issues in higher education (Oseguera, Lockes & Vega, 2009). This qualitative research study can provide insights into higher education by looking closely at how a university department, CSUN's Chicana/o Studies may support the retention of Chicana/o Latina/o students in higher education.

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chicana/o Studies has played a role in the transformation of the study of Mexican Americans in the United States. Prior to 1970, it was impossible to find a dissertation under the category of Chicano. Over the last fifty years, the growth of the field of Chicana/o Studies has been accelerated due to the number of Mexican American students enrolled in higher education (Acuña, 2011).

In 2011, Rudy Acuña published “The Making of Chicana/o Studies: In the Trenches of Academe,” a book where he shares the story of the inception of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN from the perspective of those involved. He begins by describing the educational conditions that started before the 1960’s. From 1850 to 1940, Chicanos in the United States enrolled in public schools in numbers between 16-50%. These numbers were a direct result of compulsory education laws that mandated that children attend school. In California, a compulsory education law was passed in 1874, which led to an increase in number of Chicanos enrolled in schools. While Chicanos were enrolled in larger percentages than previously, Chicanas/os faced personal and institutional obstacles, ranging from racial antipathy, lack of school facilities, poverty and discriminatory school policies such as English-only laws (Acuña, 2011).

Moving forward to the 1960’s, the educational conditions had not changed much from the conditions previously described. At the higher education level, the number of Chicanos enrolled in College was minimal- there was no “critical mass.” Even when Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban students represented only two percent of the population enrolled in higher education, it was the college student activism that led to

the slight increase in numbers to about 2.4%. Acuña (2011) asserts that it was during this period that Chicano Studies grew.

Locally, the push for Chicana/o Studies began in the late 1960's when most four-year colleges only had a few dozen Mexican American students enrolled (Acuña, 2011). At CSUN, previously known as San Fernando Valley State College, the process for implementing Chicana/o Studies courses began in 1968. At this time, when the student enrollment totaled 20,000 students at Valley College, only fifty were Chicana/o and Latina/o. The dismal number of Chicanos enrolled in college made it difficult for them to feel a sense of community. Furthermore the low number of Chicana/o faculty teaching at San Fernando Valley State College, was a concern. Former Chairperson of the Chicana/o Studies Department at CSUN discussed the importance of having Chicana/o faculty at CSUN, "It was important to provide role models of the same background for ethnic students (Cherchain, 2012)." During this time period, the Eurocentric curriculum taught in the classrooms by predominantly white professors, was an effort to assimilate and Americanize the foreign born and children of immigrant families. On November 4, 1968, students from the Black Student Union joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in a historic demonstration. Tired of the underrepresentation at Valley College and lack of relevant education, twenty six African Americans took over of the fifth floor of the administration building after a volunteer coach kicked an African American student in the behind. Many protests later, in January of 1969, President Malcolm Sillars signed a twelve point agreement written by college administrators and agreed to establish the Chicana/o Studies Department, Pan-African Studies Department, and to increase the recruitment of underrepresented students. By April of 1969, the Chicano Studies

department was established with Professor Rodolfo Acuña as one of the founding faculty members and nominated as department chair by his colleagues. In the Fall of 1969, the first group of students was welcomed into the Chicana/o Studies Department with a curriculum of forty-five Chicana/o studies courses drafted by Acuña (CSUN Chicana/o Studies Website). The Chicana/o Studies department at CSUN was one of the first Chicano Studies departments established in the country (Cherchain, 2012).

Meanwhile, at a National level, a three-day meeting was called in the Fall of 1969 by the Chicano Coordinating Council on Higher Education (CCHE), formed at Crusade for Justice, sponsored by Chicano Youth Liberation in Denver. The meeting was called in order to discuss how the community could increase access to higher education. Present at this meeting were four-dozen participants; Rudy Acuña was among the few faculty in attendance. The outcome of the meeting was the publication of El Plan de Santa Barbara in October of 1969; the CCHE was sending out a message to all universities and colleges that Chicanos demanded a quality education. Macias (as cited in Acuña, 2011) stated that “El Plan de Santa Barbara in the early 70’s was significant in a couple of ways.... One, it was a printed document that expressed the desired outcomes of the Chicano movement as it related to higher education.” As stated in El Plan de Santa Barbara (1969), “The goal of Chicano studies is to provide a coherent and socially relevant education, humanistic and pragmatic which prepares Chicanos for service to the Chicano community and enriches the total society (p.31).”

Over the course of its forty years of existence, Chicana/o studies as a discipline has struggled for support and legitimacy in academia (Mac Donald 2004, as cited in Nuñez). In 2010, the legislature in Arizona passed House Bill 2281, which banned the

teaching of ethnic studies at the K-12 educational system. This law directs us to look at how ethnic studies programs and course offerings, including Chicana/o studies courses, are being challenged in institutions of higher education in the United States. Critics of Chicana/o studies and other ethnic studies claim that it marginalizes students of color, separates them from standard school activities, does not promote mainstream American culture and does not contribute adequately to student learning (Nuñez, 2011). However, critics have failed to talk to students enrolled in Chicana/o Studies courses to verify their claims.

Presently, limited research is available looking at the field of Chicana/o Studies in higher education. Michael Soldatenko's (2009) book "Chicana/o Studies: the genesis of a discipline" provides an overview of the theoretical foundations of the discipline of Chicana/o Studies. Reynaldo Macias (2005), points to success in the field by looking at the growth over the last forty years, documenting the number of established departments in higher education institutions, number of offered courses and hired faculty. Furthermore, Aida Hurtado (2005) describes the personal transformation that occurs when Chicana college students are exposed to Chicana/o studies courses and writings; it has "a revolutionary effect on their identities, as well as their political consciousness" (Hurtado, 2005). While many have written about the strengths and challenges in the field of Chicana/o Studies, there has been limited research examining the impact of Chicana/o Studies on students' retention and graduation rates.

Sleeter's (2011) work is important to this study because her research focuses on the academic and social values of ethnic studies. Sleeter defines ethnic studies as "units of study, courses, or programs that are focused on the knowledge and perspectives of

racial and ethnic groups ” Ethnic studies include narratives and points of view that reflect and are rooted in the group’s lived experience and intellectual scholarship. It counters the mainstream Eurocentric curriculum, and so as students of color go through the schooling system in the United States, research finds these students feel overwhelmed by the dominance of Eurocentric perspectives in the classroom and as a result are often disengaged from academic learning. However, Sleeter’s (2011) report suggests that there is a positive relationship between racial/ethnic identity of students of color and academic achievement when ethnic studies courses are taught. Furthermore, her article examines a case study that demonstrates that when a curricula teaches directly about racism, there is a stronger positive impact, when compared to a curricula that teaches about diversity and ignores racism; this is due to racial attitudes being acquired actively, rather than passively. In summary, there is evidence that shows that a well-designed and well taught ethnic studies curricula has positive academic and social impacts for students. This present study will look at CSUN alumni who majored in Chicana/o studies and examine how the major impacted their college experience.

Sleeter’s (2011) report provided a summary of Vasquez’s case study, which examined the responses of 18 college students who took a Chicana/o literature course. The course utilized literature selections that were all authored by Chicana/o authors and dealt with topics such as immigration, migrant labor, poverty, and Catholicism. That particular study interviewed 18 students, of whom 11 were Latinos. The results of the study demonstrated that Latinos were able to identify with the texts and that the text helped them fill in the blanks and understandings of their families’ stories. Latina/o students in the study shared that being able to read books by Latina/o authors gave them

ethnic and personal affirmation, confidence, empowerment, and it gave them a space within academia where they felt that they were insiders.

Nuñez (2011) is one of the few scholars who examines the impact Chicana/o Studies has on students' persistence in higher education. She asks the question, how do first generation Latino sophomore students at a public research institution describe the influence of Chicano studies on their transition to college? Her research found that Chicana/o studies courses have served as counter spaces to help Latino students gain tools that can help them deal with cultural isolation, negative stereotypes, and facilitates the development of their personal identity in relation to their families and communities. Her study also found that the courses help Latino students establish networks at the university through the process of building positive student-faculty relationships and connections with their peers. Significantly, her research suggested that Chicana/o Studies courses contributed to student persistence in the university. Nuñez's study is closely related to the present study as it will investigate Chicana/o Studies majors' perceptions of Chicana/o Studies and their college experiences including retention and graduation.

While the research examining Chicana/o studies and its impact on student retention is limited, student retention in general is one of the most widely studied areas of higher education. However, forty years ago retention issues were not a priority because the composition of institutions of higher education in the United States consisted of a mostly privileged homogenous group (Tinto, 2007). As the student populations on college campuses have changed, becoming more diversified (Berger & Lyon, 2005), research has created a greater awareness of the complexity of events and factors that shape the departure and persistence of college students (Tinto, 2007).

Vincent Tinto (2007) defines retention as the ability of a campus or institution to successfully graduate students. The initial research in the field of college student retention was viewed through the lens of psychology. Research portrayed students who did not persist as less able, lacking motivation, and less willing to struggle in order to reap the benefits of graduating from college; rather than looking at possible institutional challenges, the responsibility was placed solely on the student (Tinto, 2007). By the 1970's Tinto's book, *Leaving College* was the first to use a longitudinal model that made connections between the environment of the institution and the individuals who shaped those systems. In the 90's research explained that student involvement with both peers and faculty mattered during the most critical year in college-the first year, as explained by Astin (1993). Involvement with faculty and students during their first year of college had a positive association to retention. Since Astin, research in the field of retention has evolved to include understanding the experiences of students from different backgrounds. Certainly, there is now more awareness of how culture and economics, as well as social, and institutional factors that shape student retention (Tinto, 2007). The present study will attempt to expand awareness of factors that may impact student retention by examining the relationship between majoring in Chicana/o Studies and retention of Chicana/o students.

Traditional persistence theory, like that of Vincent Tinto's (1993) Stages of Passage model argues that students engage in three processes early on in college: separation, transition, and incorporation; however, this model may not apply to all college students. In Tinto's model, separation refers to the college student disassociating with their pre-college community. Transition takes place during and after separation,

when the student lets go of their old norms and behaviors and instead acquires new college norms and behaviors. Lastly, incorporation refers to the process of integrating into various college communities. Yosso (2006) argues that the Stage of Passage model emphasizes assimilation and assumes that once students of color go to college, they disassociate themselves from the communities that they came from. This study may provide data that can support Yosso's suggestion, that rather than disassociating from the community, students who take courses in Chicana/o studies have a place in the university where they can continue their connection to the community, which may impact their retention in college.

