

Latino Males and College Preparation Programs: Examples of Increased Access

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Abstract

This study highlights the narratives of five Latino males from three different postsecondary institutions—a community college, a four-year public state college, and a large private research university—and the impact of their participation in college preparation programs. The data is drawn from a study in which the impact of college preparation programs became evident. With a focus on the individual stories of these young men and their involvement in college preparation programs, this study provides recommendations for research, policy, and practice as a means of providing increased access to postsecondary education for Latino males.

A number of the other articles in this volume argue for the value and importance of college preparation programs to multiple audiences (Perna; Smith). In this article, we argue specifically for the value of college preparation programs in promoting college access for Latino males. We provide examples of how Latino males have benefited from their experiences in college preparation programs before and throughout their postsecondary work. Attention to this population is especially meaningful since Latino males are one of the lowest represented groups in postsecondary education; they are seen as “vanishing” when moving from high school to college (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009).

Latino males have the highest high school dropout rate of 25.6 percent, compared to 9.7 percent of Black males and 6.4 percent of White males (NCES 2007a). Additionally, 30 percent of Latino men, 18 and over in the United States, earn a high school diploma, whereas 32 percent of all males earn a high school diploma (Excelencia in Education 2008). Approximately 6.6 percent of all bachelor’s degrees by a degree-granting institution were from Latino males, compared to 7.6 percent Black males and 74.1 percent White males (NCES 2007b). Proportionally, Latino males are second only to African American males in accessing and successfully completing postsecondary work (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009).

Latino males are not well represented in higher education for a number of reasons. Gándara and Contreras (2009) assert that poor precollege preparation, an overrepresentation in bilingual and special education programs, higher incidences of incarceration and high school drop out or push out can explain this lack of participation (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Our own recent research suggests that successful Latino male students benefit from a connection to community, familial support, strong sense of self, and participation in college preparation programs (Venegas, Huerta, Sanchez, Soto, and Davis, under review).

Although this paper focuses specifically on the role of college preparation programs, it is important to acknowledge the interplay between these interactions and other college going influences. We now turn to a review of related literature, to follow with a brief discussion of our research methods. The bulk of the paper relates the stories of Latino male students who participated in a study of Latino and African American males in the college-going pipeline. We conclude with an analysis of our findings and a discussion on how these findings relate to future research, policy, and practice.

Review of Related Literature

Only recently has research focused specifically on the Latino males' educational pathways and postsecondary education. Most previous research has focused on Latino males as part of broader studies of persistence and resiliency for low-income, other minority, or gender-related studies (Arbona and Nora 2007; Clark 2005; Hawley and Harris 2005; Hurtado and Ponjuan 2005). The transition to college for students of color has been characterized as a challenging experience because often, this student population is more likely to be low income and first-generation college goers (Castellanos and Gloria 2007; Strayhorn 2006). For Latino males, some particular academic experiences begin as early as preschool, since this student subgroup is the least likely to attend preschool (Planty et al. 2008). Although some research suggests Latino males perform better on standardized tests than their Latina peer group, there is not an equal translation to in-class performance, since Latinas are more likely to prevail through high school and into college (Cammarota 2004; Excelencia in Education 2008).

An additional challenge related to college going for Latino males is their entry point into postsecondary schooling. Almost 60 percent of Latinos begin their college work in community colleges (Solórzano, Villalpando, and Osguera 2005). De los Santos, Jr., and De los Santos (2006) found that more than 25 percent of Latinos who earned a bachelor's degree in 2000–2001 were students who engaged in initial coursework at the community college. These findings together highlight the idea that a severe melt in postsecondary participation occurred between the 60 percent of Latinos who attend college and the 25 percent who complete a four-year degree. Arguably, many of the 60 percent of Latino students attending community college may have non-transfer goals, although research on college aspirations suggests Latinos seek to transfer and complete four-year degrees (Luna De La Rosa 2006). Suarez (2003) found Latino community college students to be supported through individual, institutional, and environmental factors.

