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By

César Augusto Alvarez

August, 2011

CREATING DREAMS AND MAKING THEM COME TRUE: A QUALITATIVE  
EXAMINATION OF A PROGRAM TO INCREASE THE ACHIEVEMENT OF  
UNIVERSITY DEGREES AMONG LATINO STUDENTS

A Doctoral Thesis Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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August, 2011

CREATING DREAMS AND MAKING THEM COME TRUE: A QUALITATIVE  
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### Abstract

Latino students in the United States are, statistically, the least likely demographic group to complete high school and go on to college. To combat the issue of Latino dropout rate, and its subsequent negative impact on educational, social, economic and public welfare, federal, state and local government agencies are attempting to address the issue by providing educational programs in order to decrease dropouts, and increase educational support in high school and in college. The Latino population is becoming the dominant population in many major cities in the United States. Therefore, if dropout rates and academic opportunity gaps are not addressed within this demographic, it is increasingly being recognized that the nation will be catastrophically affected.

Although the focus of these programs is well intentioned, the majority of existing programs tend to focus on solely on preventing Latino students from dropping out of school. Few programs actually take the initiative to prepare and develop Latino students to be successful in high school or to actually graduate from college.

The program studied has achieved several decades of success in equipping Latino students to graduate from college. The program recruits students during their sophomore year in high school and monitors and supports each cohort member through graduation (i.e., not just in high school, but also through college). This unique program, which is both costly and time-consuming, often requires a seven to nine year commitment.

Nevertheless, this program has served as a method of salvation for many of the cohort members, especially considering the typical life alternatives to participation.

The purpose of this research was to systematically examine and document the various perceptions of program participants, which include perspectives ranging from student participants to program leaders and organizers. This method of examination is utilized in order to determine which elements may be in need of revision, and to identify elements that may be replicable in other educational settings. This research contributes to the literature dealing with Latino student issues such as: decreasing dropout rate, increasing academic achievement, increasing graduation rate, increasing SAT scores, mentoring and monitoring for student success, increasing college enrollment, and increasing college graduation.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

If an imaginary random sample of four-year university students across the nation were asked, “Did you always know you were going to go to college?” it may be safe to assume that a large percentage of students would respond with a similar phrase – namely, “Yes, I always knew I was going to attend college.” Some within this sample would likely take this declaration further by adding, “It’s something my family expected from me.” However, if additional analyses were conducted, and researchers isolated the responses of the students of color, the percentage of those students having the aforementioned response would drop. Furthermore, in my personal and professional experience, if one were to explore Latino students’ responses for the same question, that Latinos would be the least likely to respond, “Yes, I always knew I was going to go to college.” It is more likely that the Latino students’ most dominant responses would be, “No, I did not know college was always a sure option available to me.”

This assertion does not suggest that Latino students have an inferiority complex or that Latino parents would not want their children to pursue a four-year college degree. Historically, Latino students tend to attend underperforming schools that do not adequately prepare most students for a college-ready education. In addition, Latino parents are least likely to be able to financially afford college-preparation courses or the actual cost of a full college experience. The majority of Latino parents were themselves underserved as students; thus, they are not likely to possess the social and/or financial capital (McClafferty, Torres, & Mitchell, 2000) required promoting college attendance, to

navigate their children on a path that leads to college, or how to pursue a four-year university degree. Latino parents, as with most minority ethnic groups which are economically or culturally outsiders of the dominant non-Latino White culture simply cannot help their children attain a college degree through their own resources. When I say “White” I mean to include what non-Caucasians refer to as being “White” non-ethnic specific with any of the negative connotation. Latinos and other minority cultures have to overcome their own cultural traits which may not coincide with what is the “standard”. Moreover, Latino parents have to also adapt to a set of rules and expectations which have been set up by the dominant economic, political and established non-Latino White culture. Part of the reason that Latino students are not succeeding is that Latino students have not for the most part accepted or adapted to the White culture’s rules of the game. The game, which is identified as “Social Capital”, involves the social norms and expectations of the dominant culture that has been passed down from secession of power to ensure that it is their own values that are the standard and the rule. A Latino student is expected to play and compete on the same level as his White counterparts even though the Latino does not know or possess the hidden currency that allows access and promotes success. In the White culture, parents pass down the codes to the social capital game of how they are supposed to interact, how the system works, and how to make it work for them. It’s not that the White culture is trying to keep the codes secret, but, if a Latino parent has not received nor understands how to decipher the codes for the “social capital” game, how can he pass down the rules to his son? Latino parents are more likely to have been dropouts or educated in a non-college focused environment, most likely through vocational-type programs. If a Latino parent lacks the basic understanding of what