Higher education institutions are more diverse than forty years ago and logically if more students of color are admitted into institutions of higher education, then we would expect to have larger numbers of students of color graduating from college. However, this simple suggestion ignores educational experiences that affect students prior to and during college (Solórzano & Villapando, 1998). Despite the growing numbers of Latinas/os being admitted to college, they are the least likely to attain their bachelor's degree (Oseguera, Lockes & Vega, 2009). CSUN is an example of a diversified campus, where Latinos are the majority of the student population, yet continue to have lower retention rates, when compared to their white counterparts (www.csun.edu/~instrsch/2012). By focusing the present study on CSUN Chicana/o Studies majors and college retention, we expect to learn more about possible factors that may be connected to retention of Latina/o students.

Padilla (2007) believes that in order for educators, scholars, and school leaders to better understand the problem of retention of Latinos, they must consider the

sociopolitical, cultural, and psychological facets of Latina/o schooling experiences. Padilla (2007) developed a model that attempts to explain the experiences Latina/o students face throughout their educational process. In this model, academic outcomes are dependent on strategies employed in the macro, meso, and micro context. Padilla described the macro context as encompassing the demographic, immigration, and community issues. The meso context is defined as the environment or educational opportunity structure that Latinos navigate. Last, the micro context consists of the family and institutional climate that affects the educational success of Latinos (Padilla, 2007). Similar to Padilla, Castellanos and Gloria (2007) explore Latina/o student retention through a psychosociocultural framework (PSC), an approach relevant to university employees, as it was originally developed to facilitate interaction between counselors and their Latina/o college students. Through emphasis on the psychological, social, and cultural experiences of Latinas/os, the goal of PSC is to better guide the success of Latina/o students.

In Solórzano and Yosso's (2000) study of the collegiate racial climate, Audre Lorde's and James Banks' definition of racism is consolidated. The following three are identified as indicators of racism, "1) the group believes itself to be superior, 2) the group that believes itself to be superior can only carry out the racist behavior, and, 3) racism affects multiple racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000)." Solórzano and Yosso (2000), emphasize the importance of understanding and analyzing the college racial climate in order to effectively explore the persistence of students of color in college. Although, superficially, there may be visible signs of equalities, it is the invisible racial microaggressions that need to be further understood. Studies on campus climate

find that students who perceive discrimination or bias on the basis of their race, class, gender, or sexual identity are challenged in three ways: 1) cognitively, 2) emotionally, and 3) socially. Due to the difficulties they may encounter, students engage in a conscious and an unconscious struggle with the campus climate that may lead to their decision to leave the school (Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). The proposed study will examine how do Chicana/o Studies majors perceive the environment within Chicana/o Studies and its relationship to their retention.

Rendon (1994) further describes factors that affect the retention of students of color in the higher education. She considers these factors as part of a crisis that exists in higher education. She identifies the following factors as part of the crisis: 1) first generation college attendance, 2) poor academic skills due to tracking and attending under-funded schools, 3) cultural barriers, and 4) in and out of class validation. She states that students of color who are the first to attend college in their family enter college with self-doubt. Since they are new to a new educational institution, they are unaware of school structures. Also, they may be afraid of failure, attending office hours, asking questions in class, and not being considered college material. Their poor academic skills often result in under developed cognitive skills, poor study skills and lack of guidance in creating academic and educational goals. Teachers, professors, and counselors may convey the message to students of color that they can only go so far and that college is not for them. Also, cultural barriers like family codes of loyalty, fear of not returning home and their initial reluctance to leave home all factor in to the retention of students of color. Last, students of color do not feel validated inside and outside the classroom because there is a pressure to assimilate.

Chavez & French (2010) elaborate on the pressures that students of color face, which ultimately affects their retention. There is a certain stress involving awareness of specific stereotypes that others hold of their racial ethnic group. As a result, students of color feel pressure to modify their physical appearance, language use, and social activity. Stereotyped threat conditions lead to anxiety and fear of conforming to these stereotypes, which sometimes lead to confirming stereotypes. An example of a stereotype threat confirmation occurs when taking a test. The student of color who studied very hard in order to ensure that the stereotype of not being intelligent is not confirmed, however, as a result of such stress, the individual does not do well on the test (Chavez & French, 2010).

Pizano (2009), further identified institutional factors that affect the retention of Chicanas/os in higher education including 1) their perception of campus environment and, 2) academic preparation. Glenda Prime (2001) describes these indicators as “deficiency models,” which are utilized to examine the problem of retention of underrepresented students in higher education from a deficit perspective; minorities lacking academic preparation, socio-economic status and social adjustments. Prime suggests that when looking at the problem of “minority retention,” one must consider evaluating the assessment tools used to let a student know of their success in class. Low grade point average is one of the main reasons why students leave college too early, as grades determine their academic standing in the university. However, since grades are used as the most common way of assessing learning, and learning is often times assessed through the method of testing, then low grades represent a mismatch between teaching and learning (Prime, 2001).

Rendon (1994) makes us aware that low retention rates of students of color are not simply just a result of factors related to the student, but also institutional factors. She mentions the following factors as affecting the retention of students of color: 1) majority of faculty in academia are White, 2) Curriculum tends to be Eurocentric, 3) learning in the classroom is passive and competitive, and 4) some faculty hold beliefs that perpetuate negative stereotypes of underrepresented students. These factors all contribute to the campus climate being perceived as racist or indifferent to students of color. This study will examine if majoring in Chicana/o studies at CSUN, where the departmental faculty are Chicana/o and the curriculum is focused on the Chicana/o experience can contribute to positive campus climate that positively affect the retention of Chicana/o students.

Supporting Rendon's (1994) institutional factors affecting the retention of students of color, Delgado Bernal (2002) focuses on understanding how Eurocentric Western assumptions and beliefs that are embedded in the way dominant Western culture constructs the nature of the world and one's experiences in it, are based on white privilege. In a qualitative study, Delgado Bernal references *The Council on Interracial Books for Children* (1977) and defines perspective as "(a) the belief that the perspectives of Euro-Americans is the norm and (b) the practice of ignoring and/or delegitimizing the experiences, motivations, aspirations, and views of people of color." Hence, according to Delgado Bernal (2002), white people in the United States operate from a Eurocentric perspective founded on the assumptions of white superiority, land ownership, and ideals of democracy such as meritocracy, objectivity, and individuality. Therefore, Chicanas/os know and understand that their surroundings are consciously and subconsciously based on these Western Eurocentric beliefs (Delgado Bernal, 2002).

According to Gurin, Dey, Hurtado & Gurin (2002), “structural diversity, informal interactional diversity, co-curricular diversity, and classroom diversity contribute to positive learning outcomes and satisfaction for all students.” Chicano Studies classes, which address the indigenous heritage of Mexican-Americans in the United States, represent an example of classroom diversity. Geneva Gay (2000) agrees with Rendon, as she believes that changes must be made in the classroom in order to improve the conditions of “minority” students. Gay believes that the poor achievement patterns of students of color are too persistent to only represent individual limitations. Rather, Gay believes that the fault lies with in institutional structures, procedures, assumptions, and operational styles of schools, classrooms and society at large.

Gay (2000) believes that a multicultural education can improve race relations and help students gain the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed to participate in cross-cultural interactions and in personal, social, and civic action that will help this country become more democratic and just. Gay describes the interactions between students and teachers in the classroom as “actual sites” where learning success or failure is determined. Students of color are often portrayed negatively in books, television, movies, newspapers and this influences their self-perception (Gay, 2000). Moreover, in the classroom, students of color do not feel validated when racially biased curriculums are taught. This leads to students not performing well on academic tasks. She suggests that when a culturally diverse curriculum is taught in the classroom, students of color have an opportunity to recognize the worth of the information and contributions that their group has made to the fund of knowledge; this produces positive outcomes for students of color in the classroom. The current study will look at CSUN Chicana/o Studies, as a form of

multicultural studies, and consider possible connections to the retention and graduation of Chicanas/os majors.

However, in the schools, the colonization of the mind is continued through the perpetuation of a historical amnesia that renders Latino/indigenous people as “immigrants,” foreigners who have no claim to the Americas, while European Americans are constructed as the natural owners and inheritors of these lands. The rich knowledge, beliefs and worldviews of Chicana/o and Latina/o communities are not validated or taught in the classroom (Delgado Bernal, 2002). Ethnic identity and culture play a large role in the decision-making processes of college students. As Latinas/os navigate the higher education pipeline, they are confronted with institutional customs that are foreign to them, as often those customs are not a reflection of their own traditions. In addition, “assumption-based” practices about students in college do not always apply to them (Torres, 2006).

Yosso (2006) states that Chicanas/os in college, experience higher levels of stress, when compared to White undergraduate students. Chicana/o students are concerned about 1) student load debt and employment to help with minimizing the amount of loans, 2) academic work and socio-academic adjustment, and 3) contributing financial support to their families. One example Yosso shares about Chicanas/os experiencing anxiety is at the beginning of the semester when the student worries about how they will pay for their books, how uncomfortable they will feel when they are the only Chicana/o in their science course, and the guilt they feel for being the only person in their community to have such an opportunity. Daniel Muñoz (as cited in Yosso, 2006), explains that often

Chicanas/os do not realize that the sources of their anxiety, guilt, and unhappiness, have an effect on their academic performance.

Undocumented Latina/o students are very familiar with stress related to finances. Besides all of the race related stressors experienced by Chicanos and Latinos, enrolling in college as an undocumented student places many more challenges in the life of the undocumented college student. This often means living with two identities because undocumented students generally only reveal their identity to close friends and confidants. They must convince their families to allow them to enroll in college and take a risk of being deported. They have heightened financial, academic, emotional and career challenges, leading to very high levels of stress. Enrollment patterns of undocumented students include alternating school-work cycles. One strategy to pay for school may be to work full time in order to save money to pay for a school term, however, only to postpone enrollment the following term when money becomes scarce (Buenavista & Tran, 2009). Unfortunately, since undocumented students remain in the closet, there is limited research pointing to the impact their undocumented status has on their retention (Hernandez et al., 2010).

While Chicana/o Latina/o students experience many challenges navigating the higher education pipeline, there are factors that positively contribute to their retention and graduation in college. In a study, Rendon (1994) interviewed 132 first year college students and found that while white students had little concern about succeeding, students of color expressed concern about their ability to succeed in college. Furthermore, she found that when students of color enter higher education institutions, they have to unlearn their old ways and learn new attitudes, belief systems and values; they find themselves

forced to acculturate in order to succeed. Lacking academic confidence contribute to high levels of psychological distress, despite having met all eligibility requirements to be admitted to the institution that they are attending. It must be noted that this factor is correlated to two institutional factors, 1) overcrowding and 2) underfunding of schools that Latino students generally come from which predisposes them to academic risk prior to entering college (Rodriguez et al, 2000). Rendon recommends that in order for students of color to do well in college, they must be validated both inside and outside of the classroom and interpersonally. She found that even students who were doing poorly academically had the potential to be powerful learners and transform their academic experiences through being validated. She emphasizes that faculty should demonstrate concern for teaching, be personable and approachable, create a classroom structure that validates experiential knowledge and provide meaningful feedback to their students. Colleges and universities must intervene and create academic and social infrastructures that help first generation college students navigate and engage in the campus.

