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The Role of Faculty, Counselors, and Support Programs on Latino/a Community College Students' Success and Intent to Persist

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Abstract

This study examines how interactions with institutional agents (faculty and academic counselors) and select student support programs influence success (i.e., grade point average) and intentions to persist to degree completion for Latino/a community college students. Using social capital theory and college impact models, the study controls for the effects of select pre-college student characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, and academic and social factors. Findings indicate that interactions (quantity and type) with institutional agents exercise a small, but significant effect on Latino/a students' success. Similarly, participation in an academically rigorous program and a counseling-intensive support program influences students' success and intent to persist. Implications for practice are addressed.

Keywords

Latino/Latina students, community colleges, institutional agents, faculty, counselors, outcomes

The purpose of this study is to determine how interactions with institutional agents (instructors and academic counselors) influence the success (grades) and intention to persist to degree completion of Latino/a students at a community college. Whereas, many studies have examined student success (Bensimon, 2007; Núñez, Hoover, Pickett, Stuart-Carruthers, & Vázquez, 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Zalaquett

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& Lopez, 2006), much of the literature largely focuses on the experiences of students at 4-year institutions, while devoting lesser attention to community college student success models. However, recent studies from the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin and the Minority Male Community College Collaborative at San Diego State University, and other researchers have begun to devote greater attention in the literature to community college students (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012, 2014; Crisp, 2010, 2013; Deil-Amen, 2011; Price & Tovar, 2014; Wood, 2012). Concomitantly, while myriad studies focus on Latino/a students in general (Chapa & Schink, 2006; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009), until recently, few studies have examined the role of social capital resources in shaping success and persistence in the community college environment, particularly when considering faculty–student interactions and academic counselor–advisor-student interactions (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2012; Chang, 2005; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). These limitations are also evident in the relatively few studies focusing on the experience and factors influencing Latino/a community college students' transfer to 4-year institutions (Chapa & Schink, 2006; Núñez et al., 2013). Moreover, given that institutions play a critical role in creating the conditions that engage students and help them to persist and succeed (Bensimon, 2007; Perez & Ceja, 2010; Perna et al., 2008; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Stanton-Salazar, Vasquez, & Mehan, 2000), this study examined how select types of interactions with institutional agents and select student support programs influenced Latino/a students' educational outcomes.

Better understanding of the dynamics leading to degree attainment for Latino/as attending community colleges requires attention to the factors that influence their intentions and success, particularly given that they represent the fastest growing population in the United States. According to the Pew Hispanic Center (2010), between 2000 and 2008, the percentage of native born Latino/as grew by nearly 38%, while that of the foreign born grew by 26%, for a combined growth rate of 33%. Latino/as 25 years of age or older were more likely to have less than a high school education (39%) than any other racial/ethnic group in the United States. Only 26% reportedly had graduated high school, 22% had some college, and only 13% had a college degree. By contrast, a much higher percentage of their Black (17.5%), Asian (50.0%), and White (30.7%) counterparts had completed college.

From a public policy perspective, these statistics highlight the need to close the achievement gap not only in access to college but also in community college degree/certificate attainment, transfer, and bachelor degree completion, if Latino/as are to reap the full benefits of a middle-class life (Chapa & Schink, 2006; Núñez et al., 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). While college completion rates for Latino/as in the United States remain low, recent educational trends give hope for increasing the number of Latino/as completing college. First, the percentage of Latino/as graduating high school reached an all-time high of 70% in 2007 (Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). And, second, between 2007 and 2008, the number of first time, full-time Latino/a freshmen at postsecondary institutions grew by 15%, while the overall growth rate for all racial/ethnic groups grew by 6%.

Research also suggests that well over 50% of Latino/as enter higher education at less than 4-year institutions, including community colleges (Perna et al., 2008; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010), which are typically open access institutions and are characterized by low retention rates. Scholars note that ability and academic achievement do not adequately account for the disproportionate underrepresentation of Latino/as at 4-year institutions (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013; Perez & Ceja, 2010). In the case of Latino/as, it is not merely access to college that has been reported as a problem, but also inequities in access to resources, participation, preparation, transfer, and progression (Adelman, 2007; Ceja, 2006; Dowd, Pak, & Bensimon, 2013; McDonough, 1997; Teranishi, 2002).

Using social capital theory and two college impact models as a foundation, this study examines the influence of select pre-college student characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, academic and social factors, and interactions with institutional agents on community college Latino/a students' success and intentionality to persist to degree completion. Consistent with previous research on community college students, and given limitations in the dataset, this study utilized broad conceptualizations of "successful" student outcomes (Bers & Smith, 1991; Goldrick-Rab, 2010; Núñez et al., 2013), better known in the literature as intermediate outcomes, which include academic performance as measured by grades (i.e., grade point average [GPA]) and student attitudes, behaviors, and intentions (Astin, 1993).

With respect to the selection of GPA as a reflection of "success," Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) synthesize numerous studies demonstrating its influence on degree attainment and career or employment outcomes. Some students attending community colleges do so to complete a short-term occupational certificate program or associate degree to then seek employment or advancement, while others transfer to a 4-year institution. As Pascarella and Terenzini and Rivera (2011) have noted, employers sometimes use college grades (right or not) as a reflection of the student's motivation, conscientiousness, cognitive ability, as well as to screen job candidates in large applicant pools. Thus, grades may influence a hiring decision, salary placement, and advancement. Moreover, grades obtained also affect involuntary withdrawal from college when students fail to maintain the institutional standard of success to remain in good academic standing (Tinto, 1993). Failing to maintain such standard may lead to academic probation or disqualification. Research has shown that Latino/a community college students are disproportionately overrepresented where academic probation is concerned (Tovar & Simon, 2006). However, it is important to acknowledge that grades, especially self-reported GPAs, as a measure of learning have been called into question and also deemed unreliable (Porter, 2011).