Remediation also continues to be a key issue for the Latino college-going population (Jalomo, Jr., 2000). The effects of remediation include a longer time to earn a degree and can affect availability of financial aid over time. Students who do take remedial coursework at two- or four-year schools often rely on initial additional academic support services as a key mechanism for connecting to their college or university and for persisting to meet their transfer and persistence goals (Castellanos and Gloria 2007). This form of academic support enhances students' sense of academic resiliency. These kinds of academic and social activities are important because students who have a strong sense of academic and social efficacy are seen as more likely to persist in college, regardless of their starting point into postsecondary education (Morales 2008). Therefore, programs that develop these academic and socio-emotional goals, much like the ones described in this volume and in the case studies that are highlighted in the data section of this paper, serve as a valuable academic and social touch point for Latino male students as they progress from high school to college, from community college to a four-year school, and/or from their baccalaureate to post-baccalaureate work.

The literature reviewed within this section emphasizes two main points. First, Latino males continue to be understudied and underrepresented in postsecondary education. Second, the research that does exist related to this student group suggests that academic and social sense of self are key components for college access and persistence. The next section of this article shares the research design and data from a study that seeks to consider the pathways of successful Latino males to gain a better understanding of how they navigate and succeed in postsecondary education, regardless of the many challenges they may face along the way.

Research Method and Design

This article uses case studies from a larger narrative study using a grounded theory approach, which has been informed by Gándara's (1995) research design of 50 Mexican-American professionals, and Morales' (2008) research on resiliency among college students from diverse ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Grounded theory provides a rich account of the lived student experiences, which sheds light on Latino males in the postsecondary pipeline (Creswell 2003).

Site Selection

This article focuses on student participants who attended three different postsecondary institutions, including a community college, four-year public state college, and a large private research university. Each participating institution was given a pseudonym and was selected for the representative number of Latino students on each campus. The following chart provides information about the overall racial/ethnic population at each selection site.

Table 1. Selection Sites Four-Year Institutions

		Los Angeles University (LAU)		Southern California College (SCC)	
		<i>Private Research University</i>		<i>Public State College</i>	
		Total Enrollment 33,408		Total Enrollment 12,082	
<i>Ethnicities</i>	<i>Enrollment</i>	<i>Six Year Graduation Rate</i>		<i>Enrollment</i>	<i>Six Year Graduation Rate</i>
Asian/Pacific American	22%	87%		8%	31%
Black	6%	76%		28%	5%
Latino	13%	84%		38%	32%
White	47%	86%		12%	18%

(NCES 2007cd)

Two-Year Institution

**Los Angeles Community College
(LCC)**
Public Community College
Total Enrollment 24,895

<i>Ethnicities</i>	<i>Enrollment</i>	<i>Six Year Graduation Rate</i>
Asian/Pacific American	16%	37%
Black	18%	13%
Latino	32%	18%
White	20%	27%

(NCES, 2007e)

Participant Selection

All five participants were recruited and selected on a volunteer basis (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006) and were primarily contacted by e-mail with the use of a recruitment flier. Some student participants were selected through the contacts between academic enrichment programs, such as the McNair Scholars Program, Transfer Student Center, or Latino cultural centers. There were no restrictions placed on the participants, other than each participant self-identifying as a male with a Latino

background. To assist in the recruitment of additional participants, snowball sampling methods also were used (Jones, Torres, and Arminio 2006).

Data Collection

All five interviews lasted approximately one to two hours, where all participants selected a pseudonym to create anonymity before the start of the interview. Before the start of each interview, the study participants read and signed an approved consent form and authorized the researcher to audio record the interview. The audio recordings allowed the researchers to provide an in-depth detail of each participant’s account and descriptions of the students’ experiences. All interviews were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for involvement in college preparation programs. All interviews were conducted during the fall and spring semesters of the 2008–2009 academic year, during which three researchers participated in the interviews. Table 2 provides a brief summary of information about each of the study participants selected for this paper.

Table 2. Summary of Student Participants

Pseudonym	Institution	College Standing	Major/Minor	Hometown	Ethnicity	College Prep Involvement
<i>Enrique</i>	LAU	4th year	Political Science Minor in Business	South Los Angeles	Salvadoran	CES, CESA
<i>Jaime</i>	LCC	3rd year	Sociology	Community of Los Angeles	Mexican	Puente, EOP&S, Transfer and Career Center
<i>Demeter</i>	SCC	3rd year	Sociology & Behavioral Science	Community of Los Angeles	Mexican	Upward Bound/ Talent Search/ McNair
<i>Beltran</i>	LAU	2nd year	Public Policy, Planning & Management	South Central Los Angeles	Honduran	CES, Policy Leadership Program, CESA
<i>Michael</i>	LCC	2nd year	Architecture	Community of Los Angeles	Mexican	Talent Search, First Year Experience

Student Experiences

This section highlights the experience of five students attending three different institutions and their involvement in college preparation programs as a means of providing increased access to a postsecondary education.