Rendon's findings are supported by Ponjuan (2012) who published an article about research in higher education that examined the institutional and educational benefits of having underrepresented faculty members in institutions of higher education. The article demonstrated that researchers find that there are many benefits to hiring Latino faculty - one benefit is that it improves the retention and degree completion rates of Latinos in higher education because students have faculty of color as role models. Also, faculty of color help students of color have successful undergraduate experiences because students viewed professors as inspirational symbols of college success. Hurtado et al (as cited in Ponjuan 2012) found that the presence of faculty members of color is

necessary in order to create and enhance the diverse educational learning environment and the diversity of faculty members demonstrates an institutional commitment to creating a multicultural learning environment and increasing the retention of students of color.

Ponjuan's (2012) article is supported by Schreiner et al (2011), who conducted a study with sixty-two successful undergraduate students from nine different colleges and universities. This study attempted to identify the attitudes and behaviors of faculty and staff and their impact on the persistence of high-risk students. They identify high-risk college students as those who are first in their family to attend post-secondary education, students with low socioeconomic status, and students of color who enter a predominantly white institution. During interviews, students were asked to identify faculty who influenced their decision to persist. Those faculty mentioned who were mentioned in the interviews were later interviewed by researchers. Through the interviews, seven themes were identified by the researchers that related to positive attitudes and behaviors of personnel that made a difference in the success and persistence of high risk students: 1) a desire to connect with students, 2) being unaware of their influence on students at critical junctures, 3) wanting to make a difference in students' lives, 4) possessing a wide variety of personality styles and strengths perceived by students as genuine and authentic, 5) being intentional about connecting personally with students, 6) different approaches utilized by faculty compared to staff, and 7) differences in the types of behaviors that community college students reported as fostering their success. The faculty and staff interviewed in this study were described by Schreiner et al (2011) as retention agents because they were able to make a significant impact on the students' decision to stay or

leave an institution. Similar to Schreiner's et al (2011) study, this study will give participants an opportunity to describe factors and people at CSUN who they perceive as retention agents.

Chapter 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In conceptualizing the proposed study that examines the impact of majoring in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN on student retention, it is important to select a framework that is aligned with the philosophy of Chicana/o Studies and that is also relevant across disciplines. In addition, this framework must not look at Chicana/o students from a deficit perspective and should provide solutions or further recommendations for others to explore. It is for that reason that this study will utilize Critical Race Theory as a theoretical framework.

Critical Race Theory is a theory used to study the intersection between race, racism and power. It begins with a premise that race and racism are prevalent and permanent in the United States. It discusses race as a social construct. The system of racism functions to oppress people of color while giving unearned privilege to white people. CRT considers issues that both the civil rights and ethnic studies discourse cover, as well as broader perspectives including economic, history, context, group and self-interest, and the unconscious (Delgado & Stefanic, 2001).

Initially, Critical Race Theory focused on legal studies, but over time it has been referenced in different disciplines. As it relates to institutions of higher education, CRT concentrates on uncovering how race and racism exist in educational structures, processes, policy and discourses, and how it functions in a manner that may oppress and marginalize certain groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000). Delgado Bernal demonstrates why Critical Race Theory provides an adequate lens, when doing qualitative research in the field of

education. “CRT and LatCrit in education can be defined as a framework that challenges the dominant discourse on race, gender, and class as it relates to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000).”

Solórzano & Yosso (2000) describe the five tenets that form the perspectives, research methods, and pedagogy of critical race theory in education: 1) the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism; 2) the challenge to dominant society, 3) commitment to social justice, 4) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and 5) the interdisciplinary perspective. These five tenets help challenge existing education scholarship and help shed light about the educational injustices that exist, through using the perspectives of communities of color. These five tenets as described by Solórzano (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001; Solórzano & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, 2006), can inform this qualitative study, as Chicana/o studies embodies all five tenets.

The first tenet, the centrality and intersectionality of race and racism, allows us to see how Chicana/o studies as a discipline is a direct result of the racial disparities that exist in institutions of higher education (El Plan de Santa Barbara, 1969) and its objective is to systematically examine and dismantle institutional racism (Hu-DeHart 2004, as cited in Sleeter). As Chicanas/os navigate the K-12 educational system, they are taught a Eurocentric curriculum that does not reflect their history and culture. By the time the few Chicana/o students reach college, they have a negative self-perception and internalize the racism experienced in their K-12 education. However, through Chicana/o Studies courses, Chicana/o Latina/o students learn about issues of race and racism, and in the process learn a language that can help them understand the racism they have experienced.

This new awareness becomes an intellectual tool that can help students ease the process of dealing with racism on their campus and often leads to a positive sense of self (Torres & Hernandez, 2007, as cited in Nunez, 2012). Sadly, outside of Chicana/o Studies, students of color continue to deal with institutional racism on campus. At CSUN, Chicana/o Latina/o students represented the largest ethnic group, yet the faculty on campus does not reflect the student body on campus, as only 11% of all faculty are Latina/o (www.csun.edu/~instrsch/2012). When 68 percent of the faculty at CSUN is white (www.csun.edu/~instrsch/2012), students of color continue will continue to deal with the stereotyped threat conditions that may affect their persistence in college (Chavez & French, 2010). This tenet connects to the current study, as it will examine whether or not the intellectual tools gained through Chicana/o Studies aid the student's path to graduation.

The second tenet of CRT is the challenge to dominant ideology. A main outcome of Chicana/o Studies research is to challenge dominant ideology (Yosso, 2006). It came about as a counter to the traditional mainstream curriculum that is dominated by Eurocentric perspectives that marginalizes scholarship by and about people of color (Sleeter, 2011). While the system of education in the United States claims to have in place a system that is objective, provides meritocratic, color-blind, race neutral and equal (Yosso, 2006), it persistently studies Chicana/o students from a deficit perspective (Delgado Bernal, 2002). The Chicana/o Studies major and courses at CSUN question colonization and challenge Eurocentric perspectives and racism. Courses such as Chicana/o Studies 452: American Colonialism and the Chicano/a, Chicana/o Studies 401: Pre-Cuahtemoc Meso-American Civilization, Chicana/o Studies 470: Cultural

Differences and the Chicano/a (www.csun.edu/~instrsch/2012) are centered on the experiences and culture of the Chicana/o student, and Nuñez (2012) study concluded that when that takes place, students often feel as the insider. This study will consider how the CSUN Chicana/o Studies course content impacted their college experience.

The third tenet is the commitment to social justice. Critical Race Theory is committed to advancing a social justice agenda in schools and in the community (Yosso, 2006). Chicana/o Studies serves as a tool in institutions of higher education that can address the needs of the community. The founding of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN was based on the notion of access to higher education. It was born out of social struggle and a product of the Civil Right era of the 1960's. At that time, the average level of education for Mexican Americans was an eight-grade level and the dropout rate was over sixty percent. In the Los Angeles Unified School District, there was there was an increase in the number of enrolled Mexican American students between 1960 to 1970, as there was a percentage increase from 10 percent to 22 percent. Unfortunately, the Mexican American population was not being prepared to attend college nor did they have teachers or courses that reflected their experience. Chicana/o Studies was perceived as a solution to address the many issues faced by Chicana/o students, not just how to access institutions of higher education but also graduate and prepare students to return to their communities (Acuña, 2011). This study will investigate students' perceptions about the role of Chicana/o Studies in their retention and graduation from college.

The fourth CRT tenet is centrality of experiential knowledge. In the discipline of Chicana/o Studies, counter-story telling, *testimonios*, and personal narratives, account for emotional intelligence, as these forms of sharing personal experience can serve as

therapeutic emotional outlets that acknowledge students of color as holders of and creators of knowledge (Hurtado, 2005). These relevant topics provide Chicana/o students with knowledge that resonates with them and their families, in addition to providing the student with a perspective of an insider, in other words, being able to share the experience with the authors and characters being studied (Sleeter, 2011). Courses in Chicana/o Studies give students an opportunity to engage in service learning. Service learning is a high impact practice that gives students an opportunity to directly experience the issues they are studying in the classroom and furthermore to bring their community experiences back into the classroom. This often leads to students being able to decide a career path and to set goals for their future. This tenet relates to the study, because service learning is a high impact practice. Participants will be able to share to what degree their service learning impacted their college experience, and whether or not that aided their path towards graduation.

The last and fifth tenet is the interdisciplinary perspective. El Plan de Santa Barbara (1969), called for the implementation of Chicana/o Studies in institutions of higher education “in all disciplines and in all areas, involve redefinition, reinterpretation, and most importantly a premise for the above two, it involves a change of framework (Macias, 1971).” According to the CSUN Chicana/o Studies website, the courses offered in the department reflect a multidisciplinary approach to understanding the histories, politics, culture, language and education of the Chicana/o Latina/o community. An interdisciplinary approach can be defined as “the conceptual and integration of more than one discipline to find solutions to a complex problem” (Sivagurunathan, 2012, p.16). Research has found that courses that offer a multi-disciplinary approach in higher

education create critical thinkers, communication skills, appreciation of diversity and understanding of social responsibility. This is related to the study, as participants will have an opportunity to discuss the impact of Chicana/o Studies' multi-disciplinary approach on their persistence in the university.

Chapter 4

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how majoring in Chicana/o Studies at the California State University, Northridge impacts the student's college experience and retention. In order to understand the impacts, I conducted a qualitative research study. The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods defines qualitative research as umbrella term used for an array of strategies used for conducting inquiry that is aimed at understanding how human beings understand, experience, interpret, and produce the social work. There are various methodologies used when conducting qualitative research, including, but not limited to phenomenology, grounded theory, participatory inquiry, ethnography, narrative and discourse analysis and interview (Sandelowski, 2003). Interviewing is the most frequently used research method when conducting qualitative research. The process involves the interviewer and interviewee dialoguing in a conversation, in which the interviewer asks the interviewee questions which are focused on a certain topic, then listens and records the answer (Warren, 2003).