college is- he or she will perpetuate a culture of poverty, thus the parent is less likely to be able to advance the child past their own parents' current socio-economic status or type of employment. Furthermore, the mentality of "*if it was good enough for my parents, and for me, then it's good enough for my child*" is counterproductive in the advocacy of a college education. Stephen L. Klineberg (2011) notes that similar antiquated and deeply-held beliefs of the good times and the notion all one would need were good hands and a strong back is no longer valid because in reality the "great life" will only be designated for those with higher education. Not being part of the system, Latino parents have to rely on the individuals who have successfully maneuvered in and through the university waters. For the most part, the majority of Latino families are supportive and accepting of any type of assistance an institution wishes to give to facilitate their child's college admission. It is not that Latino parents are lazy or uninterested; rather, they simply understand that school officials should be trusted when they are trying to help their children progress through the educational system. Latino parents respect educators and are willing to accept, often uncritically, their opinions and are willing to put their children's futures in their hands. Another reason why so many Latino parents are willing to allow other people to help their children is that most Latino parents are intimidated and feel they do not have a voice because they lack certain language skills. For instance, McClafferty (2000) noted that some Latino parents who are not able to speak English or many are ashamed of not being able to speak properly and because of their own educational inadequacies of not completing school may avoid becoming involved in the formal education and college tracking of their children. For many Latino parents, most resort to blame themselves for why their children do not go to college and not necessarily

seeing that there are historical factors which may contribute to the social disconnect and the way the educational system has been set up by a once dominant White population does not advantage them and their children. Latino parents and grandparents who were students the 1950- 1970 in Texas vividly recall that there was a double standard for Latino students. My father-in-law and mother-in-law (both being 5<sup>th</sup> generation Texas-Mexican) would explain that when they were young and attended school in a rural town outside of Houston in the 1950-1960s, they recalled that most Latino children were forced to attend 1<sup>st</sup> grade for two years (low 1<sup>st</sup> and high 1<sup>st</sup> grade) and two years for second grade (low 2<sup>nd</sup> and high 2<sup>nd</sup> grade). Many Latino children were nearly 2-3 years older than their non-Latino White classmates, if they were allowed to go to desegregated or “white” schools. In Texas, until the 1990s it was legally acceptable that at age 18 or after the 9<sup>th</sup> grade to drop out of school. It was the easy way out for most Latino students which were already behind struggling in the class facing discrimination in the classrooms. That is not even discussing the economic reality of easy entry-level positions available to low skilled individuals or the cultural expectation for boys to sacrifice their education to enter the workforce to help the family financially; or for the girls of being expected to be domestic housewives and baby producers. For many Latinos, the educational system was not initially designed to actually educate students of color. For Latinos of the segregation era, education was designed to isolate and take away their cultural and social capital. According to my father-in-law and many of his generation, the educational system was never designed with the intention of preparing them for a better life than their parents, if anything, it was designed to help replace and substitute them in their parents’ workforce.

The topic of this doctoral thesis is the study of a student cohort group's evaluation of a Latino student advocacy program at a Texas university in a large urban city which has focused on recruiting Latino students from an urban secondary school and supported them until each cohort member graduates from the university. The cohort being studied is actually the 6<sup>th</sup> cohort of the program's history. The first such cohort was started in 1988 in which the researcher was a member of the pilot program. The cohort being studied comprises approximately 15 current students who are still enrolled in their senior year of college. This study will contribute to educational theory, practice, and policy by supporting the claim that, for most Latino students who actually enter a four-year college; there are additional factors (i.e., aside from parental contributions) that have contributed to their success and support. These additional factors have allowed Latino students to make the leap into college beyond their parents' understandably limited purview and expectations of college access and attainability. This topic is of great importance as the United States of American is experiencing a significant shift in demographics, which may eventually have a political, economic, and social impact. Stephen Klineberg (2011) states that cities like Houston is where the impact will be seen and must be address as, "cities need to acknowledge that nothing in the world will stop America's major urban areas from becoming more Latino, more Asian and less Anglo as the 21<sup>st</sup> century unfolds. This diversity can be a city's greatest asset or it can become a major liability". If the Latino population's educational trends do not improve from their current trends, this could lead to catastrophic consequences for all citizens of all economic and social backgrounds (Dorning, 2010).

The students and faculty members in this study may identify themselves as Latino, Hispanic, Mexican-American or Chicano, and the author will accommodate each individual's preferences. For the purposes of this paper, the term "Latino" will be used to signal Hispanic, Mexican-American, or Chicano. The reasoning for using Latino versus any of the other terms is, firstly, the need for overall consistency and, secondly, in that the terms Latino, Hispanic, Mexican-American and Chicano have political and historical roots and connotations that are not reflective of the diverse population of individuals, which are of Spanish-decent in the United States of America (USA). Furthermore, the term "Latino" will be used in the body to include both genders, which generally would be Latino for male and Latina for female; however, when used in the narrative description the terms Latino and Latino were used to identify the student's gender. Further, pseudonyms will also be used for the individuals, programs, and university in the study. "The Dream-Maker University" will be the pseudonym for the name of the university. "The Center for Hispanics Engaging in Learning Practices" (cHELP) will be how the College Department will be named. "The Hispanic's Option for Promise and Excellence" (HOPE) will be the name of the program. Each name/acronym used will not reflect the real identities of the participants or entities within this study. "Zapata" High School will be the pseudonym assigned for the high school from which the students were originally recruited.