Community College Pathways

Michael. Michael attends Los Angeles Community College (LCC), a two-year public community college, located in the Los Angeles area, where he is a prospective architecture major. Michael grew up in a small Latino majority community in the Harbor Area of Los Angeles, California. He attended his local high school in a majority Latino and African American neighborhood. Michael grew up with both his parents. His father worked as a truck driver for more than 15 years, and his mother worked approximately 6–7 years for the same company in packaging. When asked what the highest grade level each parent completed, he replied, “My dad had graduated high school in Mexico, and my mom, she didn’t finish middle school.” Michael is the oldest of his siblings and has three younger brothers. Despite Michael’s parents being separated and his family obligations of caring for his younger siblings, his parents continuously push him to attend college. His deep connections to his younger siblings pose challenges of time management; yet, he acknowledges his priority is always his education.

Michael’s parents encouraged college at an early age. He described his parent’s desire for him to attend college as a way for him to “maintain [a] better life [because] they came from Mexico so they didn’t [get] to go to college.” While Michael participated in several college preparation programs, when asked who has influenced him the most in setting his educational goals, Michael turned the attention to his parents and their constant support, which has helped him pursue a higher education. Despite the long working hours his parents put in, he often heard them say, “School is the only way to go.” They also encouraged him to plan ahead and “get out there and experience the community, absorb whatever you hear, see, or what you know. . . don’t take anything for granted. . . don’t forget where you came from.”

In addition to his parent’s support and influence, Michael participated in several college preparation programs, the Talent Search Program, and the First-Year Experience (FYE) Program. Talent Search assisted him in his senior year of high school with “applying to colleges, to different colleges, UCs, Cal States or wherever, and they help you with financial aid.” At LCC, the FYE Program assisted Michael as a community college student. Michael’s first-generation status allowed him entry into the Talent Search program, which provided him “step-by-step” guidance and support throughout the college application and financial aid process. This mentorship not only provided Michael assistance throughout his senior year of high school, but also helped guide his decision in electing to attend a local community college. “If I didn’t have that program I would be lost. Like before I would like rush on everything and stressing out, but that program actually helped me out a lot.”

In the spring of his senior year, Michael received notification of his acceptance to a four-year public in-state college, where he had hoped to major in business. After receiving his financial aid package, Michael was notified that he did not qualify for any free financial aid and came to the conclusion that, “I’m not going to be able to pay for this.” Even though this in-state public college was merely a four-hour drive from

his Los Angeles home, he concluded “[he] was going to stress out [his] first year in a brand new city, brand new place, [with] brand new people, and [he] was going to stress out a lot.” Therefore, Michael decided to attend a local community college because “it was less money, cheaper, so [he] can actually afford it, [he] would keep [his] part-time job, and with [his] parents help [he] would be able to afford \$20 a unit. . . .” Since then, Michael has looked into his financial aid situation and has received guidance from his FYE advisor who previously served as a financial aid advisor. Due to the mentorship and guidance he received from his advisor, he now receives federal aid to assist him with his college expenses.

As an architecture and transfer student, Michael has taken advantage of the advising and mentoring services from the FYE Program, which assisted him in the transition from high school to college. The FYE program also helped him develop an individual education plan, in which it recommended that he stay an extra year at the community college before he transfers to complete his prerequisites and general education requirements. Being a participant in the FYE program has allowed him the opportunity to obtain a part-time student paid position as a Student Ambassador for the Transfer and Career Center, where his supervisor has developed into his mentor. Michael turns to his mentor for both academic and personal issues, and she is willing and able to “help [him] out.” In addition to his supervisor, Michael has three other faculty mentors, all of which are female, whom he relies on for academic support and professional development, such as letters of recommendation and career advice. Michael’s participation in the FYE program has empowered him to engage with faculty members in different academic fields; his exploration has guided him to architecture. Michael devotes much of his success to the FYE Program and the personal connection with his mentors who have supported him during his tenure at LCC.

Michael’s current educational plans include, “studying to be an architect.” He is currently a second-year student and has plans to transfer to a four-year institution, such as “Cal Poly Pomona or San Luis Obispo, and then my other choice is UCLA, and my next choice is an out-of-state college.” Michael plans on pursuing a graduate degree in architecture after he receives his bachelor’s degree.