When conducting qualitative research, Rodriguez (2010) emphasizes the importance of building relationships with the interviewees in order to build a collective space and break down the hierarchies that are pre-established between the researcher and the researched. This is a pre-established practice used by feminist researchers who often include a reflexive methodology in their research process in order to consider issues of power, active listening, narrative and discourse and interviewing ethics. While Rodriguez (2010) understands that the majority of scholars believe that limiting one's interaction with the interviewee is necessary in order to ensure the interview is not distorted or that

the participants are not distracted, she argues that through sharing experiences, as well as practicing reflexivity during the research process, several purposes are served when interviewing marginalized students. Reflexivity can provide a space to affirm the lived experiences and knowledge of students of color, as well as serving as a means of empowering students of color during the data-collection process are served (Rodriguez, 2010).

Rodriguez (2010) used a reflexive methodology while conducting a study across a university campus with self-identified Chicana/o Latina/o and African American college students. The interviews lasted between one to two hours and students discussed topics such as experiences with racism and discrimination with professors, types of support services, and relations with white students. She found that a reflexive methodology worked well in her qualitative study because it allowed for a holistic process to take place. She first identified the research problem, and then she conducted the interviews as conversations between two equals. She emphasized that the conversational interviews worked well in the research process because the interview space was more comfortable, as it provided a space for sharing stories.

A reflexive methodology lend itself well to this qualitative study for two reasons: 1) the theoretical framework of this study is Critical Race Theory, which validates storytelling as a method of understanding the experiences of marginalized communities, and furthermore, allowing the storyteller to heal in the process of sharing, and 2) as a Chicana/o Studies major, and, now a graduate student of Chicana/o Studies, in the process of sharing my story was able to help the participants feel comfortable and understand our shared experience.

Rodriguez (2010) states that a reflexive methodology is a communal process because it requires that the researcher be attentive to the structural, political and cultural environments of the researcher and participants, as well as a transformative process for the researcher, participant and community of knowledge builders.

Sample

For this study, the sample was restricted to CSUN alumni who graduated within the last five years and majored in Chicana/o Studies. One of the main reasons why I elected to interview recent graduates was because it was important for alumni to reflect back on their experiences in the department and in their Chicana/o studies courses after the fact. Of the six alumni that I interviewed, I attempted to find alumni with varied experiences and considered participants that were 1) undocumented, 2) direct entry or transfer student, 3) veteran, 4) parent, 5) student activist, and 6) commuter, in an attempt to represent the various populations within the department of Chicana/o Studies. Additionally, I thought that it was important to maintain gender balance and as a result three males and three females were interviewed for this study.

Since the sample for this study (N=6) was small, participants were recruited to this study through participants with whom I had already made contact and used their social networks to refer other people potential participants. I also emailed recent CSUN alumni to share names of other recent Chicana/o studies alumni who may be interested in participating in this study. After participants were recruited and agreed to be part of the study, a two-hour meeting block was set up for the interview with potential participants. On the day of the interview, the first five minutes were devoted to inform the subject on the purpose, process and procedures of the research project, including the audio taping of

the interview. Additionally, I shared with participants my background and interest in the research project. After the overview of the research project, an additional five minutes were provided to study participants to read over the consent form and sign the proper documentation. Before beginning the audio taped interview, the participant was reminded that all identifiable information gathered during the interview would be changed or removed from the study. During the next 30 to 60 minutes, the participant was asked to answer the following open-ended questions: 1) Why did you choose to major in Chicana/o studies? 2) How did majoring in Chicana/o Studies at the California State University, Northridge impact your college experience? 3) Do you believe that majoring in Chicana/o Studies aided you in your path towards graduation? Why or why not? 4) In your experience, was there a difference in taking Chicana/o Studies courses and courses outside of the department? If so, can you elaborate? 5) Can you discuss the impact of participating in the service learning course through Chicana/o Studies? 6) Can you discuss the interdisciplinary aspect of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN, and whether or not it had an impact on your college experience?

At the end of the interview, ten minutes were devoted to gather recommendations on how to improve the interview process, in addition to providing the participants with time to make any closing comments. After the first interviews were completed, transcribed and coded, I conducted follow-up interviews with all of the participants and raised questions that provided me with details about the common themes. Both interviews with participants lasted an average of one hour and a half for a total of nine hours of participant interviews.

Data Analysis Methods

After all six interviews were completed, all data was transcribed. By analyzing the individual interview transcriptions, I was able to create a coding system that aided the process identifying common themes across all interviews. Once those themes were identified, quotes were pulled from the transcriptions that supported the research questions. Furthermore, literature was used to support the findings.

Ethics

As a researcher, I respected the participant's rights and privacy. In order to minimize any discomfort when discussing their experiences as Chicana/o Studies majors, the questions in this study were intentionally open-ended to allow participants to interpret and answer the question according to their level of comfort. Participants who were concerned about others being able to identify them through their responses, were reminded that they would be given pseudonyms in the study report. All identifiable information that could be linked to the participants was changed or removed. All names, including those of CSUN faculty mentioned during interviews, were replaced with pseudonyms. A list linking the code and participants' identifiable information were kept separate from the research data. The audio was stored on a laptop computer that is password protected; then transcribed and erased at the end of the study. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies the subject will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without the subject's separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about the subject.

Chapter 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS

“Chicano Studies really gave me something to carry with me for the rest of my life.”- Enrique

The purpose of this research was to explore the impact on the college experience of students who majored in Chicana/o studies at CSUN. Also, the interviews sought to understand more about the relationship between majoring in Chicana/o Studies and the path towards college retention and graduation. Through the six qualitative interviews, ALL participants affirmed that Chicana/o Studies at CSUN aided their path towards graduation. Furthermore, there were three themes in the CSUN Chicana/o Studies Program at CSUN that the participants described as having impacted their college experience: 1) the role of community, 2) the professor-student relationship, and 3) the critical pedagogy practiced in the classroom. Further, all of the participants identified these factors as having helped them form a sense of purpose.

Participants

Lisa, is a single mother who transferred from Ventura Community College to CSUN in the Fall of 2004 as a Chicana/o Studies major. While in school, she commuted every day from Ventura County to the San Fernando Valley. She is the first in her family to attend college. While in high school, Lisa had a 1.87 GPA which made her ineligible to graduate. However, since her high school counselor did not notify her of her ineligibility, by law she was allowed to graduate. After her high school graduation, she described herself as having “no sense of direction, no guidance, and low self-esteem.” While at Ventura Community College, she considered herself “fortunate” to have a good counselor that helped her transfer. Once she got admitted CSUN, she felt it was

necessary to receive her diploma in order to be a role model to future generations. Lisa graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Chicana/o Studies in 2008 and was later admitted to the Chicana/o Studies Master's program at CSUN. Lisa decided not to continue in the Master's program at CSUN and instead enrolled at CSU Channel Islands to obtain her credentials to become a Special Education teacher. She currently serves as a substitute teacher at her local elementary school district.

Enrique transferred from Fresno City College to CSUN in 2008. He is the first in his immediate family to attend college but also mentioned that it was his aunts who encouraged him to transfer to CSUN because they were alumni. He decided to attend CSUN because of the great reputation of the Chicana/o Studies program, and to the short distance between school and home; it was important for him to remain close to his family. As a student, Enrique was an active member of MEChA de CSUN and Ballet Folklorico de CSUN. Enrique graduated in 2011 with a major in Chicana/o Studies and at the time of the interview was unemployed, actively seeking employment.

Victoria was the only participant who entered CSUN as a freshman. She is the first in her family to attend college; her older sister dropped out of high school. At the time she enrolled in college, she was undocumented and as a result struggled financially to pay for school as she was not eligible for financial aid or employment. Her parents paid her tuition and housing each semester; they became her motivation to attain a bachelor's degree. Victoria's goal is to make sure that she will be able to repay her parents the money they spent on her education. As a student, she was an active member of the Movimiento Estudiantil Chicana/o de Aztlan (MEChA) and helped coordinate the youth conference. It was MEChA members at CSUN that encouraged her to take

Chicana/o Studies courses, and simultaneously discouraged her from joining a sorority. Victoria graduated from CSUN in the Fall of 2008 with a double major in Chicana/o Studies and Child Development. During the time of the interview, she was struggling to financially, as she only had a part time job. Most recently, Victoria received her Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) work permit, which provided her with a social security number and a work permit; she now struggles to balance her multiple part time jobs.

Jorge transferred from East Los Angeles College as a Chicana/o Studies major. Jorge described himself as not being a dedicated student. While in high school, he felt that he was just “going through the motions” so he went to school in order to “keep his parent off his back.” His lack of interest in school led him to continuation school where he had an opportunity to take a Chicana/o Studies class that reawakened his passion for learning. However, he did not graduate from high school, and instead enrolled in the military. While at war, the racism he experienced led him to read about Chicano & Latino history, which allowed him to think critically about the war. Upon his return, he enrolled at community college and was later able to transfer. After graduation in 2009, Jorge was admitted to the Chicana/o Studies Master’s program and within two years successfully completed his M.A. degree. At the time of our meeting, Jorge had the opportunity to return to teach at his community college through an internship program. At the end of the interview he handed me a copy of a published article he wrote in which he discussed his experience in the military. This article was assigned to the students in his Chicana/o Studies course.

Gloria was a transfer student from Los Angeles Valley College. She is the first in her family to attend college. Her passion for the field of Chicana/o Studies began at the community college level when she enrolled in several courses that made her realize her passion for art history. As a student at CSUN, she was involved in MEChA and was politically involved as she protested the school budget cuts. After earning degree in Chicana/o Studies in 2009, Gloria was also admitted to the CSUN Master's degree program. During the time of interview, Gloria was not enrolled in courses, as she had recently given birth to her first child. However, she expressed interest in returning to complete her degree in order to be able to return to community college and teach in order to inspire students like her.

Last of the study participants, Francisco transferred from Los Angeles Valley College and was inspired to major in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN because his interest developed while enrolled in a high school Mexican American history course. While a student, Francisco was a very active member of MEChA, which he described as going hand in hand with his Chicana/o Studies courses because what he learned in the classroom informed his activism on campus and in the community. During his senior year, Francisco participated in the Mc Nair program, which helps first generation college students prepare for research at the graduate level and apply to graduate school. Francisco obtained his bachelor's degree in Chicana/o Studies during the summer of 2011. He is the first in his family to obtain a college degree and also to be admitted to a graduate program. At the time of the interview, Francisco was getting ready to complete his Master's degree in Latin American Studies.

The following narrative describes the finding from the study's key emergent themes, which are: 1) student service learning in the community, 2) the professor-student relationship, and 3) the critical pedagogy practiced in the Chicana/o Studies classroom. Additionally, the analysis of the data is presented with the findings.