In the literature review of this related issue, the reader will view the outline of the many programs addressing dropout prevention for Latino students at the high school level. Most of these varieties of programs focus on preventing Latinos at risk of dropping out, but most are not addressing the need to encourage high-achieving students to

progress through high school on a college-bound track, and providing the support systems needed to sustain the student's focus, nurture their dreams and cultivate the student's accountability towards themselves, family and the program of completing a college degree. It has been my experience working with urban Latino students that they do not have someone planning a tangible and realistic college seed in their mind. For those Latino students who may have had someone plant a college seed so he or she can actually think that just maybe he could one day go to college, not many of those students ever get any real germination of that seed and their aspirations would not had blossomed. What this program does is it plants the seed of college attainment, it waters the seed with skills, it cultivates the seed as it germinates into a real flower, and finally after the flower is finally mature and strong enough, the flower is able to stand alone a be in a full college bloom. The program being evaluated does more than just throws seeds on the ground and hope that a flower will bloom. This program has to metaphorically plant the college seed into the minds of these Latino students and help that seed turn into a dream but does not stop until that dream become a reality. In essence, this program is a dream maker. Moreover, there are many programs that address the recruitment of students of color, the retention efforts for students of color, and even increasing the graduation rate among students of color in the higher education setting. The majority of the programs that help recruit students of color only help the targeted groups into college, but provided little support is provided once they are in. Retention programs in the college setting tend to be limited to simply giving the student temporary assistance, such as tutorials and access to student learning centers, where he has the opportunities to learn study skills and counseling; unfortunately, there is no follow up past the semester. Graduation programs

usually only target juniors and seniors in order to finish their college degrees.

Historically, universities have not done well in ensuring that their students are supported through the whole experience and actually graduate within six years, which is a reality that many universities across Texas currently have to face in its press for Tier 1 status. This topic becomes further compounded by funding issues (THECB, 2005) as state legislators are now creating accountability measures in regard to student performance, which is tied to state and federal funding, similar to K-12 institutions. (Valverde, 2008)

What makes the HOPE program unique is that the program recruits exclusively from Zapata High School during the student's tenth grade year. Zapata High School is located within walking distance of the Dream-Maker University. The ethnic demographics of Zapata are 96% Latino, 3% African American, and 1% White. A second unique element of the HOPE Program mission is that it provides support and resources in supporting students' high school graduation is only half of the program's mission. The same cohort of twenty-thirty students will then be assisted and monitored until each has successfully completed his/her university degree on the Dream-Maker campus; however, it is ultimately the students' option of where they attend college. Much of the seven to eight year commitment involving the students and families is orchestrated by the Center for Hispanics Engaging in the Learning Process (cHELP). Each cohort member is required to sign a contract and their parents must also sign the contract. The agreement is very simple: the expectation of the student is to perform academically and participate in HOPE's academic and social activities. The program incurs no extra costs to the family, but requires complete commitment. Dream-Maker University's Office of the President and cHELP are investing (\$1, 500 per cohort member

at the high school level and \$4,100 per cohort member at DMU) a lot of money and time to each cohort member and there needs to be a strong commitment from the student and his parents.

For the seven or eight years the students are in the program, they become part of a cohort that is specifically looked after and supported. For those same seven to eight years, the cHELP becomes the student's *loco parentis* (i.e., parental advocate in the absence of direct parental involvement) when dealing with academics, college preparation, selection, admission, and funding. The majority of the cohort members' parents did not graduate from high school and even fewer attended college. What has become evident here is that for most Latino students who actually enter a four-year university, these students (HELP cohort members) are more likely to credit their teachers, counselors, administrators, or university related programs for planting the college-seed, and not necessarily their parents, as most usually is the case with the White-dominant population. Unfortunately, most Latino parents do not have the resources or the social capital that university-bound students require in order to prepare the transition and succeed in college. It is common practice for parents of more affluent families to fund SAT review courses for their children as early as middle school. More affluent parents are more likely to pay for summer programs where the child will develop academic skills. Lastly, more affluent parents are more likely to send their children to schools that have stronger academic programs and college-bound cultures.

On the other hand, Latino students tend to attend low-performing local public schools where emphasis may focus on passing the state accountability test, and not on developing the higher level and critical thinking skills necessary for success in college.

The HOPE program in essence fills in the opportunity gap (Darling-Hammond, 2010) for these cohort members as part of their program requirements. Each student is required, while at Zapata High School, to maintain high grade point average, take Advanced Placement courses, and maintain good academic and participation standing with the program. In its own unique way, the HOPE Program is helping not only by narrowing the achievement gap but, more importantly, by increasing the opportunity gap. For the small group of students who are fortunate to have been selected into the program, they now have a better shot in life and possibly access to a better future.