Jaime. Jaime also attends Los Angeles Community College (LCC), a public two-year community college, where he has current plans of majoring in sociology. Jaime is a third-year student who is in the process of transferring to a four-year public research university in California. Jaime grew up in a city in Los Angeles County, where the community is split between African American and Latinos. He attended public schools in his neighborhood and attended two local public community colleges in the area. Jaime grew up with both his parents. His father worked at a metal forging factory, and his mother worked as a hotel housekeeper, but she now works at a fast food restaurant. Both of his parents were born in Mexico, where “my dad only made it to middle school and my mom only went to kindergarten.” Despite Jaime’s parents’ low education attainment level, they consistently provided him support throughout his education. Both his parents took the time out of their busy work schedules to inquire about his interests and talk about “what direction [he] want[ed] to go [in with] school.”

They also supported him financially in paying for his books and tuition and even drove him to work and school.

At home, Jaime has four siblings, one older and two younger sisters and one younger brother. His older sister has intentions of transferring to a four-year institution, but has unclear personal and academic goals, which is reflected in her constant change of academic majors. While Jaime's sister is older, he is transferring before her, which he believes is the direct result of his involvement in the Puente Project at LCC. The Puente Project has empowered Jaime with a new level of personal and academic confidence. He has refined his scholastic goals with the support of his mentors and academic advisors at LCC. Prior to his participation in the Puente Project, he was unfamiliar with the college process, but during his senior year of high school, a local community college recruiter spoke to him and encouraged him to enroll. Jaime did not participate in any college preparation programs at the high school level other than his involvement in a multilingual teaching academy, which he did not find very helpful. It was not until he began his involvement in the Puente Project that he was able to identify his college pathway and find his area of interest.

“The Puente Project . . . it just completely switched over the way . . . my way . . . of thinking. Before that I really did not know what I wanted to do. I was just taking classes, skipping classes, just trying to figure out what I wanted to do. Just working and taking care of my brothers and sisters. Then I went through the Puente Program, and it helped me set up goals, short-term goals, long-term goals, and they explained how to achieve them.”

According to Jaime, the Puente Project assists minority college students to “integrate into the educational system,” where students are introduced to “first-year experience programs, community programs, and they offer tutoring and [provide] mentors.” Jaime was matched with a counselor as a mentor, as he is interested in psychology and sociology. Jaime's mentor provided him direct support in developing his educational goals and even provided him assistance with financial aid. As a direct result of this relationship, Jaime now has aspirations of pursuing an education that will lead to a career as a Puente Project counselor.

Before attending LCC, Jaime attended another local community college, where he did not have access to any support programs. As a result of little understanding of the community college system, Jaime struggled to complete classes and was unable to develop realistic goals. He almost gave up until he was introduced to the Puente Project and decided to give college another try. At LCC, Jaime has participated in the Extended Opportunity Program & Services (EOP&S), which he has found very helpful as his counselors have informed him of upcoming events or workshops to help prepare him for the transfer process. EOP&S also assisted him with receiving book vouchers.

Despite working 40 to 50 hours a week as the president of the Student Ambassador Program, student receptionist at the Transfer and Career Center, and at a fast food

restaurant, Jaime is motivated to continue his studies. Jaime's career goals include returning to the community college as a Puente coordinator or counselor "because it's helped [him] so much." He plans on obtaining a bachelor's degree in sociology, and then he hopes to pursue a master's degree in counseling. Jaime plans on becoming a counselor to "help out students that are kind of like me . . . that are kind of lost, they don't know what to do . . . I want to kind of help them, motivate them to go to school [and] get a higher education." He hopes to help students "shoot for something higher." Ultimately, Jaime's participation in college preparation programs channeled his ambitions to obtain a graduate degree in counseling, which will enable him to give back to other community college students and share similar academic experiences.

Four-Year College Pathways

Demeter. Demeter currently attends Southern California College (SCC), a public state college located in the Los Angeles area, where he is currently a junior double majoring in sociology and behavioral science. He grew up in a small city in Los Angeles County. He self-identifies as a first-generation Mexican-American; he has close ties to his cultural roots; and he often visits his family in Mexico. Demeter attended public schools in two majority Latino communities in Los Angeles. Demeter first remembers discovering college in elementary school but became more cognizant of college in middle school. Demeter has two siblings, an older sister and a younger brother. Demeter will be the first in his immediate family to obtain a bachelor's degree. Yet, he has six aunts, all who have attained a bachelor's degree or higher, including graduate or professional degrees. These women engaged Demeter as an adolescent regarding the personal and professional values of higher education. Although these childhood experiences are anecdotal, they may have contributed to his college-going attitude of pursuing a doctorate in sociology to become a university researcher.