Community

When asked about the impact of majoring in Chicana/o Studies, all participants mentioned the service-learning component of Chicana/o Studies curriculum at CSUN, otherwise known as Barrio Studies. The College Learning for the New Global Century (AAC&U, 2007) defines service learning as one of the five high-impact practices that increase persistence of “minority students.” Service learning is an instructional strategy defined as field based “experiential learning’ with community partners is an instructional strategy—and, is usually a required part of the course. The idea is to give students direct experience with issues they are studying in the curriculum and with ongoing efforts to analyze and solve problems in the community. These programs model the idea that giving something back to the community is an important college outcome, and that working with community partners is good preparation for citizenship, work, and life. Participants elaborated on their experiences in the community and discussed how their experiences in the community helped them realize their role in the community and their desire to impact community and future generations.

Service learning in the community

The majority of the participants described their experience in the Barrio Studies course and other similar courses as being given the opportunity to learn about community issues inside the classroom, while also having the opportunity to participate in

community organizations that allowed them to play a role in addressing the community needs. For Victoria, learning about the community conditions helped her identify a path after graduation:

Being Chicano studies, you know, like pushed me to actually, like, graduate and to look forward to grad school, cuz [sic] me learning about our community and taking Salazar's class and learning about how students are getting pushed out of high school made me, like, think of a path I wanted to take, and, which was graduating, and after that starting grad school and studying to become a high school counselor even do social work or psychology or something.

Victoria's words are forceful here, as she uses the term "pushed" to describe her sense of needing to graduate and go on to graduate school. She makes a direct connection between the classroom content, high school push-out rates, and the need to do something related to the issue. Victoria elaborated on what Salazar was teaching in Barrio Studies. "She was teaching us about the school pushout/dropout rates." Prior to Chicana/o Studies, Victoria noted that she was not aware of this information. For example, she learned about schools being funded through property taxes, which affects the types of resources schools receive. For Victoria, learning about the unequal educational system and conducting high school presentations through MEChA, gave her the opportunity to bring awareness about higher education to Los Angeles Unified School District students by sharing topics such as: A-G requirements, classes and tests to take, how to apply to college, financial aid, college life. This experience made her realize that she wanted to be an example to high school students. Prior to being involved with the community, she was not open about her immigration status. However, in the process of being involved in the community, she

realized that she needed to be open about her undocumented status in order let other students know about the AB 540 law and to allow other undocumented students “to have a person that they can relate to,” and maybe encourage some of them to apply to college.

Similarly, Lisa’s outlook on Chicana/o Studies courses was that it was really important for students to understand the importance of community and the urgency of community needs:

What we learned in Chicano Studies is the community needs and so we learn about...let’s say, in the field of education, we learn about the high dropout rates and why we are dropping out and we learn about the low self-esteem that we have and the and the stereotypes that or the, I guess, the internalized oppression.

Lisa indicated that her learning in Chicana/o Studies took place by personalizing the information she was learning in the course. For example, reading articles about the dominant culture and Eurocentric curriculum made her understand why her experience in the K-12 system were “so tragic” and why she was so disconnected from the content she was learning. Now as a teacher, she views her role in the community as being able to provide her students with what she did not know when she was their age. She models her teaching after Dr. Zamora by asking questions, providing validation, and engaging students with culturally relevant course content.

Gloria, also expressed that the Barrio Studies course helped her broaden her understanding connecting to the humanity of others in the community:

Of not just your connection to community, but overall sets a course, I think, of wanting to not only better that community, but do whatever in your power to

ensure that it continues down that path. It's going back to seeing the human in one another.

Since she was a little girl, Gloria always wanted to be a teacher and at the same time loved the role of student. "I just wanted to learn to teach, and teach to learn." Through the Barrio Studies class, Gloria had an opportunity to work with Agua University, which helped her strengthen that love that she felt as a little girl:

Because it provided me with a platform to interact with high school students and to learn about some of the issues dealing with water in my community that I had no knowledge of. So it helped me venture into a different understanding of my community and reinforced the importance of maintaining an active role. My role is one of active participation, learning, providing guidance/mentorship, and just being an informed good citizen.

Gloria's words are very powerful. Given the opportunity, Gloria was to learn about new issues in her community and then went on to connect her love of environment with her passion for teaching, mentoring and social activism. Through the Barrio Studies course, she was able to fully embrace her role in the community as an active participant and marker of history.

Before taking a Chicana/o Studies class in high school, Jorge had always had a negative perspective of his community and "our people." In high school he learned about the walkouts and he felt like he finally had something positive to relate to, to be proud of. While in the military, Jorge knew he wanted to go to college and major in Chicana/o Studies "because I knew the power of Chicana/o Studies. Chicana/o Studies, it was the seed. It has an effect on people." Having majored in Chicane/o Studies at CSUN, Jorge

describes that different Chicana/o courses helped affirm his role in the community as feeling as though it was his duty to do something positive, whether it was going to a protest or getting the younger people involved. He perceives his role in the community as being able to:

Motivate students and to empower them to... graduate and go to college and not just for yourself but to share the knowledge that you are gaining to benefit the rest of the community. To me...that was very important. They have negative stereotypes about us and how they understand our community.

Jorge was empathetic that his role in the community was to lead by example, which to him also meant getting his bachelor's degree. It was also important for him to share the knowledge he gained through his Chicana/o Studies courses because he understood that not everyone in his community had access to such knowledge. Jorge used the term "seed" to describe the impact of Chicana/o Studies suggesting that Chicana/o Studies could make a significant difference in people's lives. Jorge's sense of importance of Chicana/o Studies is consistent with findings by Hurtado (2005) who describes the potential of Chicana/o Studies courses and writings to transform student's consciousness.

Enrique also spoke about furthering his understanding about his role in the community. "Chicana/o Studies helped me put together the puzzle. Everything became clear to me." Prior to arriving at CSUN, Enrique felt that it was his responsibility to be able to get out of his community in order to attain an education and then come back "to make my community better. Twenty years of being in my community, not much has changed." He now understands his role as being a leader, and for him, the best way of

leading is through example by going to college and attaining a degree. “It starts with helping each other. Like for example just by answering questions about going to the university and leading by example.”

As a first generation student, and one of the very few students in his community to have a bachelor’s degree, Enrique identified his role in the community as a leader who felt that it is his responsibility to return to his hometown to be a role model to those who had not had the opportunities he did. His willingness to share his experience in navigating the educational pipeline and by articulating the value of education, Enrique believes in his potential to lead and have a meaningful impact in his community.

Research in the area service learning suggests that when college students participate in service learning course and have the opportunity to give back to their communities, their consciousness level about community issues is raised (Rhoads, 1997 as cited in Nunez, 2009). Additionally, research suggests that there is a positive relationship between service learning and student retention, as service learning provides students an opportunity to engage in collegiate activities and student engagement is one of the most persistent predictors in college persistence (Tinto, 1997). The data collected in this study is consistent with the available research on the role of service learning in college retention, as all the study participants discussed the having gained awareness about community issues through participating in Barrio Studies. Further, participants reported a sense of commitment to return to their communities to give back. Participants in this study indicated that earning their bachelor’s degree was an indirect outcome of service learning.

Desire to Impact Community/Future Generation

All participants in the study talked about a desire to impact their community and the future generations. By learning about the different community conditions, participants felt that it was important for them to obtain their bachelor's degree in order to go back to the community and help address the needs addressed in the classroom. Enrique described Chicana/Chicano Studies as "being about the community and about being part of the community." He felt that he had to pick up where other generations had left off and couldn't finish doing and to this day continue to do.

Jorge stated that he majored in Chicano Studies because he would like to teach Chicana/o Studies in order to someday have the opportunity to motivate somebody and help them to go to college.

Maybe there is some knucklehead out there you know. They take a class. Maybe I will help them change. You know like maybe, you know they won't change right away, but you know, it's better, you know going around doing some of the things they are doing with their friends but they are going to help them change like think twice put a little conscious in them. That's, that's, I think that it starts in people you know cuz [sic] it happened to me you know, cuz [sic], ... believe me, a lot of people, they helped me out when I was younger. They, they're kind of like, "Wow! You went to college, man?" You know, things like that.

Jorge felt that he was being motivated by professors because they were pushing him to go out to the community in order to be an example to the community. In essence, he felt that he did not graduate for his own personal gain, but rather for the community. Jorge was also specific in naming the power of a course to build consciousness in a student. He also

noted the potential to serve as a role model to others because he had attended college. His quote completes a circle in which he starts by noting that he may be able to help others through the classes he teaches and then he closes by noting that a lot of people helped him when he was younger. This quote also articulates Jorge's sense of capacity to create social change.

Francisco also articulated similar sentiments, where he notes that he felt motivated to graduate because he knew that once he graduated he would be able to give back to his community. His motivation was to be a role model to the community where he came from.

You can be able to give back to your community where you come from ... as you contribute to your scholarship because then I would be able to create my own my own research based on my interest which would contribute to the existing literature or literacy studies. So I would be able to, I guess in a sense, provide something new. So like, I feel like I'm contributing to the greater community in that sense.

Through this statement, Francisco defined community broadly to include the academe. He identified knowledge creation as a way of giving back to the community. In this case, Francisco identified his academic contributions as important because they are a reflection of his interests and it will add to a body of literature that has traditionally offered Eurocentric perspective (Sleeter, 2011). Using the Critical Race Theory lens to analyze his statement, his research contributions will add to a body of work that often views

Chicanas/os from a deficit perspective, and instead create knowledge that will allow college students to be the insider (Nunez, 2011).

Both Lisa and Gloria are continuing this legacy by working at their local community schools and utilizing their knowledge gained in Chicana/o Studies to impact their communities. Lisa stated that she needed to earn her diploma in order to be effective with the younger generation- her nieces, nephews, and, children in the community who are growing up, “so that they don’t have go through what I did.” She was especially motivated to make an impact on future generations because she has a young daughter. Having come this far, she knew she needed to keep going to make it to the finish line. For Lisa, it was the only hope to be independent and care for her family and also to make her parents proud.

When discussing the desire to impact future generations, Gloria mentioned her last job at Los Angeles Valley College as a college recruiter,

I can't help but want to provide whatever help I can to future generations to see them achieve their dreams and goals in life just as my professors helped guide and teach me through my own academic experience. It's continuing the good that someone else has bestowed on you to help you succeed that will in turn help others pay it forward.

All participants were motivated to graduate in order to impact future generations. As Gloria mentioned in the above statement, it is important to her to help future generations, just as previous generations, professors, helped her in her academic

trajectory. In a sense, her motivation is to return to her community to share what she was able to receive.

Professor-Student Relationship

“I really feel like they have a lot of love for us and they want us to succeed really bad.”- Lisa

An important factor described by participants as aiding their path towards graduation was having an inclusive and welcoming departmental environment; participants described professors as playing a role in creating a welcoming environment. In a study, Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler, (1996) found that the college experiences students face inside the institution have been shown to affect their adjustment to and persistence in college more than their backgrounds (preparation, first generation status).