Intent to persist to degree completion is strongly correlated with actual persistence (Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993; Hausmann, Schofield, & Woods, 2007; Hausmann, Ye, Schofield, & Woods, 2009), including at community colleges (Barnett, 2011; Bers & Smith, 1991). Related concepts such as "motivation to persist" and "commitment to attend" college have also been found to influence persistence of Latino/a community college students (Solis, 1995). The selection of intent to persist as an outcome variable in this study, and more broadly at the community college level, seems appropriate

given that community college students frequently attend more than one institution at a time, or over time while pursuing their educational goal (i.e., concurrent enrollment and "swirling"; Crisp, 2013, p. 4), and may not complete their studies at the institution of origin. In other cases, the patterns of enrollment for community college students affect persistence. These patterns have been described as "chaotic" with respect to intermittent enrollment semester-to-semester or to its intensity, that is, how it fluctuates between full- and part-time attendance depending on student responsibilities or on the availability of courses at times best suited for them (Crosta, 2014, p. 12). In the absence of longitudinal data, even beyond the standard 6-year period typically examined for community college outcomes, intent to persist serves as a good proxy to students' college graduation intentions, given that they may leave college for an indeterminate period of time without completing a degree (Bean, 1982). As Astin (1971) has noted, "A 'perfect' classification of dropouts versus non-dropouts could be achieved only when all of the students had either died without ever finishing college or had finished college" (p. 15).

To summarize, the purpose of this study was to determine how interactions with institutional agents (instructors and academic counselors) and select support services influenced the success (i.e., grades) and intention to persist to degree completion of Latino/a students at a community college. This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do institutional agents (instructors and counselors) and student support programs influence Latino/a community college students' success (i.e., GPA)?
2. How do institutional agents (instructors and counselors) and student support programs influence Latino/a community college students' intent to persist to degree completion?

The remainder of this article discusses relevant literature, and the conceptual framework on which this study is grounded. Next is a discussion of the methodology employed, followed by the presentation of results, and culminates with a discussion of findings, and implications for practice and research.

Literature Review

Overview of Community College Student Access and Progression

Despite the fact that college admission has increasingly become more competitive and costly, the number of students wishing to attend and enroll in community colleges and baccalaureate institutions has steadily increased over the last 3 decades (Skomsvold, Radford, & Berkner, 2011). However, it has also become clear that traditionally underrepresented ethnic minority and low-income students continue to attend less prestigious institutions even when similarly academically qualified as their White, Asian, and more affluent counterparts (Carnevale & Strohl, 2013). For students entering higher education through open access institutions, such as community colleges, the

ultimate goal of attaining an associate or baccalaureate degree may be difficult to accomplish. Starting at community colleges slows down degree progression, reduces degree aspirations by up to 40%, and reduces the chances of degree attainment by as much as 20%, in comparison with students who start at 4-year institutions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Community college students with transfer aspirations, however, are often able to transfer to more competitive universities than they were originally eligible for as high school graduates (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Goldrick-Rab (2010) found that middle-class community college students are the primary beneficiaries of the transfer process.

In the case of Latino/a students, community colleges serve as their primary gateway to higher education (Perna et al., 2008; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010), not merely with the intent to complete short-term occupational certificates or associate degrees, but to prepare for transfer to 4-year institutions. Despite the fact that well over 80% of Latino/as at 2-year institutions intend to transfer, less than one quarter actually do (Crisp & Nora, 2010). National longitudinal data examining 6-year attainment and persistence rates for students starting at a 2-year public institution in the United States showed that 53% of Latino/a students in the 2003-2004 cohort had left higher education without completing a college credential—a much higher percentage than students of other race/ethnicities (Skomsvold et al., 2011). In fact, only 6% had completed an occupational certificate, 11.7% an associate degree, and 8.2% a bachelor's degree at any institution in the country. An additional 14.7% remained enrolled at less than a 4-year institution, while 6% were enrolled at a 4-year institution.

Social Capital and Its Importance in Higher Education

To help explain the underrepresentation of low income and other impacted ethnic minorities at flagship and highly selective institutions, scholars and researchers have postulated that social capital theoretical frameworks may elucidate the college decision-making process for these students. According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital consists of a supply of "actual or potential resources" (p. 248) associated with social networks and interpersonal relationships formed by individuals with others from whom support may be sought. These resources are the by-product of investment strategies "aimed at reproducing social relationships that are directly usable in the short or long term" (p. 249). Social capital is a resource that may be inherited or acquired and that may differ in quantity and quality. Social capital, while reproducible, is seldom acquired without significant investment of resources and know-how (Portes, 2000). Likewise, it has been noted that our educational system is particularly apt at recognizing specific cultural competencies commonly associated with the dominant culture, and compensates those individuals who already possess valuable forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1973).

While not universally defined or measured, social capital has been studied to a significant degree in education, particularly in relation to college choice, access to higher education, transition to, and retention in college (see Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; McDonough, 1997; Perna & Titus, 2005; Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Using Bourdieu's

(1973, 1986) theoretical tenets on social capital, McDonough (1997) and Stanton-Salazar (1997) introduced to the higher education literature fundamental work leading to a better understanding of the socialization process of diverse youth as they navigated school systems and networks, and prepared for college. McDonough and colleagues (McDonough, 1997; McDonough, Antonio, & Trent, 1997) examined how the manifestation of this construct impacted students from various socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as ethnic minority students, including Latino/a youth. Based on their extensive studies, they concluded that low income and underrepresented students do not possess adequate knowledge of what college is, the vastness and differences between institutional types, and, significantly, knowledge of the admission process. McDonough has also noted how degree, type, and availability of resources in school and within the family impede or enhance educational opportunities for all students.

Stanton-Salazar (1997, 2001, 2011) has also noted that high school teachers and counselors, as institutional agents and gatekeepers, play a crucial role in transmitting knowledge and information to students about the college choice process. Positive relationships with institutional agents afford low-status students the opportunity to access resources, privileges, and support systems needed for advancement in higher education. Stanton-Salazar (2001) goes as far as stating that institutional agents have a "determining role in either reproducing or *interfering with the reproduction of* class, racial, and gendered inequality" (p. 161, emphasis in original).