Demeter was introduced formally to college preparation programs in high school, where he participated in two TRiO Programs, Upward Bound and Talent Search. Due to his participation in Talent Search and Upward Bound, he was aware of the courses he needed to become college eligible, but experienced difficulty with his counselors in obtaining the courses he needed. In his senior year of high school, Demeter had to retake an English and algebra course, but his counselor responded, "No you can't do that because you're not equipped to [take] those classes." As a result of his counselor's response, Demeter addressed his concerns with his high school principal, where he was able to successfully enroll in the courses he originally requested. This was not the last time Demeter experienced a conflict with his high school guidance counselors, but often Demeter would request to enroll in physical science courses, such as physics, anatomy, or ecology, and instead they would assign him to mechanics, workshop, or computers. Demeter often felt held back by his counselors and teachers, who were discouraging and attempted to place hurdles in front of his academic success. Because his parents were not familiar with the college process, Demeter was left to self-navigate the web of college admissions with hollow support from school administrators and educators.

When asked whether he participated in any programs that have helped him in college, he responded, “Yes, right now I am a McNair Scholar, which is part of the TRiO Program which helps. The Upward Bound and the Talent Search helped at the undergrad level. They’re helping me at the graduate level.” Due to his participation in the McNair Scholars Program, Demeter currently is applying for summer research programs, which he feels will, “enhance [his] research skills which is required [for] graduate school.” As a McNair scholar, Demeter has taken advantage of the workshops coordinated by the Program, in which he has learned to manage his finances and obtain financing for graduate school. Due to his participation in this college preparation program, Demeter had the opportunity to participate in a summer research program in a Midwest land-grant university. Due to his connections through the McNair Program, Demeter currently holds a research assistantship in an on-campus research center at SCC, where he conducts interviews and transcribes and enters data for the center. It is evident that Demeter’s participation in college preparation programs has led him to several unique opportunities for access to college, mentorship, and scholarship at the undergraduate level. Although he is far from completing his tenure in academia, he is grateful for the positive experiences and trajectory.

In deciding which college to attend, Demeter selected his attendance at SCC, a public state college, over a research-intensive public university due to the connections he made with faculty members at orientation. During his freshmen year in college, these same faculty members took him “under their wings.” One faculty mentor provided him the opportunity for the internship in the research center, and another faculty mentor provides in-depth support in the areas of qualitative and participant research. Demeter understands earning a doctorate degree will allow him the opportunity to conduct his own research.

Beltran. Beltran is a second-year public policy and development undergraduate student enrolled at Los Angeles University (LAU), a private research university in southern California. He was born and raised in South Los Angeles in a low-income family to a Honduran mother and a Guatemalan stepfather and has five siblings, two of which currently reside in his immediate household. He affirms his younger sisters “[are] college bound, too. I’m going to make sure of that.” Beltran self-identifies as a first-generation American college student, who holds strong ambitions to pursue a graduate degree. He first learned about college as a third grader attending the “Festival of Books” at the University of California, Los Angeles, when a college administrator provided his family a pamphlet about the “A–G requirements . . . I kept that paper with me, and I still have it in my portfolio.” Although his parents completed only a middle-school level education in Central America, they stressed the importance of attending college after high school, “there was no other [pathway] than college after high school.” His parents currently are unemployed due to the economic recession. However, during his adolescence they held positions in the garment district in downtown Los Angeles as seamstresses. His humble beginnings provide a foundation to understand the personal and social benefits of attaining a college education to better his community, which faces multiple disparities.

Beltran was first introduced to college preparation programs in middle school where he was part of the California Department of Education sponsored Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID) program, which focuses on cultivating “college-going attitudes” for low-income and underachieving students in secondary school. He also was involved in the Los Angeles University (LAU) Community Educational Strategy (CES) program, which emphasizes college awareness and provides educational programs for low-income and traditionally underrepresented students and parents. He asserts “AVID...is dear to my heart...LAU students [were] our role models. It was there to help us look into colleges and make posters about the colleges we wanted to go to.” Additionally, he was required to participate in daily auxiliary support in math and English at LAU, where a CES college student provided further attention. Beltran asserts,

“[A]t first it felt like a burden, but overall it just became part of my life. So that was a success. I have to say that was very influential because we were exposed to students from the community who had been through CES who are now in college...we saw them as role models.”