Participants elaborated on this professor-student relationship by describing it as having an impact during their college experience because participants had 1) the ability to identify with professors, 2) received mentoring and guidance from professors, and 3) professors allowed for a holistic relationship to exist.

Student identification with Professors

Participants in this study felt that they were able to relate to the professors because they had a role model to help them believe that it was possible to attain a bachelor's degree. Participants also felt that they identified with their professors, by nature of being Chicana/o. Lisa described her positive experience with CSUN Chicana/o Studies faculty as follows:

I felt like I identified with them so much that... It was a very safe experience for me and that's important because I am foreign to college and nobody in my family has been to college and so I felt like I didn't have anywhere to go.

For Lisa, the professor's ethnic background was not the only reason she identified with them. She deepened her response by explaining that professors were:

Not trying to overcomplicate things. They cared, classrooms were smaller, they were funny had a sense of humor. They were personal and the content in the classroom was personal. They hugged you; they talked to you outside of class, and in the lobby.

Lisa suggested that her relationship with the professors in Chicana/o Studies was significant because as a first generation college student, who was new to higher education, she felt safe and cared for. She then suggested that her relationship with professors was not bureaucratic. She notes that the content in the classroom was "personal" suggesting that she could relate the content to her lived experiences. Her comments about ability to maintain relationships with professors outside of class is significant because research suggests that increased connections with faculty inside of the classroom result in positive college experience (Astin, 1993). For example, Schreiner et al's (2011) study found that the student and professor relationship outside of the classroom also made an impact on the Latino college experience, as it sends the student a message that the institution values them and is committed to their collegiate success. Other literature suggests that having a good relationship with professors outside of the classroom was an important indicator of academic success (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004).

Like Lisa, other participants felt that professors were very approachable, as they did not create a hierarchy between students and the professors. Francisco compared his experience in the CSUN Chicana/o Studies Department to other departments on campus

where he occasionally took courses and felt that in other departments at CSUN, students only got the opportunity to speak to professors inside the classroom. He believes that his ability to approach his professors outside of the classroom allowed him to personally develop a relationship with professors, which allowed him to feel like he was not just one “who just walks through the door and graduates,” but rather, he felt a “connection.”

Francisco was able to build his initial relationships with professors inside the classroom:

Then being in class and spending time with them I was able to build a relationship. What helped build that relationship was being Chicano because it was a university and a higher level of education and knowing that I was going to graduate from college...it helps to create those networks. After graduation, now I know that I can go kick it with them. So I guess because I want to go into teaching, then I saw them as a role model... it is the relationship that I had with them that helped me want to be like them and be that role model to other students. The same background, the same experience, so that was the primary thing that we had in common, but then past that maybe cuz [sic] they were older and you could see them like a relative. What I think of, is...them being there and showing interest and seeing that they were going to help me do the work that I wanted to do.

Francisco noted that he was aware of the importance of building a relationship with his professors because as a college graduate, developing networks was important to his future success. Additionally, his professors motivated him because he viewed them as

role models and instilled in him a desire to impact other students by emulating his professors. Francisco described commonalities and differences with Chicana/ Studies professors, all which created a feeling of being amongst family. Francisco shared that his professors were available and interested in ensuring her personal and academic success. Research has found that the type of relationship that Francisco described has the potential to make a difference in the student's ability to succeed in college (Schreiner et al, 2011).

Victoria described the immediate connection between her and the Chicana/o studies professors. She stated that in "Chicano Studies they are like very, you feel "it" right away, maybe because, you know everybody is brown, and like, you feel like family." She moved on to say:

When I was a student, or when you were a student, you know we go through a lot of stuff and they're like, they're just willing to share their time. And, you know, cuz [sic] some of them really are passionate for Chicano Studies, and um, I think that is very, like, empowering and just like, just to have them there you.

Victoria discussed the challenges of being a student and professors' willingness to "share their time." She also discusses the professors' passion for Chicana/o Studies as something that she found empowering. Schreiner et al (2011) found that faculty and staff who made a difference in the success of high risk students exhibited several qualities, one of them being the passion for the work and for their students. In this case, Victoria acknowledged how the Chicana/o Studies professors' passion impacted her by supporting her feelings of empowerment.

Victoria further described having an advantage by being a member of MEChA, because MEChistas had the opportunity to work closely with professors. One thing that made her really comfortable was that professors always had their doors open, and they are always there to actually help their students. “They are willing to listen to you, about things that they are experiencing as students and as a person in their personal life.”

Victoria shared an instance during her senior year while taking the senior seminar with Professor Jimenez. As a student leader, Victoria was involved in many things and was falling behind her work. When it was time to turn in her homework, she realized that Dr. Jimenez was concerned when she asked to speak to her. When the professor asked her what was going on, she realized that her professor was genuinely interested in hearing about what was happening to her. Victoria, openly shared about her personal and academic struggles and by the end of their meeting, Dr. Jimenez was helping her get back on track in order to finish the course and ultimately fulfill her requirements to graduate. “She was willing to push me to do my best” because she was able to identify with what she was experiencing as a student.

Jorge described some of his Chicana/o Studies professors as “down to earth.” He described them as treating people with respect. “They are professors and they have Ph.D.’s. They have a good work ethic. They go an extra mile for you. I was able to relate to them.” Jorge stated that their background played a role in being able to connect to them. While in the military, Jorge described having a tighter bond with other *Raza* (Chicano Soldiers) because he was able to relate to them.

And it is the same thing in Chicana/o Studies... I was able to see myself. That made me feel even more comfortable, I did not feel like they have to ... have a professional attitude, they could be personal and still get the job done. What made me, umm, comfortable, I was able to speak Spanish with them. You are home.

He notes that his Chicana/o Studies professors did not create “professional” distancing between them, but instead related in a personal way and still address what needed to be done as part of the course requirements. He also notes that he felt comfort in being able to speak Spanish, noting how this helped him feel at home. The literature in retention notes that having a sense of belonging is important to the success of the college student (Tinto, 1993). However, for the Chicana/o, having a sense of belonging can be difficult because academia’s dominant culture often reflects Eurocentric and upper class perspective, in which the Chicana/o student may feel like an outsider (Zurita, 2005). For Jorge, the ability to speak Spanish with his professors contributed to his sense of belonging in the university.

Enrique was able to identify with his professors because they were educated and he was raised around people that were educated. “They were complex and in terms of life.” He identified with their critical thinking and complex thought process because he was aware of current affairs and therefore was able to engage with them in conversations outside of the classroom material. Furthermore, he felt that he was able to identify with professors because he is from:

The hood and professors are from the hood and that also made it easier to identify with them. Like for example being interested in low-rider culture. It was more on

a personal than an academic level. I just identified with them as people, but from there it went to an academic level.

Enrique described being able to identify with professors, as he aware that they came from neighborhoods similar to his own. He was able to connect with professors because of the personal conversations that took place during their meetings outside of the classroom. These informal conversations then moved into academic conversations. Schreiner et al (2011) noted that often times high risk students do not take initiative to see professors during office hours in order to seek help. However, in Enrique's case, his initial ability to relate to the professor supported their later conversations were related to academics. Student retention research has demonstrated the potential impact of strong professor-student relationships (Schreiner et al, 2011).

Mentoring/Guidance

All participants described their Chicana/o Studies professors as having provided some form of mentorship and guidance through the college process. Participants, all of whom identified as first generation college students, felt that their professors were there to help them out and played a role in guiding them through the process of becoming acquainted with the graduation requirements and the college experience in general. Enrique noted, "I am foreign to college and nobody in my family has been to college and so I felt like I didn't have anywhere to go... I mean for counseling I had a Chicano counselor."

Enrique also mentioned that professors provided him with guidance on time management and sharing their perspectives on how it should be done. In the following narrative, Enrique describes his relationship with Professor Saul Gonzalez:

This is what has worked best for us. Like for example, professors would take their time to lay out the mechanics of things, and role model the assignments, academically, this is how you write an essay, study habits-- that type of mentorship. Organizational skills...because the professors had experience in organizing in the community. Saul, I would sit with him for hours where I would ask him all sort of questions to receive guidance in life. And based on his guidance, I would decide what was the next step for me.

The type of mentorship that Enrique described has been found to have an impact on student persistence (Tinto, 1993). “Effective mentoring involves not only the transfer of academic skills, attitudes, and behaviors but a level of trust, and communication which results in a psychological comfort that empowers a student with knowledge and confidence to grow academically and socially” (Parker-Redmond, 1990, p.191, as cited in Hernandez & Lopez 2005). In this case, the academic role modeling from Enrique’s professors made a positive impact, and supported Enrique with making important life decisions. Having influential professors on campus, who are not part of their immediate family, is important for students of color, as often they lack academic preparation and lack awareness of academic and social resources. Through mentoring, professors are then able to provide that information, which is important for the retention of students of color (Hernandez & Lopez 2005).

Victoria felt that her Chicana/o Studies professors at CSUN provided her mentorship and guidance that helped her towards her path to graduation.

There were some professors that were there for me whenever I needed simple guidance regarding graduation requirements...I knew I could go to the Chicana/o Studies department and talk to Saul Gonzalez about what classes to take in order to graduate. There were also professors who were there to push me whenever I would slack off with school and did not feel inspired to do any work anymore.

Victoria also mentioned that Dr. Jimenez made herself available and she knew “she was that person who I could go talk to whenever I needed to talk to someone about my life and my struggles as a student. She always told me about the importance of graduating and getting that degree, specially being first generation.”

Four participants, not only described professors as aiding them in their path towards graduation but also in helping them to consider Graduate School as an option. Jorge, discussed how prior to the program, he questioned graduate school. “How am I going to go to grad school?” However, after a conversation with a Chicana/o Studies professor at CSUN, he considered the idea of graduate school. Jorge was validated during his conversation with his Chicana/o Studies Professor, who affirmed that he was a great writer, which made him a strong candidate for graduate school. Her validation was important as it motivated him to apply to graduate school. Francisco also shared feeling encouraged to attend graduate school:

It got me to where I am now, in graduate school, because I wasn't really considering, like, going forward. And, being around scholars who are Chicana and Chicano,

studied about the different dissertations that they wrote, I think was good in the sense that it provided me with ... a role model or you know someone that had been through it and was able to help me to move through it.

Francisco attributes his decision to attend graduate school to his McNair mentor, a Chicana/o Studies Professor. “She helped me by sharing her story of going through graduate school and moving out of state.” He felt encouraged by being told that he was on the right path and that the struggle of being away from his family was only temporary.