Stanton-Salazar (1997) proposed a theoretical framework encompassing various forms of institutional support, and asserted that its six components serve as ingredients to "social integration and success" in college (p. 11). Characterizing these forms to the specific roles that institutional agents play in student–agent relationships, institutional agents may then be described as individuals who (a) possess and have the capacity to transmit knowledge, (b) serve as bridges or gatekeepers, (c) advocate or intervene on students' behalf, (d) serve as role models, (e) provide emotional and moral support, and (f) provide valuable feedback, advice, and guidance to students. While in these roles, institutional agents have the capacity to assist students in the college choice and admission process. Stanton-Salazar (2011) has expanded upon the concept of institutional agents to that of "empowerment agents," focusing on their capacity to also empower students to help them "transform themselves, their communities, and society as a whole" (p. 1068). Upon entering college, instructors, counselors, students, and other college personnel may provide the support needed for students to successfully transition and adjust to the college environment.

The Contribution of Institutional Agents to Student Success

Recent studies note that institutional agents exercise influence on community college student aspirations and success by providing both psychological and instrumental support (Barnett, 2010; Chang, 2005; Dowd et al., 2013; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Based on a narrative analysis of 10 students starting at a community college who went on to selective 4-year institutions and graduate school, Dowd et al. (2013) found that institutional agents played key roles in helping students navigate the transition to college and helped them realize they were not only "college material," but "influenced them

to achieve their full academic potential" (p. 21). The relationships students established with agents and with select special programs at the community colleges afforded them access to crucial educational resources and information as they contemplated their academic future. The study, consistent with the work of other researchers (Barnett, 2011; Rendón, 1994, 2002; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Schlossberg, 1989; Suarez, 2003; Tovar, Simon, & Lee, 2009; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006), demonstrated that receiving support, caring, and validation from institutional actors significantly impacted their development, transition, and adjustment. Dowd et al. also noted that in affirming and validating students, institutional agents helped them thwart stereotype threat, often experienced by low-status students when they transition to higher education. A recent report from the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) noted that while Latino and African American men are moderately to highly engaged in effective educational practices, they also experience the lowest outcomes, in contrast to other students. The Center attributes this in part to stereotype threat and emphasizes that community colleges must devote specific efforts to actively counteract threats through effective culturally relevant pedagogy, narratives focusing on belonging, and student–agent relationships characterized as positive, supportive, and demanding. Lundberg and Schreiner (2004) also found that students' relationships with instructors, rather than student characteristics, had a stronger effect on student learning, especially for Asian/Pacific Islander, Latino/a, and Native American students. Similarly, the frequency and quality of interactions with faculty exerted a positive effect on Latino/as' GPA. Perceiving that faculty paid attention to them resulted in higher retention rates.

Research also shows how participation in select student support programs enhances ethnic minority students' access to social networks, thereby permitting them to acquire the social capital needed to connect to resources on college campuses (Dowd et al., 2013; Museus, 2010), and also increases the probability for retention and persistence. Participation in mentoring programs/services has also been shown to influence positive college outcomes for community college students, including Latino/as (Crisp, 2010; Santos & Reigadas, 2002). Mentoring may be formal, through structured college programs, or informal, facilitated in student–agent relationships. Likewise, mentoring from individuals outside the institution, from family, friends, and peers may also affect persistence decisions (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). A retrospective qualitative study assessing the role of mentoring and financial sponsorship on Latino/a students attending a large urban university found that mentors (including faculty and college staff) served in a variety of capacities to students as they navigated the college transition process (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). Mentors served as hosts and guides; welcomed them to the university; helped students familiarize themselves with institutional values, customs, culture, resources; and provided moral support, thus facilitating their adjustment. Examining the impact of mentoring on community college students' intent to persist and actual persistence to the following fall, Crisp (2010) found that mentoring provided positive influences across race/ethnicity, albeit female students tended to be the primary beneficiaries of various forms of mentoring, including psychological/emotional, academic subject knowledge, and degree/career support. While mentoring did not affect actual persistence, the study did

find that mentoring predicted social integration, academic integration, goal commitment, and institutional commitment. Mentoring also directly impacted intent to persist, mediated through its effect on academic integration and goal commitment.

Whether mentoring takes place through formal or informal college programs may not always matter. Research shows that the interactions themselves do. Highlighting the importance of mentoring relationships, a 4.5-year follow-up study examining Latino/a students' academic persistence found that support from faculty and other college personnel in the form of mentoring was key to their persistence (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011). While the study did not focus on the type of mentoring assistance received, participants who had persisted to degree completion or who were still enrolled at the time of the study reported receiving more mentoring than those who had dropped out.

Last, in developing a college persistence model for Latino/a university students, Torres (2006) found that student persistence was most influenced by cultural affinity (the degree to which Latino/a faculty/students and events facilitate a feeling of belonging at the college), mediated through encouragement from various supports (friends, family, college personnel), and institutional commitment. Torres also found that academic behaviors and symbols of success do not immediately influence intent to succeed; rather, "internal reflection" upon these must occur first. Torres noted that teaching students "how to create a cognitive map that includes positive symbols, self-reflection, self-regulations, and forethought . . . [will allow] them to understand and maneuver the college system" (p. 315) and in turn how to be successful. Torres argues this is an appropriate and relevant task for college mentors and advisors, especially for those who understand Latino/a students' cultural needs.

Method

Participants and Procedures

Participants for this study were drawn from a database of students participating in a larger research project assessing the construct validity of the *College Mattering Inventory* (Tovar et al., 2009). Data collection took place at a large, urban, diverse community college in California. Participants were 18 years of age or older and regularly enrolled at the college at the time the study was conducted. All participants provided informed consent. For the purpose of this study, only responses from Latino/a students ($N = 397$) in their second semester of college and beyond are examined. Additional details concerning the recruitment of participants may be found in Tovar et al. (2009).

The Model

This study uses social capital as its foundation, and is guided by two college impact models as proposed by Strayhorn (2006) and Crisp and Nora (2010). The study assesses how specific forms of capital are manifested in pre-college student characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, and academic and social factors, and how interactions with institutional agents and support programs affect community college

Latino/a students' success and intent to persist. The model components are discussed below in the context of previous studies and tested using hierarchical multiple linear regression with 4 blocks. Table 1 describes the variables composing each block. Two dependent variables were of interest to the study: (a) success as measured by cumulative GPA, and (b) intent to persist to degree completion.