Access to college students who share similar life experiences of having low incomes, living in urban environments, and being first-generation college students may have provided the impetus to see attending a university as a natural progression after high school. CES also provided support and information to Beltran’s parents about the value of higher education. He states, “They [his parents] learned basically how to understand their child and the process of trying to get into college . . . it was about letting me do my school work . . . she began to trust me . . . and . . . understand the CES program a lot more. She was committed [to my education].” Beltran stresses the importance of having his mother provide him the emotional comfort he needs to excel in his academics. His mother’s attitude persisted during the strenuous process of college financial aid planning. An additional benefit of the CES program is a university scholarship covering tuition, which is contingent on a competitive college entrance exam score and grade point average. He postulates, “They saw the numbers, and they were like I need to become involved if I want my son to go to this university. And she believed in me . . . she made sure she got the papers for financial aid . . . [w]hat the CES scholarship is instead of us getting loans the financial aid is committed so that we don’t get any student loans.”

Due to his participation in CES, Beltran was motivated to become more involved in other education programs, such as volunteering with a health clinic, which allowed him the opportunity to be matched with a health educator as a mentor. This mentorship allowed Beltran to learn more about health education and to mature, and it exposed him to the Policy Leadership Program (PLC). PLC afforded Beltran the chance to participate in a program in Sacramento where he was able to “believ[e] that [he] can make a change” through policy. Not only did this program influence him mentally in changing the way he “viewed life,” but also physically as he now understands the impact of “suit[ing] up.” Beltran attributes his professional goals of being involved in public policy and development to participating in this program.

Although Beltran is grateful for his personal and academic achievements, he recognizes he is far from reaching his individual goals, “[w]hat I am doing [going to school] and our entire family will benefit . . . I’ll be a role model to my younger sisters; it’s a ripple effect.” His attitude is not isolated to his family, but includes his native community, a community that is in need of positive changes, and he aspires to be the individual to provide that change.

Enrique. Enrique is a fourth-year political science major and business minor enrolled at LAU, in a private urban research university in southern California. He was born and raised in south Los Angeles to immigrant Salvadorian parents, who work multiple full-time service positions throughout the city to support four children. He self-identifies as a first-generation American college student, although his older brother graduated from a local state college. He is the second oldest of four children, three males and one female. Enrique was formally introduced to higher education through the LAU CES program. He reflects on the additional academic regime, “I was a part of that since 8th grade . . . coming in every morning and taking classes, [and then] going back to our home school.” CES exposed him to the benefits of educational workshops, helped him navigate the financial aid program, and provided the resources to subsidize his tuition at the university. Enrique’s father encouraged him to participate in the CES program and frequently reminded him of the difficulty of his work by stating “always telling us you don’t want to work like me, I don’t want you to *have* to end up working like me.” He stressed the challenges of the financial inadequacy of his middle and high school with his classes “super packed with 50, 60 students . . . didn’t have any like honors programs . . . CES . . . would have been the gifted scene.”

The CES program requires students to maintain a 2.75 grade point average to remain eligible. The grade stipulation provided the impetus to Enrique to stay focused on his studies, “In 6th grade . . . I started hanging out with the wrong crowd . . . um then 8th grade came . . . and I had to keep up a B average . . . I would push myself a little bit more . . . 11th and 12th grade came . . . when it kinda got knocked in the head that I wanted to go to college.” Although Enrique struggled maintaining a positive peer network, he recognized the benefits of participating in the CES program and restructured his priorities. Additionally, he states the importance of matriculating to a prestigious institution did not foresee himself in a “state school . . . I knew that I could [see] myself like it was just like an epiphany type of thing . . . I actually started pushing myself a little more . . . actually go to like a really good college.” The personal revelation of being eligible for a prestigious university may not be realized frequently by South Los Angeles youth, albeit, the cultural capital attained through the CES program may have elevated his confidence. He asserts, “I’ve always made myself [give an] extra push — I guess just knowing that I am different and I am looked down on by a lot of people, so like I said I like the challenge.”