In this case, the professor and student relationship is important to mention because the number of Latinos completing graduate degrees is even lower than the number of Latinos completing undergraduate degrees. Latinos fall even further behind in the graduate school completion rates, when compared to all other racial and ethnic groups (Fry, 2002). According to Fry (2002), among 25- to 34-year-old high school graduates, about four percent of whites are enrolled in graduate school. Sadly, less than two percent of Latino high school graduates within that same age frame are pursuing post-baccalaureate studies. A similar study by Santiago (2004) found that Hispanics earned five percent of all master’s degrees in 2001, which was only five percent of all professional degrees earned in that year.

In the case of CSUN Chicana/o studies professors, the mentoring went beyond helping student attain their bachelor’s degree and encouraging them to apply to graduate school. Francisco shared that his Chicana/o Studies professors helped him identify a career path. Prior to attending CSUN, Francisco was not sure about his future profession. However, after building relationships with his Chicana/o studies professors, he was able to receive guidance about the material he was studying in the classroom, saw how the

classroom material was connected to the issues taking place outside in the community, and felt encouraged to consider becoming a professor in order to be a role model to other students. In his opinion, having those close relationships with professors has helped him in his path towards achieving this goal.

Holistic Relationship

Participants found that Chicana/o professors were supportive both inside and outside of the classroom. All participants described their relationship with Chicana/o Studies professors as holistic—referring to a relationship that went beyond the academic setting and topics to address other settings and areas of life. This holistic relationship was described by Lisa as, “I felt like I could go to them for any type of direction that I needed, both academically and personally.” Participants felt that professors were able to have a holistic relationship with the student, where the relationship did not only focus on academic development but also personal development.

Lisa elaborated on the relationship she had with professors and described it as nurturing and loving. She felt that when professors challenged her, they were coming from a place of love. She moved on to say that a particular professor in the Chicana/o Studies program helped her realize that she is significant in this world.

You know, just by...the simple things, like engaging with me and having those types of conversations with me, and letting me ask him questions and him responding and going back and forth and making me think. He would ask me questions that really made me think. And then I would respond. I just felt like...I really became an adult that mattered and a human being because I think that I didn't feel like a human being.

For Lisa, prior to coming to CSUN, she didn't feel like she mattered as an individual. Through her k-12 education, Lisa learned to memorize rather than to think. However, once she began taking Chicana/o studies courses she would go home "sometimes you would think about things for days." When her professors asked for her opinion, she began to realize that her thoughts mattered, not just to the professor, but also to herself. It was through this process that she began to believe that her own thoughts and her experience mattered. She carries this lesson with her as she knows that she brings something valuable to the table, "not just her voice but her actions." The validation she received in the room, made her realize that she is alive and she matters. Prior to Chicana/o studies she never felt valid. "Before I was just getting by without thinking or questioning things."

Enrique also expressed his feeling that the holistic relationship with his professor had an impact in his college experience at CSUN. He described it as aiding his path toward graduation "quite a bit," because he had a lot of support from them. Furthermore, he mentioned the support he received from his professors during the time in his life when his parents were going through a divorce.

They were, very, very, very supportive of me. I was going through a lot of things throughout, um [sic], especially with my parents' divorce. Not just my parents' divorce because I had been expecting that for a long time, but it was much more about everything that had to do with them, and, it just, there was a lot of things.

He further describes what professors did to support him:

They were understanding and empathetic. They were comforting, almost like couches are. They didn't try to give advice, and rather gave experiences. They shared their wisdom. They were comforting with their words.

This holistic relationship with his professors helped him because he felt that going to college while facing difficulties in other areas of his life were “the things that required mental stability and mental strength.” Their support led him to understand that he was much stronger than he believed himself to be.

Francisco shared similar thoughts about the holistic relationship with his professors:

Knowing that you have a close relationship...and you can go talk to people even if it's just about like how you're doing or whatever it is you are going through... So not only about the academics... but also like you know having uh [sic] having somebody who has been through it and can help you to move forward.

Francisco's thoughts about the holistic relationships with faculty are important to note because it suggests that the bonds are stronger when the professor is able to relate and understand the student. Research about the persistence of high risk students suggests that faculty are effective in impacting students when they are like the type of student enrolled in that university, because they have the ability to understand the student needs, enjoy being able to relate to them, and have the ability to respond to their unique circumstances (Schreiner et al, 2011). In this case, Francisco's holistic relationship with his professor helped him overcome challenges.

Jorge described having a holistic relationship with two of his Chicana/o Studies professors who he communicated with the most. “I was able to meet with them outside the school environment.” To Jorge, a holistic relationship with a professor meant having a professional friendship.

On a personal level, at the end of the day, they were people and the way I was taught is that you have to be a person, your weaknesses, be honest with the class, they were like that. They didn’t make us think that they knew everything but we knew they were smart individuals. I always went to them for help. I ask for them to help me proof read, write me a letter of recommendation, trying to help me out to apply for jobs. I know that if I need help, they are always willing to help me out. They are leading by example. A lot of them talk but don’t walk the walk, they go out of your way and it makes me want to go out my way.

Jorge describes the power of his professors’ example by explaining that this encouraged him to also want to go the extra mile for his students. The notion of “leading by example” is significant. It suggests that students, as do most people, notice the actions more than the words.

Gloria described having a holistic relationship with her professors in Chicana/o studies. She described those relationships as very open relationships where both the student and the professors view each other as human:

I am reminded of a professor who guided me through a really tough time at one point during my early academic transition from junior college to CSUN and likewise a few years down the road when she was going through a personal matter

I feel that I helped in some way. It's called being attentive to each other and essentially just open and honest with one another.

The holistic relationship between students and professors appeared to help students to move forward on their path towards graduation, as well as their careers and future endeavors. The participants noted that their relationships with their professors were important because of the holistic nature of the relationship. All participants mentioned having faced difficulties in both their personal and academic life and the reason why professors were able to make an impact in the student's retention was because they did not separate the issues; rather they viewed the student as a whole human being. Rendon's (1994) research on validation suggests that when faculty believe in their students ability to succeed and understand their life circumstances, students are deeply impacted and it can actually serve to motivate students to persist even during difficult times.

Critical Pedagogies

During the interview all participants noted that the critical pedagogies utilized in their Chicana/o Studies classroom positively impacted their college experience. Hurtado (2005) describes the personal transformation that occurs when Chicana college students are exposed to Chicana/o Studies courses and writings; it has "a revolutionary effect on their identities, as well as their political consciousness" (Hurtado, 2005).

Freire (1970) believed that oppressed people could not be liberated by the oppressor, or individually. Rather, in a collective manner, through praxis (theory and action), critical consciousness could be raised amongst oppressed people. He argued that the people should create knowledge through problem posing, rather than using a banking

system. He believed that if the oppressed used the same strategies as the oppressor, like the banking system, they would further emulate the dehumanizing process of education.

Wink (2000) defines the words critical and pedagogy separately. She defines the word critical as being able to see things at a deeper level, “from within and without,” and pedagogy is defined as the interaction between teaching and learning. Therefore critical pedagogy is important in reshaping the oppressive educational system because it has the potential to unveil the present educational injustices and furthermore, can transform the educational system to one that promotes the holistic development of the learner (Wink, 2000). Enrique summarized the critical pedagogy taught in the classroom by stating, “in a Chicano studies class you take it, you apply it, and then you take it out in life.”

Consciousness/Awareness

Participants in the interviews discussed how the critical pedagogy taught in the classroom made them aware of issues they had never considered before, which participants described as eye opening, leading them to consciousness. Gloria said, “It was just like, wow, opening your eyes to a whole new world.” Lisa described a deeper level of consciousness as, “What everyone brings is unique, by content and engaging conversations, reflecting and engaging. That was really empowering. It was the most effective.”

For Enrique, consciousness was being aware of those issues within society, understanding and knowing. “Being awake.” He believes that as individuals we “can’t make the right decisions if we are not aware and awake. A Chicana/o Studies course that helped awaken his consciousness was the Pre-Cuahtemoc course. “It made me aware of how we are mixed people.” He attributes this to the picture he saw of the caste system.

“Racism is invaded in all of us. I was surprised that we could be so classist and racist. It is a European idea. It’s a world-wide trend. It’s a type of superiority complex.”

Enrique went on to discuss how this awareness changed his perspective:

I would walk around campus and I would observe people because I’m kinda [sic] a people observer. So the way I would observe people and men and their attitudes and, of course, women and their attitudes towards men.

For example, he would observe the way men objectified women. “It was clear to me.” He would look at people and their bodies and their characteristics. His views changed based on his experiences over time. He later discussed the impact of reading Paulo Freire’s book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Reading it for him reading it for the first time brought him awareness and he was finally able to have words to describe his experiences as the oppressed. For Enrique, being able to articulate those concepts, he felt he was able to articulate life. “Chicano Studies really opened up that, that critical point of view, that, like I said, that conscious, that truth, that “Ometeotl, ” the duality of everything that we really don’t see until we’re exposed to it.”

Francisco also discussed how the pre-Cuahtemoc course made him conscious. “Learning about language, knowing that words in Spanish come from Nahuatl. The history that we don’t know of before Columbus, knowing what happened then and how it has affected us now.” He attributes his consciousness to the interdisciplinary aspect of Chicana/o Studies, “you learn about various elements and that everything is connected. All the fields come together in Chicana/o Studies.”

Jorge remembers the first time he learned about Paulo Freire:

I remember thinking, “Who is this guy?” So I bought the book, even though it was not a required reading. Freire, wanted students to be critical thinkers. It made a lot of sense. In our society you see how schools are set up a certain way, sub-category social reproduction. I knew what that was and did not have language for it. It was... working class students working to become working class adults. The illiterate are more easily controlled so that they don't ask questions. He talks to transform not just to change themselves but also society and also the hardest to transform is the oppressor. I was able to relate to it and around the experience. It expanded my consciousness in each different class that I took. It broadened my knowledge.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is an important outcome of the critical pedagogy practiced in the classroom and participants described how they felt that the Chicana/o studies pedagogy led them to become critical thinkers. Jorge conveyed that being in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN sharpened his critical thinking skills.

They teach you to think critically, you know? I remember writing classes, they teach you to write critically, but I think mostly all my classes in Chicana/o Studies were,... focused on critical thinking, you know, or writing logically, you know, things like that and yeah again and... it did impact me.

Jorge reiterated that the Chicana/o Studies courses helped him make sense of the experiences that he was unable to articulate and now had language to describe. He notes that all of Chicana/o Studies classes focused on both critical thinking and critical writing.

Francisco shared that his initial critical thinking skills first developed while in high school, while taking a Chicana/o Studies course. His critical thinking was further developed while taking Chicana/o Studies courses at CSUN.