Pre-college student characteristics. While variables in this block were intended as controls, researchers continue to call attention to the need to uncover how variables such as gender, age, college generation, and immigration status affect the success and retention of diverse students, especially in light of dominant college impact models inadequately accounting for the experiences of impacted groups (Crisp & Nora, 2010).

Transition and adjustment to college. The model posits that external influences exercise an effect on student's decisions to attend and succeed in college. Having the support of family and friends, family and work responsibilities, and experiencing financial difficulties impact Latino/as' college attendance (Nora, 1990; Nora & Rendon, 1990). Experiencing a challenging transition to college negatively impact students' decisions to remain enrolled, albeit having institutional support may facilitate their adjustment (Tinto, 1993; Tovar, 2013).

Academic and social factors. With respect to the degree aspirations of Latino/as, research has shown they generally have high degree aspirations but often lack adequate knowledge of how to transition to and navigate the college culture (Kao & Tienda, 1998; Laanan, 2000; Torres, 2006). Consequently, they often experience academic difficulties, despite being receptive to institutional assistance as compared to other ethnic groups (Tovar & Simon, 2006). Factors such as academic and social engagement, enrollment intensity, and perceptions of belonging have been found to increase the probability of persistence and degree attainment (Crisp & Nora, 2010).

Interactions with institutional agents. The model tests if interactions with instructors and counselors influences community college Latino/a students' success and intent to persist to degree completion. As has been noted above, institutional agents exercise powerful influence (positive and negative) in students' decisions to attend college and the type of institutions they attend. Interacting with these individuals influences their psychosocial and cognitive development, degree aspirations, and retention (Dowd et al., 2013). Research has also shown that Latino/a community college students' contact with academic counselors impacts their interactions with faculty members, as well as their academic and social adjustment in college (Chang, 2005). Key to this adjustment is the degree and intensity of that contact.

Measures

Table 1 presents in full detail all variables used in the study, along with the coding scheme used. Two dependent variables were of interest: cumulative GPA and intention

Table 1. Definition and Coding Mechanism for Variables in Regression Analyses.

Variables	Coding
Dependent variables	
Cumulative GPA	1 = under 2.0, 2 = 2.0-2.49, 3 = 2.5-2.99, 4 = 3.0-3.49, 5 = 3.5-4.0
Intend to persist to degree completion	1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree
Pre-college student characteristics	
Gender	1 = male, 2 = female
Age	Scale variable
College generation	0 = first to college, 1 = one parent attended, 2 = both parents attended
Citizenship	0 = citizen, 1 = permanent resident, 2 = undocumented
Transition-to-college experiences (all variables single item)	
Family supportive of attending college	Scale used: 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree
Friends supportive of attending college	Scale used: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Time spent on family responsibilities (hours per week)	1 = none, 2 = 1-5, 3 = 6-10, 4 = 11-15, 5 = 16-20, 6 = 21-30, 7 = 31-40, 8 = Over 40
Challenging transition to college	Scale used: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Received transition assistance from college	Scale used: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Finances have been a significant obstacle while attending college	Scale used: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Hours employed per week	1 = none, 2 = 1-5, 3 = 6-10, 4 = 11-15, 5 = 16-20, 6 = 21-30, 7 = 31-40, 8 = over 40
Academic and social factors	
Highest degree intended	0 = personal interest, 1 = career certificate, 2 = AA degree, 3 = bachelor's degree, 4 = master's degree, 5 = doctorate or professional degree
Length of attendance	2 = 2 semesters, 3 = 3-4 semesters, 4 = 5-6 semesters, 5 = 7 or more semesters
Enrollment intensity	Scale variable−Number of units enrolled
Commitment to major	1 = not very committed to 9 = very committed
Experienced academic difficulties while in college	Scale used: 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree
Hours spent studying per week	1 = none, 2 = 1-5, 3 = 6-10, 4 = 11-15, 5 = 16-20, 6 = 21-30, 7 = 31-40, 8 = over 40
Hours spent on campus activities	1 = None, 2 = 1-5, 3 = 6-10, 4 = 11-15, 5 = 16-20, 6 = 21-30, 7 = 31-40, 8 = over 40
Perceived belonging at institution	1 = not at all, 5 = very much

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Variables	Coding
Interactions with institutional agents	
Participated in college support programs	
EOPS	0 = no, 1 = yes
Latino/a Center	0 = no, 1 = yes
Scholars program	0 = no, 1 = yes
Times met with instructors outside of class since starting college	1 = not met yet; 2 = once; 3 = 2-3 times; 4 = 4-5 times; 5 = more than 5 times
Meetings with instructors covered:	
Academic issues	0 = no; 1 = yes
Career issues	0 = no; 1 = yes
Personal issues	0 = no; 1 =yes
Times met with counselors since starting college	1 = not met yet; 2 = once; 3 = 2-3 times; 4 = 4-5 times; 5 = more than 5 times
Meetings with instructors covered:	
Academic issues	0 = no; 1 = yes
Career issues	0 = no; 1 = yes
Personal issues	0 = no; 1 = yes

Note. EOPS = Extended Opportunities Program and Services.

to persist to degree completion. GPA was measured on a 1 (*under 2.0*) to 5 (*3.5 to 4.0*) scale and intent to persist on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scale. Given the hierarchical design of the study, several control and background variables were included in Blocks 1 to 3. The last set of predictor items (Block 4) assessed students' participation in three college support programs, and the degree and type of interactions students had with instructors and counselors. The first program is the college's Extended Opportunities Program and Services (EOPS), with the mission to

> encourage the enrollment, retention and transfer of students handicapped by language, social, economic and educational disadvantages, and to facilitate the successful completion of their goals and objectives in college. EOPS offers academic and support counseling, financial aid and other support services. (California Community College's Chancellor's Office, 2013)

The Latino/a Center provides a range of bilingual services, including academic, vocational, and personal counseling, tutoring in math and English, and dispenses financial aid and scholarship information. The Scholars Program is both a counseling support service and an academic program that serves as the institution's honors program; admission is restricted. The program aims to prepare students for transfer to colleges and universities. Items pertaining to contact with instructors and counselors

included the number of times students had met with them (outside of class) since starting college, and whether or not these meetings encompassed discussions related to academic, career, or personal issues (0 = *no*; 1 = *yes*).