Enrique attributes much of his motivation to his parents, especially his father who attended all of the CES Saturday parent workshops. Enrique recognizes the importance of having a father figure and how that impacted his life. His father “made it a lot easier for us;” he would often “check our homework.” Enrique remembers his earlier

years where his father would assign him and his siblings homework over summer vacations and encouraged him to take pride in his writing as a child. He also recognizes the importance of his older brother setting the bar high when he first attended college, which led Enrique's parents to expecting him to complete college as well. Overall, Enrique felt extremely supported and appreciative of his parents and older brother throughout his educational journey as he recognizes his friends did not have the same experience.

Enrique attributes much of his middle and high school success to CES, where the staff motivated him to perform well in school and improve his work ethic. Due to his participation in CES, Enrique was linked into the Student Success Program (SSP) at LAU, where he received information about graduate school through the many workshops offered by the program. Enrique also often turned to the SSP director for mentorship and working out his long-term goals. Due to his attending an SSP workshop, Enrique was able to connect to an LAU professional who had assisted him in applying to a dual master's degree program in law. Additionally, Enrique is an LAU scholar, where he received a stipend to complete a Law School Admission Test (LSAT) preparation course. Due to his high involvement in college preparation programs at LAU, Enrique has received mentorship and knowledge, which has inspired him to become involved in several student organizational efforts to give back to his local community. In particular, Enrique coaches a youth soccer team and implemented Dare to Dream, a new student organization that is in the process of becoming a non-profit organization, which mentors middle school Black and Latino boys in the local LAU neighborhood. Enrique's passion for helping Black and Latino males get to college is evident through his volunteerism and aspiration to become a lawyer.

Enrique's participation in the CES, SSP, and scholar program supplemented his precarious high school experience. He states, "the counselors really didn't care" and because of this he had to rely on the mentorship from college students affiliated in the CES program and his older brother, who is also a college graduate, to guide him into college. He did not receive the social capital regarding college from his parents because they completed only secondary school in El Salvador. Although his parents could not provide college information, he is determined to alleviate that stress for his siblings by positing, "My brother like cleaned up the way . . . I set the rocks . . . my sister's gonna pave the road for my little brother, so he can just run through [to go to college]."

Analysis

The personal and academic experiences of these Latino male college students differ by institution type, family size, and professional aspirations. They share a history of participation in precollege preparation or a post-secondary preparation program. Their pathway to higher education was not a clear trajectory due to multiple individual and social factors, which include being a first-generation college student, social capital, and mentorship from K – 12 educators. First generation status for Latino students poses various challenges to navigate the education system including garnering support from peers and family (Strayhorn 2006).

For Jaime and Michael, the two community college students, personal success can be attributed to their participation in the First Year Experience and Puente Project. These programs have empowered these Latino male students with a sense of direction and social capital to continue with their academic pursuits. Although Jaime and Michael have encountered personal challenges due to parental separation and temporary “stop-out” from community college, they were able to refocus and continue with their goals of being transfer eligible. The First Year Experience and Puente Project shaped the academic aspirations of these students through mentorship and personal connections. This scholastic and individual structure subsidized the students’ lack of social capital regarding academic requirements to achieve their goals. Beyond academics, the students’ exhibited a heightened level of confidence in their future goals and accomplishments in community colleges, which was supported by their professional mentors and peers from the college preparation program.

Beltran, Enrique, and Demeter all participated in multiple intensive college-participation programs during their adolescence, which may have attributed to their matriculation into four-year universities. The environment of consistent interaction with peers and mentors who hold “college-going attitudes” impacted and motivated these Latino male students to elevate their goals and ambitions, which was reinforced by active engagement from their families — all of which contributed to their growth and dedication to pursue higher learning. The parents’ involvement was facilitated through the college-preparation programs’ goals to include families and to gain knowledge about financial aid, tuition costs, and the application process, which enables parents to hold higher aspirations and their children accountable to their studies. All of the students in our sample at the four-year postsecondary level were accepted to several colleges and universities across California. However, they made the decision to remain in Los Angeles County for personal, family, and financial reasons. This includes family obligations and a sense of comfort in their matriculated institution. Having students who are natives to their geographic region poses challenges in generalization to other localities. This sample of students also has alternated their living arrangements from their residence halls to their parents’ home in efforts to alleviate the financial burden to their families.