The researcher has benefited from this program in ways that are difficult to measure. Before the program in 1988, the researcher and his family had lived in a housing project, in a subpar housing and without any real thought for the future beyond their daily existence. After the program in 1999, the researcher had a college degree and is currently completing a doctorate program living a modest upper-middle class lifestyle. In a school of nearly 2000 students, the selected 20-30 student cohort quickly realized that because they were in this program they would get special privileges of access and enrollment with the best teachers and advanced courses, extra mentorship, dedicated tutorials with university tutors and more attention from the teachers and the program managers and director. Membership really did have privileges which helped ensure they had the best teachers, their schedule requests changes were resolved, and if there was a conflict with their teacher or grades, it was resolved. Having a full-time advocate on campus that exclusively assisted them was a true benefit. Cohort members would quickly learn that failure was not an option and every possible resource was being used to assist them in completing high school and prepare them for college.

At Zapata High School, a freshman class can average 600-800 students, unfortunately, 300 to 400 students respectively will graduate in four years. Statistically, half of all Latino students at Zapata High School will not finish high school, being part of the HOPE program virtually ensures not only successfully completing high school with high GPA and preparation but the expectation of going through to finish college is engrained in each cohort member. Each cohort member may not have known exactly how they would be going to go to college, but, at least each one believed that HOPE was going to get them there. This, in fact, was the case for the researcher, he was fortunate to have been selected as one of 88 students from eighth grade in middle school and it was evident in the lives of the cohort members how most of the students actually completed high school even though many of their friends who had not been part of the cohort did not finish. Each and every one of the 88 students actually finished high school either through the standard high school diploma or the Graduate Equivalency Degree (GED).

In this thesis investigation, I study the degree to which student cohort members felt the HOPE program was effective in preparing them for high school and how effective the HOPE program is still helping them be successful in college. This academic year will be the current cohort's sixth year in the program, and most are seniors or on path to graduating. The discussions and finding will help the program modify or maintain its practices to help future cohort members and determine if expansion of the program is a viable option.

#### Purpose of the Study

Latino groups are among the fastest and largest growing demographic groups across the United States. In the border states of California, Texas, and New Mexico, the

latest figures the census Latinos comprise the largest ethnic group - if not the majority-minority. Moreover, the same Latino population that is among the largest groups are not completing high school and are not entering universities, much less getting their four-year university degrees, which is a particularly troubling phenomenon that most certainly affects the U.S.'s competitiveness in an increasingly global economy (Augustine, 2005). This trend poses a very serious concern for social and economic development in areas with high population density levels of Latino individuals, and also for the society of this country as a whole as well. This study may promote a dialogue among school districts and university officials to possibly replicate similar HOPE programs to help address the above-mentioned issues. While the HOPE program may be very focused and limited, it has demonstrated results that will be elucidated in this study. It is my fervent hope that what is learned from this study will be used to seed other programs across the nation to help deal with low Latino recruitment, retention, and graduation rates in four-year institutions of higher learning.

As the researcher, I have a personal stake in this study. In 1988, I – along with 87 other students – was selected to participate in the pilot program which through time and refinement became to what today is known as the “The Hispanic’s Option for Promise and Excellence” (HOPE). It was through the HOPE Program that my dream of going to college was planted and nurtured. And, it was through the constant monitoring and support that I received that I was able to graduate from high school in the top quarter, transition into Dream-Maker University, and then successfully graduate from college. I acknowledge that it was because of the HOPE Program that I was able to attain two baccalaureates degrees (Social Sciences, History), a Masters in Education, and that I am

currently in the throes of completing my Doctorate in Education. There are countless stories, since 1989, from alumni like me who also trace their successes in life to what the HOPE Program has done for them. The program has been able to produce many professionals in the education, business, and technology fields, to name just a few. For approximately 300 participants, the HOPE Program was been a source of pride and salvation from a fate that many former classmates that were not cohort members faced as dropouts. For me, being selected into this program was like winning the lottery - a lottery in which one perpetually wins and benefits those around them and future generations. The program does not guarantee the student's fortunes, but it literally ensures a chance at a better life, a life where he/she can contribute to society and not be a burden.

#### Significance of the Study

The purpose of this particular study lies in the expectation of finding meaning and significance in this type of program that addresses the achievement gap among Latino students and how implementation of this very unique program has found a possible solution. Educational practitioners and university professors are currently studying and examining a variety of education-based dilemmas: how to help minority students from dropping out from high school; how to help recruit minority students into universities; how to retain minority students in college; and how to increase the graduation rate for minority students. It would behoove these same educational practitioners and college professors to look at the HOPE program as a potential remedy to such issues. Latinos, in particular because of their majority minority status in the future and their historically evident need for access and success in education, will find it of critical importance when seeking examples of effective best practices already being used and with positive results.

The program has a proven track record of successfully recruiting, retaining, and graduating its cohort members. My focus as a researcher will be to simply look at one cohort group members' perceptions of the HOPE program in a fine-grained way.

Ultimately, the intent of this study is to identify ways that the HOPE program can improve the manner in which it operates to possibly increase its success rate, while celebrating how the program has already assisted former students, such as myself, to catapult a multitude of challenges, which include, but is not limited to, poverty and lack of conventional forms of parental support.