Data Analyses

Two hierarchical ordinary least squares (OLS) regression analyses with four blocks were conducted utilizing all predictor variables as denoted on Table 1. OLS regression was used given that data was collected at a single institution and all variables in the study were student-level variables. OLS regression permits the researcher to examine the effect of particular variables of interest while controlling for the effects of all other variables in the equation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). Derived beta weights were examined to help determine the relative importance of any set of predictive variables on the dependent variable, over other variables. The dependent variable for the first regression was cumulative GPA, while the second was intentionality to persist to degree completion. All categorical predictors were dummy coded.

Descriptive analyses were initially conducted to examine the relationship between the dependent and predictor variables. Statistical tests were conducted to ensure that the assumptions for regression were met. These included an assessment of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, outliers, and collinearity. Variance inflation factor (VIF) values greater than 10, or root condition indices greater than 30, and variance proportions greater than .50 on more than one variable were considered indicative of multicollinearity (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). Evidence of the presence of multicollinearity was found in two variables: family supportive of attending college and friends supportive of attending college. Consequently, these two variables were averaged and a single variable, support from family and friends, was created and entered into the regression models. Upon further examination, 13 cases were deemed univariate outliers in one of two variables (age or supportive family/friends). In addition, two cases were identified as multivariate outliers as indicated by the Mahalanobis distance, $p < .001$. Following the recommendation of Tabachnick and Fidell (2006), the offending cases were removed from further consideration. Hence, the final sample consisted of 382 cases.

Limitations

This study is limited to only Latino/a students attending one community college. Hence, it is not possible to know how these findings may generalize to other Latino/as at different institutions, or to students of other races and ethnicities at community colleges. Other limitations include the measurement of interactions with institutional agents, as elaborated in previous sections. Additionally, this study captured data for students' participation in three college support programs characterized by frequent interactions with institutional agents. However, because students self-select to participate in these programs, selection bias may very well be present, and findings pertaining to these must be interpreted with care. Moreover, membership in the program may

not in itself yield any advantages in the outcome variables, but intensity of participation might; unfortunately, this was not captured in the dataset. Owing to data limitations, participation in any other type of academic outreach programs was not included in the study. Other variables omitted from the model that might affect intent to persist, in particular, include developmental course placement or enrollment, and high school outcomes such as GPA. With respect to the other outcome variable in the study, students selected one option (among 6) to self-report cumulative GPA at the college. Ewell and Jones (1993) have noted that as direct measures of assessment such as a college transcript are lacking, self-reported data serve as a good proxy where issues of policy assessment are concerned. However, others have also noted that self-reported measures are unreliable (Porter, 2011).

Results

Descriptive Information for Sample

As noted in Table 2, the sample consisted of 397 Latino/a community college students in their second semester of college and beyond. In all, 56% of them were female, 44% male; 75% were first generation to college; 89% were either a U.S. citizen or a permanent resident, while 11% were undocumented. The average age for the students was 22.40 years ($SD = 4.66$). The overwhelming majority (96.6%) noted spending several hours per week on family responsibilities. Nearly three quarters also indicated they held a paid job. At the time of the study, students were enrolled in an average of 9.37 units ($SD = 3.46$). Last, students as group held high expectations concerning degree attainment, with 86% indicating they wished to pursue a bachelor's degree at minimum. Most students reported discussing academic issues with both instructors and counselors (83.5% and 93.2%, respectively), in comparison to career-related (30.9% and 60.5%) and personal issues (22.8% and 17.3%). Curiously, students were more likely to discuss personal issues with instructors than counselors. Overall, the sample closely resembled the Latino/a student population at the college at the time data were collected with respect to gender, age, and citizenship; but it was overrepresented in the percentage of Latino/a students interested in pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher (by approximately 10%).

Regression Analysis 1: Predicting Cumulative GPA

The first regression analysis assessed the impact of pre-college student characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, academic and social factors, and interactions with institutional agents and support services on Latino/a community college students' GPA. A review of the statistical tests for normality, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, and multicollinearity showed the assumptions for regression were met. With respect to multicollinearity, none of the roots in the model had a condition value exceeding 30 and variance proportions on more than one variable exceeding .50 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). VIF scores ranged from 1.00 to 2.40. A visual inspection

Table 2. Select Demographic Characteristics for Sample.

Variable	*n*	%
Gender		
Male	169	44.2
Female	213	55.8
College generation		
First to college	287	75.1
One parent	59	15.4
Both parents	36	9.4
Status in the United States		
Undocumented	40	10.5
Resident	52	13.6
Citizen	29	75.9
Length of college attendance		
2 semesters	108	28.3
3-4 semesters	139	36.4
5-6 semesters	75	19.6
7 or more semesters	60	15.7
Meetings with instructors covered:		
Academic issues	319	83.5
Career issues	118	30.9
Personal issues	87	22.8
Meetings with counselors covered:		
Academic issues	356	93.2
Career issues	231	60.5
Personal issues	66	17.3
Educational goal		
Just a few courses	4	1.0
Career/vocational certificate	5	1.3
AA degree	44	11.5
Bachelor's degree	107	28.0
Master's degree	134	35.1
Doctorate or professional	88	23.0
Hours employed per week		
None	89	23.3
1-5	14	3.7
6-10	22	5.8
11-15	21	5.5
16-20	42	11.0
21-30	84	22.0
31-40	70	18.3
Over 40	40	10.5

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Variable	*n*	%
Hours spent on family responsibilities per week		
None	13	3.4
1-5	91	23.8
6-10	84	22
11-15	64	16.8
16-20	40	10.5
21-30	33	8.6
31-40	20	5.2
Over 40	37	9.7

of the residual plots (histogram and P-P plots) determined residuals were approximately normally distributed.