The amount of classes and the disciplines that it incorporates, umm, that develops critical thinking because we may think that things are forward but in actuality with Chicana/o Studies things are connected. For example, gender and sexuality, and immigration status are all connected to economics, and so for example, in Sociology you only focus on that discipline. So all of these connections make you a critical thinker.

Francisco suggests that the interdisciplinary approach in Chicana/o Studies at CSUN supports critical thinking. Chicana/o Studies as a field of study, examines the history and conditions of the Chicana/o through the use of various disciplines. Limited research suggests that this approach (Sivagurunathan, 2012) is necessary in order to solve the issues of society, as issues are not isolated, and therefore critical thinkers need to connect the dots. While there are some studies which are not conclusive about the use of an interdisciplinary approach to facilitate the development of critical thinkers, this is an area that deserves further study.

Lisa described Dr. Zamora's approach to teaching. "He is humble. He is really passionate about his teaching. I learned so much from him. "She states that he taught her how to think critically. His approach totally changed her way of thinking. His strategy was to ask questions and allow the students to answer. While Lisa may not have had an

answer while in the classroom, once she would go home she was still thinking about the material.

During Victoria's interview she explained the process of thinking critically about the issues that she learned in class as follows:

Being Chicano studies is like, one of the things it really taught me was to go back to my community because you know our community ... like it's pretty messed up because you know, we don't really get the resources, and ... you see the ... differences you know, how like... I see it, like the system, they don't want brown people to move up. Right? Like, I think they keep pushing, pushing us down by...not giving us like healthy food... Instead, they bring us... all this fast food and it's cheap. Of course! We are going to go out and buy cheap food since we can afford it. Or like, they don't give us... rights, like immigration rights. So people... don't get paid well and you know I don't know. It's just little things that...I try to think and reflect on. Well... "this is why I'm here" and "even, if my community can't go to college," and "maybe, I'm here to go back for them."...Share, what I learned there and actually move and keep moving on and you know, step by step.

Victoria's process of thinking critically about the issues happening in her community are reflective of a critical pedagogy that helps students become aware of issues and think about how they can return to their communities to help address community needs. She notes several important issues such as immigrant rights, lack of access to healthy food, and lack of access to college as being issues that she would like to address through

attainment of her college degree. It is significant to note the power that she attributes to her educational experience.

Sense of Purpose

Throughout the interviews, all participants shared that Chicana/o Studies at CSUN helped them find a sense of purpose. In a study by Alexander Astin, Helen Astin, and Jennifer Lindholm (2010), the authors wrote about how college students change over the course of their college trajectory and the role college plays in facilitating the development of spiritual qualities. They believe that the type of questions that college students are seeking answers to during their college years are in essence, spiritual questions: Who Am I? Do I have a mission or purpose in life? What world do I want to help create? The authors recognize that spirituality is not an easy conversation to have in the academy, as it is a new and unfamiliar area of study that is often confused with religion.

The critical pedagogy previously mentioned by participants, seems to allow for space in the classroom and community where students can ponder those spiritual questions. Francisco felt that through his Chicana/o studies courses, he was able to answer an important question regarding his sense of purpose:

It helped to solidify my role in my scholarship and the community. I was able to find my direction as far as... what I wanted to do. You know, after I graduated... guess, I'm still on that ... process and ... it's, I would say that I owe credit to the department.

His initial desire to be a teacher and professor came from his high school teacher who motivated him and told him that he should teach. Then when he went to college and saw that there were other Chicana/o professors. It was at that point that he was able to visualize himself becoming a professor. “Before Chicano Studies... it was just a thought. Now, it helped me get on the road to make it a reality and to know that I could teach as well.” What’s next for Francisco? “Ph.D., that’s the plan.”

Jorge did not describe finding a sense of purpose, but instead a sense of duty to the advancement of Chicana/o students and Chicana/o Studies.

Being around the professors, they are dedicated and it helps you build your dedication to the field, my dedication to the field. It’s important, and education is key. It helps motivate people. It helps educate them. The Tucson program research shows that it (Chicana/o Studies) makes a difference. On another level, history is important and if you don’t know your history is not your fault. I am always happy to share what I know about history because it is a tool of power.

With the proper knowledge you can have the guns to defend yourself.

Francisco points to the efficacy of the Tucson Raza Studies program, as findings about that particular program have been shown to positively impact the program participants. However, he recognizes that programs like the one in Tucson are not available to all and so he does not fault or blame the students for not knowing their history. He is clear in wanting to remedy this by sharing his knowledge about history or as he refers to it, “this tool of power.” As a veteran, Francisco felt that it was important to make the analogy of using knowledge as weapons, because his books are now his guns.

Before enrolling at CSUN, Victoria did not know what she wanted to do with her life nor did she have a sense of purpose. Being involved in MEChA and taking Salazar's Barrio service class, she learned about the education system and how it was failing students of color. "After that I knew that after graduating I wanted to go back to my community and do something so our students don't get pushed out of school. I realized that I would get back to my community by becoming a counselor and becoming a mentor for these students and help them stay in school."

Enrique agreed that Chicana/o Studies helped him refine his sense of purpose:

To be a great person, to better this world. It is a community effort. You cannot make community better with just one person. Chicana/o Studies program helped me to be a more whole person, a conscious and aware person and it taught me to think strategically how to reach people. It was that last puzzle piece that made everything make sense. Now that I know where everything should go, then I can put the puzzle together.

When discussing the impact of Chicana/o Studies, Gloria, used the word spiritual several times during her interview. She felt that she was learning about herself in a very spiritual way.

I mean I keep going back to the spiritual because I feel like it opened up...the classes especially, Salazar...Prof. Salazar, I have to say... really, brought out a lot of the spirituality that you don't get from other courses...It's something that I feel it's not like very... it's somewhat disconnected from the regular courses outside

of the department. So to have that in a university setting, you're doing upper division class... it's just incredible. It's life changing.

Gloria finished her discussion about spirituality by stating that Chicana/o Studies, "makes me a better person."

The qualities that the participants described during their interviews were those spiritual qualities that Astin et al (2010) described- knowledge of self, sense of purpose in life and being able to define how they would contribute to this world. Based on these interviews, Chicana/o Studies at CSUN is providing a platform for spiritual questions to be answered and for students to clarify their sense of meaning and purpose in life.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

Through qualitative interviews, study participants identified three key factors, 1) their service learning in the community; 2) the collegial professor-student relationship, and; 3) the critical pedagogy practiced in the classroom -- as having a positive impact on their college experience. These findings are consistent with existing literature indicating a positive relationship between Ethnic Studies and retention.

Service learning in the community was identified by participants as having an impact on their college experience. Through service learning in community-based organizations, as part of their Barrio Studies courses, participants had the opportunity to directly address the issues being discussed in the classroom. Their involvement in the community helped participants identify a path after graduation; for all, it included a desire to make a positive impact on their community and future generations. This desire also motivated participants to obtain their Bachelor's Degree. Therefore, we see how retention and graduation for Chicana/o students goes well beyond self-advancement to incorporate a sense of purpose in life and of giving back to their community.

Participants also identified the collegial professor-student relationship as having an impact on their college experience. Study participants were able to identify with Chicana/o professors because they shared an ethnic background and had common interests. Also, professors were approachable and provided a welcoming environment, that research suggests, aids the retention of the college student. Also, participants described the role that the professors' mentorship and guidance played in helping them persist as first generation college students. Lastly, students discussed the importance of

having a holistic relationship with professors because they were able to have collegial relationships inside and outside of the classroom which presented opportunities to address both personal and academic issues. There is significant literature suggesting that relationships with their professors are important to Latina/o student success.

Critical pedagogies practiced in Chicana/o Studies courses impacted the participants' college experience, as it supported their development as critical thinkers. Two of the study participants reported that the multi-disciplinary aspect of Chicana/o Studies led them to become critical thinkers. These critical thinking skills were useful as participants were able to think about the content being taught in the classroom and how they could return to their communities with solutions. Participants described their college degree as important in being able to address those needs.

These aforementioned three factors helped participants find a sense of purpose. This is important to consider because college is an important time for students to ponder spiritual questions about who they are and their life's purpose (Astin, A. Astin, J. & Lindholm, J., 2010). Chicana/o Studies at CSUN is providing a place in academia where students are able to ponder these spiritual questions and to take action to realize their commitments.

Implications

The results of the current study have implications for the study of college Chicana/o Latina/o college retention. Research addressing the retention of the Chicana/o Latina/o college student is primarily focused on exploring why retention rates of this group are low. However, in this small study, there were many factors described by

participants as having aided their path to graduation which suggests that this is an area in need of further study.

Recommendations

This study suggested that there are many factors in Chicana/o Studies that are contributing to the retention of the Chicana/o student at CSUN. It is worth investigating in greater depth which retention practices are the most effective so that Chicana/o Studies faculty and staff can be focused and intentional in their efforts to retain and graduate students.

This study also points to the importance of students having the opportunity to interact with more faculty that reflect the students' ethnic, cultural, and social class background and experiences. Therefore, at CSUN, the institution should consider the hiring of more diverse faculty. The research connecting the positive impact of professors of color on student retention is solid. As the number of Chicana/o Latina/o and students of color continues to rise at CSUN, representation of a diverse faculty will be of upmost importance for the retention of students of color. Additionally, the institution should consider training their faculty to better understand the CSUN student population and the faculty's potential role in student retention and graduation.

Other recommended areas of research include the role of a multi-disciplinary field of study and its connection to critical thinking and the role of spirituality in college and its retention of students of color. Certainly, research connecting ethnic studies to student retention deserves to be expanded, as small studies are already finding positive connections.

Limitations

One of the limitations was that while the data collected was very rich, there were not participants who provided an opposing view. Future research may consider collecting data from students who decided to leave the Chicana/o Studies major in order to find out some of the challenges they faced while in the major. Another limitation of the study was the diversity of the group. In this study, five of the six participants were transfer students and therefore only one direct entry student was represented. Future research should consider having a balance of both groups, as there may be differences in what students perceive as having an impact on the college experience.

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APPENDIX A

Research questions

- 1) Why did you choose to major in Chicana/o studies?
- 2) How has majoring in Chicana/o Studies at the California State University, Northridge impacted your college experience?
- 3) Do you believe that majoring in Chicana/o Studies aided you in your path towards graduation? Why or why not?
- 4) In your experience, is there a difference in taking Chicana/o Studies courses and courses outside of the department? If so, can you elaborate?
- 5) Can you discuss the impact of participating in the service learning course through Chicana/o Studies?
- 6) Can you discuss the interdisciplinary aspect of Chicana/o Studies at CSUN, and whether or not it had an impact on your college experience?