Although the students in this study all hold ambitions of attending graduate education, Demeter has positioned his career to pursue a doctorate in social and behavior sciences through summer research internships, an undergraduate research assistantship, and enrolling in graduate level courses. Other participants expressed that the mentorship they gained through their involvement in college preparation programs has helped guide their prospective fields of study and careers. For example, Jaime was matched with individuals working as counselors and advisors, which directly correlated to his future career goal of becoming a community college counselor.

The parental influence for these college students is evident in the constant support of their children’s educational goals. Matriculating to a university is the appropriate trajectory to a better life, as stated by Beltran’s comments about his parents, “there was no other [pathway] than college after high school.” The Latino parents understand that

higher education is a deep commitment and necessary to achieve expected goals. Although the parents are unable to help their children navigate the system, the parents trust their children. The college preparation programs create a college-going culture for the students, which manifests into a heightened level of trust with their parents who believe the students' decisions are well informed.

This level of trust also is transferred to the students' financial aid decision-making process. Beltran stated his parents "saw the numbers, and they were like I need to become involved if I want my son to go to this university." The benefits of the college preparation program provide knowledge about the use of financial aid and its purpose for educational equity and access to higher education. These low-income, first-generation students were not as loan averse as their peers and understood the long-term benefit of the programs.

The role of mentorship in the college preparation program provided a path for realistic goals for the students. Due to Michael's relationships with his mentor, he gained a stronger understanding of the community college system and states, "I would be lost like before. I would like rush on everything and stressing out, but that program actually helped me out a lot." The capital gained through the program enhanced his capital and cemented his goals of transferring to a four-year institution. Enrique participated in multiple college preparation, which may have impacted his sense of civic responsibility; he developed a non-profit organization that serves low-income minority youth in Los Angeles County.

Conclusion

The pathway to higher education for Latino male students is seldom journeyed to degree completion, and Latino males are seen as "vanishing" from higher education (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). Continuous research studies conclude that multiple barriers, either realistic or self-imposed, have hindered Latino male student success in academia (Saenz and Ponjuan 2009). The students in our sample have been successful due to their participation in college-preparation programs and acknowledge their academic progression would have not been possible without the support of multiple educational agents. The significance of supplemental educational programs for traditionally marginalized populations has proved fruitful for increased college access for our sample. Latino families possess high expectations of their children to attend postsecondary institutions, yet unfortunately are unable to guide their children through the scrupulous maze of academia. The participation of these students in college preparation programs has bridged the gap in them receiving information, resources, and tools to achieve their goals of attending college and successfully earning a college degree. Enrique and Beltran repeatedly praised the LAU CES program for not only providing them with mentors and role models, but also providing individualized attention toward the development of their educational goals. CES provided weekend workshops for their parents, where Beltran's mother grew to become "committed" to her son's education. With the growing caseload for Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) counselors, students who participate in college preparation

programs, such as CES, are assigned an advisor with a smaller caseload, which often leads to more individualized attention. Often, the college preparation advisors serve as academic counselors in showing the participants how to advocate for themselves. In the case of Demeter, his participation in both Talent Search and Upward Bound, along with his drive to succeed, allowed him to advocate for himself when his guidance counselors assigned him courses he did not need. Eventually, Demeter received the classes he needed to be college ready by being aware of the college requirements needed to be eligible to apply.

Additionally, it is recommended that educators and scholars continue to conduct research, to shed light on the issues facing marginalized groups of students in the postsecondary pipeline. It is crucial for educators and researchers to provide scientific results that are evidence-based and can be generalized to other sites. These recommendations then can be applied effectively to current practices in the K – 12 and higher education arenas in promoting increased access for Latino males and other groups falling between the cracks. Although our case study participants were influenced greatly by the support they received from federally funded programs, such as TRiO, and state-funded programs, such as EOP&S and Puente Project, increased funding is needed to serve a larger population of students. The impact of these programs is consistent in providing services to first-generation, low-income minority students, yet a select number of students can participate with limited funding, especially in current economic times. To further expand college preparation programs, colleges and universities should recruit ethnic and racial males to mentor neighborhood youth. The importance of the college students' possessing similar life experiences to urban youth is significant in gaining creditability and access to truly mentor the students to position themselves to pursue a college education. Targeting college students who participated in a college preparation program will enhance their level of motivation and engagement to pay it forward to provide increased access to postsecondary education for underrepresented groups of students.

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