As shown on Table 3, the regression model accounted for 36% of the variance in GPA, $F(29, 381) = 6.71$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$, adjusted $R^2 = .30$. Results indicated that age ($\beta = .17$; $p < .001$) and student's citizenship status ($\beta = .13$; $p < .01$) were significant predictors in Block 1, pre-college student characteristics. This block accounted for 5% of the variance. Neither gender nor students' college generation status was a significant predictor. Among the transition-to-college variables composing Block 2 (accounting for 11% of the variance), the number of hours students spent on family responsibilities per week ($\beta = -.18$; $p < .001$) and reporting they had experienced a challenging transition to college ($\beta = -.14$; $p < .01$) were found to be negative predictors of GPA. Two variables in Block 3, academic and social factors, accounted for 13% of the variance in GPA. The largest predictor was students' reporting that they experienced academic difficulties while in college ($\beta = -.24$; $p < .001$), followed by enrollment intensity ($\beta = .11$; $p < .05$). It is important to note that the highest degree intended approached significance ($p < .10$). The last block, interactions with institutional agents and student support programs, accounted for 6% of the variance in the model. The highest predictor was the frequency with which students met with instructors outside of class since starting college ($\beta = .16$; $p < .01$). Interestingly, the number of times students met with counselors was not a significant predictor of GPA. While discussing career-related issues was the next highest predictor in the model, it is particularly important to note that these discussions had opposite effects on GPA when students met with instructors and counselors. As noted in the model, discussing career-related issues during meetings with instructors ($\beta = .13$; $p < .01$) positively impacted GPA; however, not discussing career issues with counselors had a negative effect on GPA ($\beta = -.13$; $p < .01$). Last, participation in the Scholars Program was also a positive predictor of GPA ($\beta = .09$; $p < .05$). Discussions pertaining to academic or personal issues and participation in other support programs, including EOPS and the Latino/a Center, did not exercise any significant effect on GPA.

Table 3. Predictors of Grade Point Average and Intentionality to Persist (Step 4—Last Model Only).

			Predictors of grade point average					Predictors of intentionality to persist				
Predictor	*M*	*SD*	*b*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*	*b*	*SE*	β	*t*	*p*
(Constant)			1.61	.64		2.53	.01	.94	.65		1.45	.15
Pre-college student characteristics												
Gender	1.56	.50	.08	.10	.03	.74	.46	−.01	.10	.00	−.07	.95
Age	22.40	4.66	.05	.01	.19	3.81	.001	.01	.01	.06	1.02	.31
College generation	.34	.64	−.03	.08	−.02	−.39	.70	.04	.08	.02	.50	.62
Status in United States	.35	.66	.23	.08	.14	2.95	.001	.11	.08	.07	1.37	.17
			ΔR^2 = .05, p< .001					ΔR^2 = .00, p> .05				
Transition-to-college experiences												
Supportive family/friends	4.49	.81	.06	.06	.04	.92	.36	.27	.06	.21	4.18	.001
Family responsibilities (hours per week)	4.02	1.99	−.10	.03	−.18	−3.79	.001	−.04	.03	−.07	−1.31	.19
Challenging transition to college	2.68	1.36	−.11	.04	−.14	−2.76	.01	−.04	.04	−.05	−.98	.33
Received transition assistance from college	3.43	1.26	−.02	.05	−.02	−.38	.71	.14	.05	.17	3.17	.001
Finances as a significant obstacle while attending college	3.72	1.33	.00	.04	.00	.03	.98	−.01	.04	−.01	−.28	.78
Working at a paid job (hours per week)	4.69	2.48	−.01	.02	−.02	−.48	.63	.01	.02	.01	.28	.78
			ΔR^2 = .11, p< .001					ΔR^2 = .15, p< .001				
Academic and social factors												
Highest degree intended	3.64	1.06	.09	.05	.08	1.72	.09	.11	.05	.11	2.10	.04
Length of attendance	3.23	1.03	.01	.05	.01	.21	.83	−.06	.06	−.06	−1.10	.27
Enrollment intensity	9.37	3.46	.04	.02	.11	2.19	.03	.01	.02	.02	.43	.67
Commitment to major	8.31	1.39	.06	.04	.07	1.56	.12	.15	.04	.20	3.97	.001
Experienced academic difficulties while in college	3.10	1.26	−.22	.05	−.24	−4.68	.001	−.06	.05	−.07	−1.20	.23
Hours spent studying	3.25	1.32	.06	.04	.07	1.31	.19	.10	.04	.12	2.17	.03
Hours spent on campus activities	1.35	.65	−.10	.08	−.06	−1.19	.23	−.01	.09	−.01	−.12	.90
Perceived belonging at institution	4.25	1.12	.01	.05	.01	.16	.88	−.05	.05	−.06	−1.08	.28
			ΔR^2 = .13, p< .001					ΔR^2 = .08, p< .001				
Interactions with institutional agents												
Participated in college support program												
EOPS	.20	.40	−.03	.14	−.01	−.23	.82	.38	.14	.15	2.69	.01
Latino/a Center	.22	.41	.07	.13	.03	.52	.60	−.08	.13	−.03	−.57	.57
Scholars Program	.06	.24	.42	.22	.09	1.94	.05	−.40	.22	−.09	−1.80	.07
Times met with instructors (outside of class)	3.06	1.35	.13	.05	.16	2.53	.01	.06	.05	.07	1.06	.29
Meetings with instructors covered:												
Academic issues	.84	.37	.02	.16	.01	.12	.91	−.19	.16	−.07	−1.18	.24
Career issues	.31	.46	.31	.12	.13	2.61	.01	.08	.12	.04	.68	.50
Personal issues	.23	.42	−.10	.13	−.04	−.73	.47	−.02	.13	−.01	−.16	.87
Times met with counselors	3.62	1.22	−.06	.06	−.06	−.90	.37	.02	.06	.02	.26	.80
Meetings with counselors covered:												
Academic issues	.93	.25	.25	.22	.06	1.13	.26	−.07	.22	−.02	−.33	.74
Career issues	.60	.49	−.31	.12	−.13	−2.66	.01	−.06	.12	−.03	−.51	.61
Personal issues	.17	.38	.08	.15	.03	.51	.61	.13	.15	.05	.85	.40
			ΔR^2 = .06, p< .001					ΔR^2 = .03, p> .05				
			R = .60					R = .51				
			Model R^2 = .36					Model R^2 = .26				
			Adjusted R^2 = .30					Adjusted R^2= .20				
			F(29, 381) = 6.71					F(29, 381) = 4.29				

Note. EOPS = Extended Opportunities Program and Services.