#### Statement of the Problem

Access to higher education is still the key in narrowing the social divide and academic achievement gap for most Latino students; the majority of Latinos are either falling into the chasm or staying in limbo on the negative side of the divide. It is critical with an increasingly large Latino population that these students be prepared to become the next level of professionals. If this issue is not addressed soon, the large underclass in the U.S. will become enormous and irreversible. It is in this backdrop where this study gets its sense of urgency. The program being studied is a successful program that maybe cultivates/ nurtures/ creates/ sows a sense of “ableness” and supports Latino students from high school through to college graduation. The larger implication of this study is the potential application of expanding and replicating this concept to other colleges and universities. Otherwise, students have limited options and, instead of being productive and contributing members of society, may revert to being a significant burden on the social-welfare, and not contributing to an increase in the tax-base because of their lower wage earning potential.

Researchers, such as Klineberg, (2011) have already conducted studies that point to the urgent need to promote Latinos into the college arena. If communities with large Latino populations do not address Latino educational needs, then those communities will have irreversible consequences that may result in the increase of crime and other negative social issues. Latinos currently represent the youngest population among all ethnic groups with school-aged children constituting the largest proportion. What this means is that the Latino population is poised to have a greater population boom; thus, the salient the need for more education. It will be the young Latino professional population that will need to replace the aging, non-Latino Whites within the next twenty years. If there are not enough Latinos whom are highly trained and highly educated, there will be a void in the workforce. (Klineberg, 2011)

The HOPE Program is developing, cultivating and nurturing the next level of Latino leaders and professionals. Due to the current economic constraints and funding issues facing higher education institutions, the program's focus is very limited in regard to the number of students it can support. Yet, the Center for Hispanics Engaging in Learning Process (CHELP) at the Dream-Maker University is also constantly searching for grants, and fundraising; CHELP currently is conducting a 3 million dollar fundraiser to build its program needs and it fortunately receives large financial support from the private sector. Currently there are 30 students at Zapata High School and 50 students at DMU who are part of the program.

#### Research Questions

There will be three levels of research queries examined in this study:

- Firstly, the tracking of academic performance of the HOPE program cohort members through a review of the archival data;
- Second, the gathering and analysis of student stories in focus groups to identify what the student's perspective of the HOPE program through the years - starting with their 10<sup>th</sup> grade in Zapata High School and who currently are juniors and seniors at Dream-Maker University.
- Third, the final research source will be personal interviews conducted with the HOPE program director.

#### Survey and Focus Group Research Questions

The first set of research questions will address my contention that Latino students need an external catalyst in the promotion and attainment of a four-year university degree. These questions will be satisfied via the survey and focus group modes:

1. What did the HOPE Program do to plant a college seed and help the participant achieve a university goal of a college degree?
2. If participants had not been associated with the HOPE program, would they today be attaining a university campus?
3. What has been the difference between the HOPE participants and their high school friends who are not in college?

#### Program Administration Research Questions

The second set of research questions will be asked of the HOPE Program administration:

1. How can the HOPE Program be replicated across different content areas or disciplines?
2. Is the HOPE Program more effective if it exclusively has a Latino or ethnic focus? Or can the HOPE program be just as effective if it was opened to all ethnic groups?

This program evaluation has many significant values in the contribution to the literature. I have a very personal stake in this program evaluation in that as a citizen, educator, and an advocate of young Latinos who will follow in my and other HOPE program graduates' footsteps. In speaking for the program's various alumni, we want to make sure that this program and future variations of this program are available to help countless future Latino students. This program is bigger than just a program that helped me, and nearly 179 HOPE alumni at the Dream-Maker University. This program has also affected my nuclear and extended family members and others in my community. Nonetheless, I am simply one individual who has benefited from this program. There are countless individuals who have benefited directly or indirectly.

#### Practical Applications

This study will ultimately assist in the expansion the current program to include more students, so that former and current students may also benefit from similar programs. The more encompassing goal espoused through this study is that this type of program will not be exclusive only to Latino students; rather, that other ethnic groups may also be beneficiaries of such support. Moreover, the great hope is that colleges might be able to use this model in order to recruit students in specific programs by identifying