Regression Analysis 2: Predicting Intent to Persist to Degree Completion

The second regression analysis also assessed the impact of pre-college student characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, academic and social factors, and interactions with institutional agents and support programs on Latino/a community college students' intention to persist to degree completion. Statistical tests for normality, homoscedasticity, independence of residuals, and multicollinearity showed the assumptions for regression were met. With respect to multicollinearity, none of the roots in the model had a condition value exceeding 30 and variance proportions on more than one variable exceeding .50 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2006). VIF scores ranged from 1.12 to 2.40. A visual inspection of the residual plots (histogram and P-P plots) determined residuals were approximately normally distributed. As shown on Table 3, the regression model accounted for 26% of the variance on persistence, $F(29, 381) = 4.29$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .26$, adjusted $R^2 = .20$. None of the pre-college student characteristics block variables were significant predictors. With respect to transition-to-college experiences, which accounted for 15% of the variance, the strongest predictor of persistence was having the support of family and friends while attending college ($\beta = .21$; $p < .001$), followed by the transition assistance students received from the institution upon entering college ($\beta = .17$; $p < .001$). Three of the variables in the academic and social factors block significantly contributed to the model's variance (8%); students' commitment to their major ($\beta = .20$; $p < .001$), the number of hours spent studying per week ($\beta = .12$; $p < .05$), and the highest degree intended ($\beta = .11$; $p < .05$). Last, participation in the EOPS ($\beta = .15$) was the only variable in Block 4, interactions with institutional agents (accounting for 3% of the variance), that predicted intent to persist to degree completion for Latino/a students. Participation in the Scholars Program approached significance ($p = .07$). Interactions with institutional agents as assessed in this study (number and type), and participation in the other support programs—Latino/a Center—did not reach significance.

Discussion

After controlling for the effects of pre-college student characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, and academic and social factors, this study found a small but significant impact of support programs and institutional agents' interactions with Latino/a community college students' success and intention to persist to degree completion. With respect to GPA, it was found that students' interactions with instructional faculty outside of class had a small but significant impact on GPA, but did not influence their intention to persist. Generally speaking, the higher the number of times a student met with faculty members outside of class, the higher the GPA they achieved. This finding supports a growing body of research valuing student–agent interactions on learning outcomes (Barnett, 2011; Crisp, 2010; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Soria, 2013; Torres, 2006; Tovar, 2013; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). However, given the small percentage of variance accounted for in this study concerning faculty–student interactions, the present study also lends support to Bean's (1985) contention that *informal*

(non-purposeful) faculty contacts exercise little or perhaps no influence on student socialization or retention. Most of the interactions held by students with instructors in this study were informal, and not designed to elicit specific outcomes.

Also consistent with select social capital literature (McDonough, 1997; Orozco, Alvarez, & Gutkin, 2010; Stanton-Salazar, 1997, 2011) and career maturity literature (Perry, Cabrera, & Vogt, 1999), this study found that discussing or failing to discuss career-related issues with students by instructors and counselors, respectively, significantly predicted students' GPA. Whereas discussing career issues with students by instructors had a compensatory effect on GPA, a failure to do so by counselors had a negative effect. Additionally, participating in select college support services characterized by greater interactions with counselors, in particular, positively influenced Latino/a students' GPA via their involvement in the Scholars Program and increased intent to persist when participating in the EOPS. Of interest is the fact that participation in the Latino/a Center did not predict either GPA or intent to persist to degree completion, raising into question the utility of the program, at least where these outcomes are involved. Suarez (2003) pointed out that while ethnic minority support programs are favored by college administrators and staff, their utility to students is often limited as students are either unaware of the comprehensiveness of the services such programs offer, or because students are unable to partake in all aspects owing to the lack of time. In other words, membership in the program is not a sufficient condition for success. Establishing a good relationship with a program leader or counselor who validates and offers them individual guidance and mentorship seems to be a benefit of ethnic minority student support programs (Dowd et al., 2013).

This study also continues to reinforce the importance of background characteristics, transition-to-college experiences, and academic and social factors in the prediction of GPA and intention to persist to degree completion (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2001; Ceja, 2006; Dowd et al., 2013; Núñez et al., 2013; Perez & Ceja, 2010). Having significant family responsibilities, experiencing a challenging transition to college, and encountering academic difficulties had a deleterious impact on Latino/a students' grades; albeit enrolling in a higher number of units positively predicted GPA. Having supportive family and friends, receiving transition assistance from the institution, spending adequate time studying, and committing to the pursuit of a major or a degree exercised a powerful influence on intention to persist to degree completion.

Given the findings presented in this article, it would appear that Latino/a students participating in this study did not draw the same social networking or academic benefits others have reported for university students (Dowd et al., 2013; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Museus, 2010; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006), or in some instances for community college students (Chang, 2005; Coley, 2000; Crisp, 2010). An alternate explanation also seems in order. It is possible that interactions between Latino/a students with institutional agents simply did not carry the same academically beneficial outcomes as for other students because Latino/as interacted with "less qualified" individuals who had limited access to information relevant to their academic success (Ream, 2003).

As institutional agents, instructors and counselors alike can influence how students socialize at the college and *how* and to what degree they are exposed to resources supporting their success. As protective agents, instructors and counselors serve as conduits to college-related information of various forms (e.g., academic, career, social). Attending to students' psychosocial and academic needs facilitates their transition-to-college experience and student's perception that they are valued by others at the institution. It also enhances their sense of belonging to the institution; facilitates social interactions and relationships with others, including faculty; and ultimately impacts degree progression (Barnett, 2011; Rendón, 1994; Tovar, 2013; Tovar et al., 2009). Failing to address these needs, student distrust and detachment from instructors, counselors, and institutions themselves will likely impact help-seeking behavior and may influence students' decision to prematurely leave the institution or higher education altogether.