content specifics, such as engineering to education to math and sciences fields. This program has proven that advocacy for Latino students is part of the key to assisting Latino student to go through high school and get into college and graduate with a degree. Such advocacy may, ultimately, prove to be the final key that practitioner may not have realize is that planting a seed without the watering does not work, sometimes the gardener needs to be more involved and protect its flower as if it were its own family. A dream about college without action will eventually just have been just a thought long passed, what many Latino students need is to help make that dream into a reality... we have to become that “dream-maker”.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Having introduced the topic of my thesis research in Chapter One, I now move on to a survey of the supporting literature for such an inquiry in Chapter Two. This literature review covers the central theme of decreasing the academic achievement gap with the emphasis on narrowing the opportunity gap among Latino students from a national, state, city, and program perspective. The focus of the search was to layout the foundation of how urgent of an issue the lack of college access and attainment for Latino students is, how this trend is affecting such students, and how this issue will have a greater impact on the American society. Furthermore, the review of literature includes a program evaluation of a similar program that only addresses the Latino high school dropout prevention and is helping the students to graduate from high school that will be compared to HOPE. Finally, the literature search includes additional program evaluation of a program that provides mentoring and support for Latino students while they are in college - again, similar to the supports provided by the HOPE program. Both program evaluations address the issues of a high dropout rate among Latino students, their academic underachievement, and the fact that they are not academically or socially prepared for college. Also, both program evaluations short-term focused. Though there have been several programs designed to address Latino students exclusively - some focusing on high school, some focusing in Junior college, and some in four year universities - there is no other program that recruits students from one high school during their sophomore year and continues to offer support throughout their college career,

especially as far as when the students graduate from college. To be part of the HOPE program the students, parents and the university have to make a 7-9 year commitment.

The problem of Latino students not graduating from high school and entering college is one problem that is only going to be magnified as the Latino population undergoes a dramatic shift. The Latino population is exploding and the majority of Latinos are between the ages of 16-26 years old, which the college aged group is. The economy and overall development of the United States cannot afford having an ill-prepared population to continue the economic progress to date, or to continue investing in the infrastructure systems that are now in place. It will be this growing Latino population which needs to be replacing the aging European-American professionals so as to sustain our current levels of economic growth and making sure things are properly working. Dean Baker with the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington projects that in the next twenty years the U.S. will have a poorly skilled workforce (Dorning, 2010). It stands to reason that if the majority of the Latino population dropouts of school and does not learn the basics needed to enter the highly skilled workforce; we will create a society of underprepared and therefore underutilized people. Moreover, having a very large population of dropouts will in turn be more of a burden and drain on our national resources than a contributor. It is also understood that individuals who dropout will not earn enough income to be help sustain the economic capital necessary to help fund the government services, which are ultimately paid by individual citizens' taxes.

## National Perspective

Across the nation, with the economic downturn, budget cuts in educational support services, and increasing graduation requirements of state exit-level graduation tests for high school diplomas, the dropout rate is now an issue that affects all racial and economic groups. Nevertheless, among the Latino population, however, this trend tends to be disproportionately high. Swanson (2006) indicates that the national picture for high school graduation rates among the three dominant ethnicities was ominous as compared with non-Latino Whites who were graduating at 76.2% as compared to Blacks 51.6% and Latinos 55.6%. This data suggests that Latino and Black students are evidently at a clear disadvantage. The stark reality of these statistics comes to light when one interprets the data as slightly better than 1 in every 2 becoming a high school dropout. Compounding the issue is not just that Black and Latino students are simply choosing to be dropouts. The educational system is broken and, especially for urban minorities, the prospects are considerably unfavorable. Zuckerbrod (2007) has noted that 1 in 10 high schools across the nation are considered “Dropout Factories” where 40-60% of incoming freshmen do not complete high school with their cohort. Nonetheless, the dropout issue is not a recent phenomenon. Rather, it is one that has recently been brought to the public’s attention.

Helping under represented students graduate from high school and enter postsecondary institutions has been a national focus since the 1960s. Federal TRIO Programs such as Upward Bound (1964), Talent Search (1965) and Special Services for Disadvantaged Students (1968) (later called the Student Support Services) have helped over two million students graduate from various colleges and universities (Campbell, 2010). I am a proud product of the Upward Bound program and can attest to the support

and benefits this type of program had on my life. But there are not enough federal programs helping enough students of color and low-income students achieve their academic aspirations of simply graduating from high school and getting into college. Programs like Upward Bound serve their purpose by providing required enrichment opportunities for student to develop skills that will support them throughout high school and into college. The program also provides cultural experiences, mentorship, and support into college access process - all of which the HOPE program also conducts. The biggest detractor for Upward Bound and similar programs are that these programs help high school students who are accepted to the program to get the support they need to graduate from high school and facilitates the process to get into college; regretfully, the ties severed with the students upon graduation from high school and the program focuses on the next group of high school students. If the problem was only dealing with helping student graduate from high school and decreasing the dropout rates, then Upward Bound serves its purpose. However, most researchers are realizing that not all students that actually graduate from high school and enter college are prepared for the rigor and demands of college and are able to graduate with a degree/ degrees qualifying them for higher end jobs in the work force.

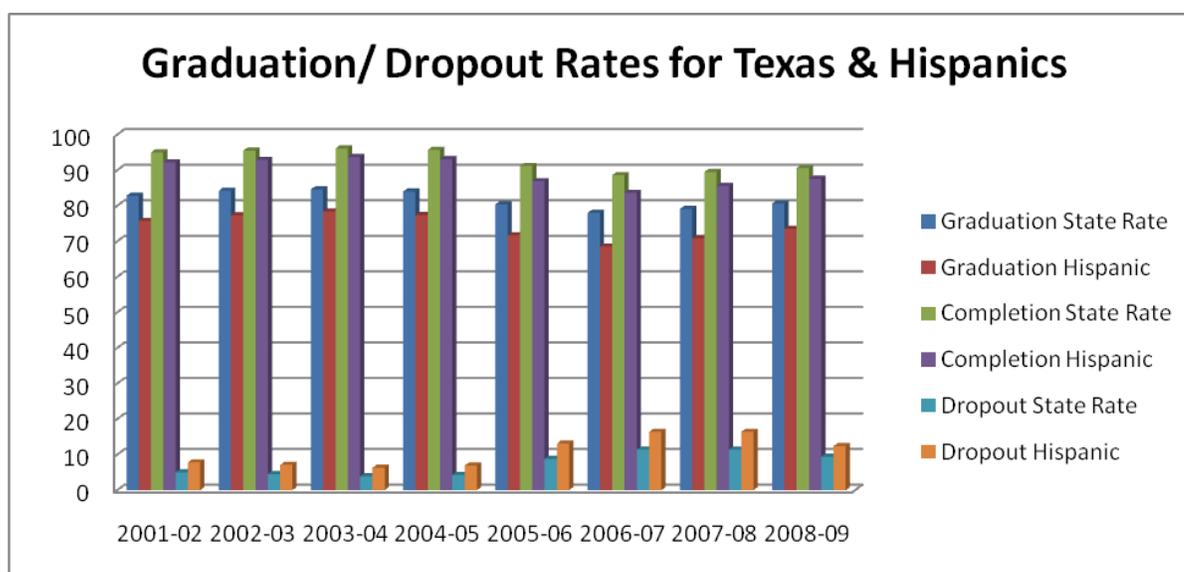
Nealy (2005) reported that nationally that the dropout rate from college during the freshmen to sophomore year is 13% in public four-year universities. Therefore, in my experience the issue is not simply getting, as in this study, Latino students through the high school and admitted to a university. Universities need to provide support systems for both Black and Latino students that include a summer bridge program, remedial support, social and cultural outreach programs, and mentoring. Most first-generation of

college going Latinos do not have the social capital needed to navigate through the complex university systems as many of their non-Latino white counterparts. Thus, federally funded programs like Upward Bound do have benefits and do a great deal of good for its members. Yet, these programs fall short in providing long-term support for students once they step on college campus, and students no longer have the same access to the resources that allowed them to be successful while in high school.