Consistent with previous studies and given the very nature of the community college system, it is often difficult for students to form close relationships with instructors and counselors (Ream, 2003). Community college students generally attend on a part-time basis given their many responsibilities, frequently work on a full-time basis, and are responsible for their families' financial well-being, as the results of this study demonstrate, and as others have noted (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Dowd et al., 2013). As a result, they spend less time on campus, and lacking knowledge of programs and services, they may not seek assistance from instructors and counselors on a regular basis. Latino/a students frequently seek out academic, personal, and financial assistance only as needed or as their responsibilities permit (Suarez, 2003; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). It is also likely that the degree and type of contact students do have with institutional agents, as well as the quality of those experiences, will determine whether future contacts with institutional agents will occur. For too many ethnic minorities, including Latino/a students, interactions with faculty and counselors are not always positive, and sometimes border on negative stereotyping experiences (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Ream, 2003; Rendón, 1994) that influence learning outcomes. While this study did not specifically address the racial campus climate experience for participants, it is clear that the number of contacts students have with agents and support programs is not a sufficient condition to successful educational outcomes.

Implication for Practice

Given this study's findings, it is imperative that counselors systematically address not only academic issues, but developmental issues as well, such as students' career interests, or their degree of career decisiveness. Counselors should approach this in a systematic fashion, and make effective use of their counseling and interviewing skills to assess students' needs, and identify areas of support already available to them, or introduce them to new resources. Simply providing academic assistance (no matter how frequently) is not in itself conducive to Latino/a student success.

Administrators must ensure that counseling and advising programs in place at community colleges must also do a better job at addressing Latino/a students' psychosocial needs in an effort to better assist them, and ultimately facilitate progression to degree completion. Studies have emphasized the need to provide students with instrumental and formalized support to maximize college outcomes, including persistence to degree completion (Dowd et al., 2013; Lundberg & Schreiner, 2004; Museus, 2010; Rendón, 1994; Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006). As the Center for Community College Student Engagement (2014) recently noted, it is time to "stop tinkering" with programs or so-called "interventions" that are not working, and instead invest the necessary resources that might bring about "big changes" (p. 25). Among these, "big changes" might be incorporating proven strategies shown to facilitate the college experience. This includes the expansion of counseling and academic advising positions available at community colleges, especially at institutions with a low counselor-to-student ratio. It also includes establishing formal mentoring programs that extend beyond the typical boutique student support programs available at many community colleges, including those that were part of this study. Key to the success of these programs will be the proper training of college faculty and staff to ensure they can function in their capacity of mentor. These individuals must be fully aware of the barriers students experience in not only getting to college but *through* college. Developing the requisite cultural awareness and competence, and building upon it, will in turn assist instructors to adopt culturally relevant pedagogies to use for the benefit of not only Latino/as but for students of all races. As the Center for Community College Student Engagement noted, using students' "cultural assets and strengths" will also ensure that faculty and other institutional agents competently deal with triggers of stereotype threat (p. 25). In the absence of formal opportunities for mentoring, instructors and counselors can employ the same gained competencies to systematically assess individual needs during informal interactions.

Given that supportive family and friends played a crucial role in Latino/a students' persistence intentions, colleges must find ways to "exploit" this positive influence. While research has shown that Latino/a parents have limited knowledge of the intricacies of college life (Zalaquett & Lopez, 2006), their informal involvement and moral support can nonetheless influence their sons' and daughters' success in college. College administrators and counselors should consider developing programs designed for parents and significant others (e.g., parent orientations) or revamping these as needed to help them become familiar with the tasks of college life. While there may be benefits from participating in an initial parent orientation as students commence college, an extended orientation offered in segments throughout the year during convenient times may be of greater benefit to both parents and students. These parent orientations can also add an additional informal mentoring element. College personnel could provide informal training to parents and significant others on select aspects of academic life, including the availability of support services for students; familiarize them with the likely issues students may experience during key points in the enrollment term; or with something as simple as dates and deadlines for important enrollment and academic transactions. The expectation would be that as these issues arise,

parents and significant others would be in a better position to assist students—even if it is just to remind them that there is help available at the college.

Implications for Research

Additional research must be conducted before we can conclusively state that interactions with institutional agents truly exercise a direct effect on Latino/as community college student success. Interactions pertaining to career-related issues appear to be the most beneficial to students, but it is unclear why these contributed only to academic success, but not for intent to persist. It is also puzzling that discussions of an academic nature or of a personal nature did not influence the outcomes of this study. Future research should attempt to tease out these findings further. It is recommended that in-depth, purposeful interviews on these matters be conducted to gain a greater awareness of which specific components under the umbrella of career-related, academic-related, and personal-related discussions with institutional agents influence Latino/a community college students' success. It is also recommended that this study be replicated at other community colleges as there may be institutional characteristics that may also help explain the findings in this study. Additional studies employing the same intention-to-persist framework used in this study should also be carried out with community college students of other races/ethnicities. This would allow us to examine whether Latino/a students indeed do not draw the same academic benefits from their interactions with institutional agents as Ream (2003) has found elsewhere. Last, given recent policy changes in California with the adoption of the Student Success Act of 2012, community colleges are expected to restructure the delivery of services such as college orientations, placement testing, and of educational planning/counseling/advising support services (Student Success Task Force, 2012). Once institutions have restructured counseling/advising services and have renewed their efforts to providing comprehensive educational planning fully assessing students' educational needs (not currently happening consistently according to the Task Force report), there will be a need to examine how these expanded services impact student success. It is plausible that in revamping services, counselors will also be more attuned to the tenor and nature of their interactions with students, which in turn may influence not only grades and persistence intentions but also degree attainment.

Conclusion

Latino/a community college students continue to face challenges impeding their progression toward degree attainment, even as transition support and interactions with agents of the college facilitate their success and persistence intentions. This study highlighted the significant and positive influence of supportive family and friends, and of transition-to-college assistance provided by institutions on select student outcomes, namely, GPA and intention to persist. While the benefits associated with interactions with institutional agents and with support services were limited in this study, it is likely that where students perceive they matter, where they feel they are noticed, where

instructors and counselors demonstrate sincere interest in their lives and academic pursuits, where they are "shown the way" and are availed of appropriate and timely resources will likely lead students to believe they are valued, both as individuals and as members of the academic community, and will influence how successful they will be (Center for Community College Student Engagement, 2014; Deil-Amen, 2011; Dowd et al., 2013; Rendón, 1994; Torres, 2006; Tovar et al., 2009). Community college personnel must take a more direct approach when working with Latino/a students and purposefully reach out to them, if we are to help them succeed.

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