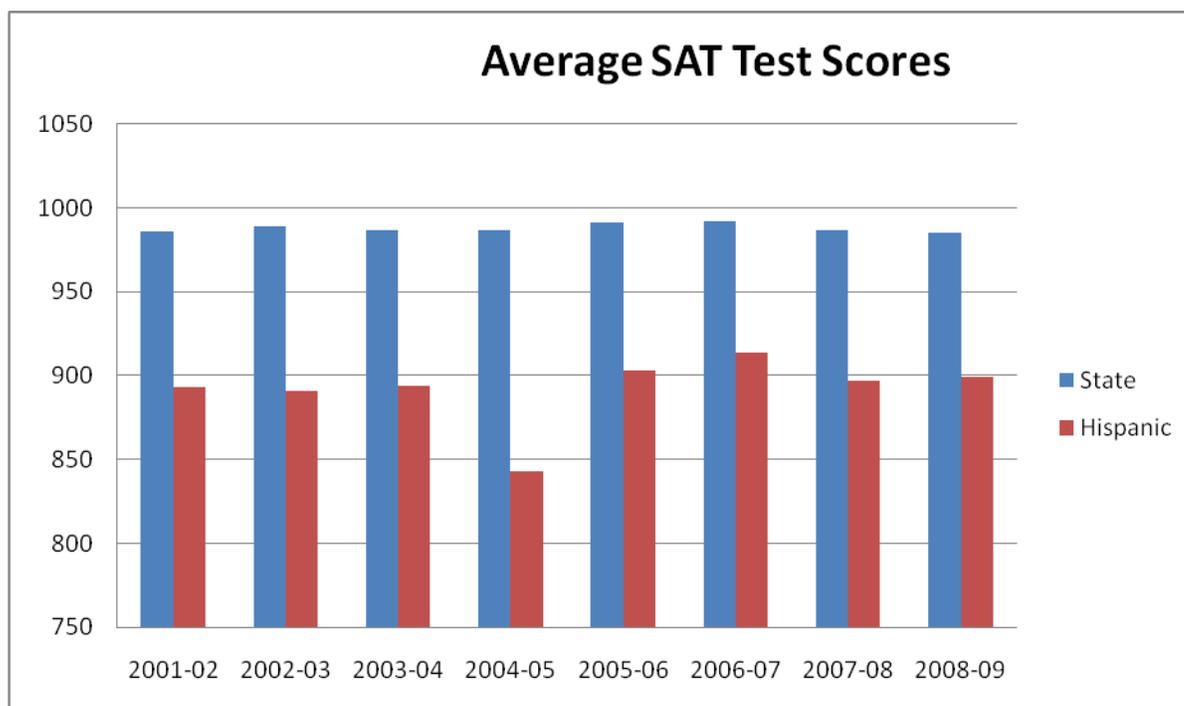
### State Perspective

The state of Texas has historically lagged behind other states in funding and performance with regards to the education of its residents. The State of Arizona is ranked 49<sup>th</sup> nationally in high school graduation rates and funding (Rivera, 2010). Texas Latinos fair better than other Latinos across the nation. In fact, these students fair better than even some non-Latino White students in other states. Latinos in Texas graduate from high school at a rate of 77.3%, as compared to Whites (89.8%) and Blacks (81.1%) (Swanson, 2006). However, many statisticians question these figures as the percentages reported for minority students are often higher based on how schools and the state remove the student “dropout”. By eliminating the enough dropouts from the student enrollment roles, the percentage of graduates will thus be inflated. The campus administrator would simply have to decide which students he wants to label as a dropout and which he will students he will identify by technicalities code them as other-than drop outs not impact the campus’ accountability rating. The name of the game would be to see how many students a campus or district could purge from its list – again, improving their dropout ratio. The official Texas Education Agency has even reported inflated graduation rates, especially for its Black and Latino students (Swanson, 2006). Figure

2.1 below shows the graduation , completion (include graduation and GED) and dropout rates for Texas students and Latino students since 2001 through 2009, it shows where in all aspects Latino students are statistically less likely to graduate or complete their high school education and more likely to become a dropout. Upon viewing Figure 2.1, it is clear to any statistician that this is not simply a recent issue. In fact, from 2001, the graphs illustrates that Latinos are consistently less likely to graduate or get a GED than the rest of all Texas students.



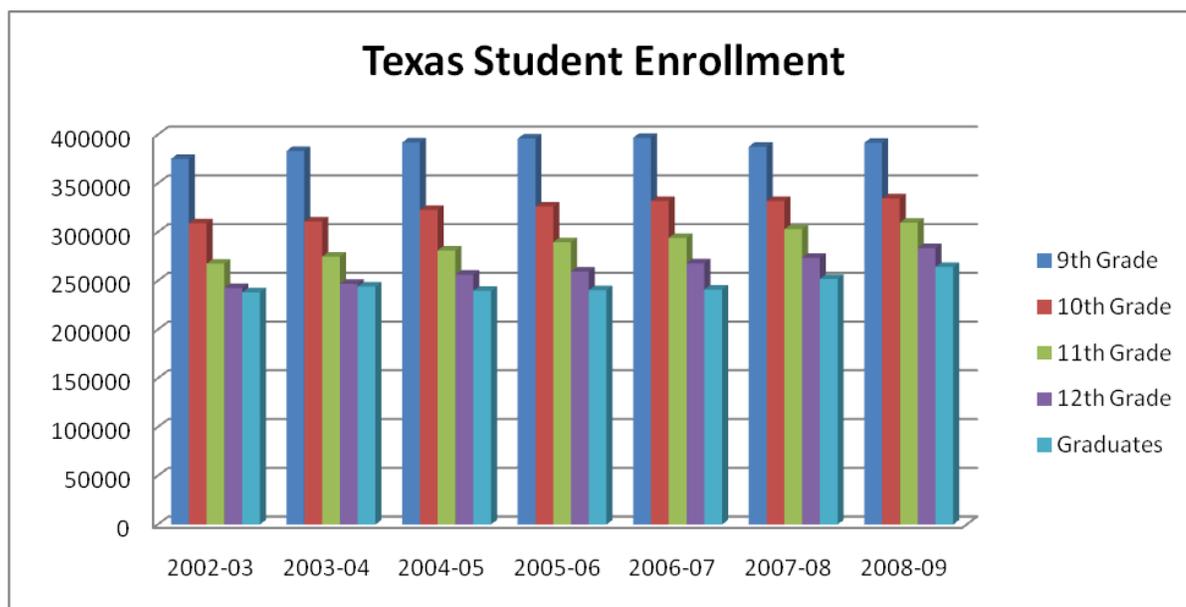
*Figure 2.1.* Graduation/dropout rates for Texas & Hispanics. This figure denotes the graduation, completion and dropout rates for Hispanic student in Texas from years 2001-2009 (Texas Education Agency, source).



*Figure 2.2.* Average SAT Test Scores. This figure denotes the average SAT test scores for Hispanics from years 2001-2009.

Figure 2.2 above shows that Latino students in the state of Texas are more likely to underperform on the national SAT test. From 2001-2009, the state average has remained constant whereas the Latino scores have some fluxuation but are approximately 50+ points lower than the state average. There are three main contributing factors for that statistic: (1) Latinos are less likely to have the vocabulary or the test taking skills identified exclusively for the SAT; (2) Schools that are prodominantly Latino and their Latino family aer less likely to provide for SAT workshops and training, and (3) Many schools do not push enough students to take the SAT test and more Latinos may not see the need to take the test seriously as they may not have interest or intent of going to college.

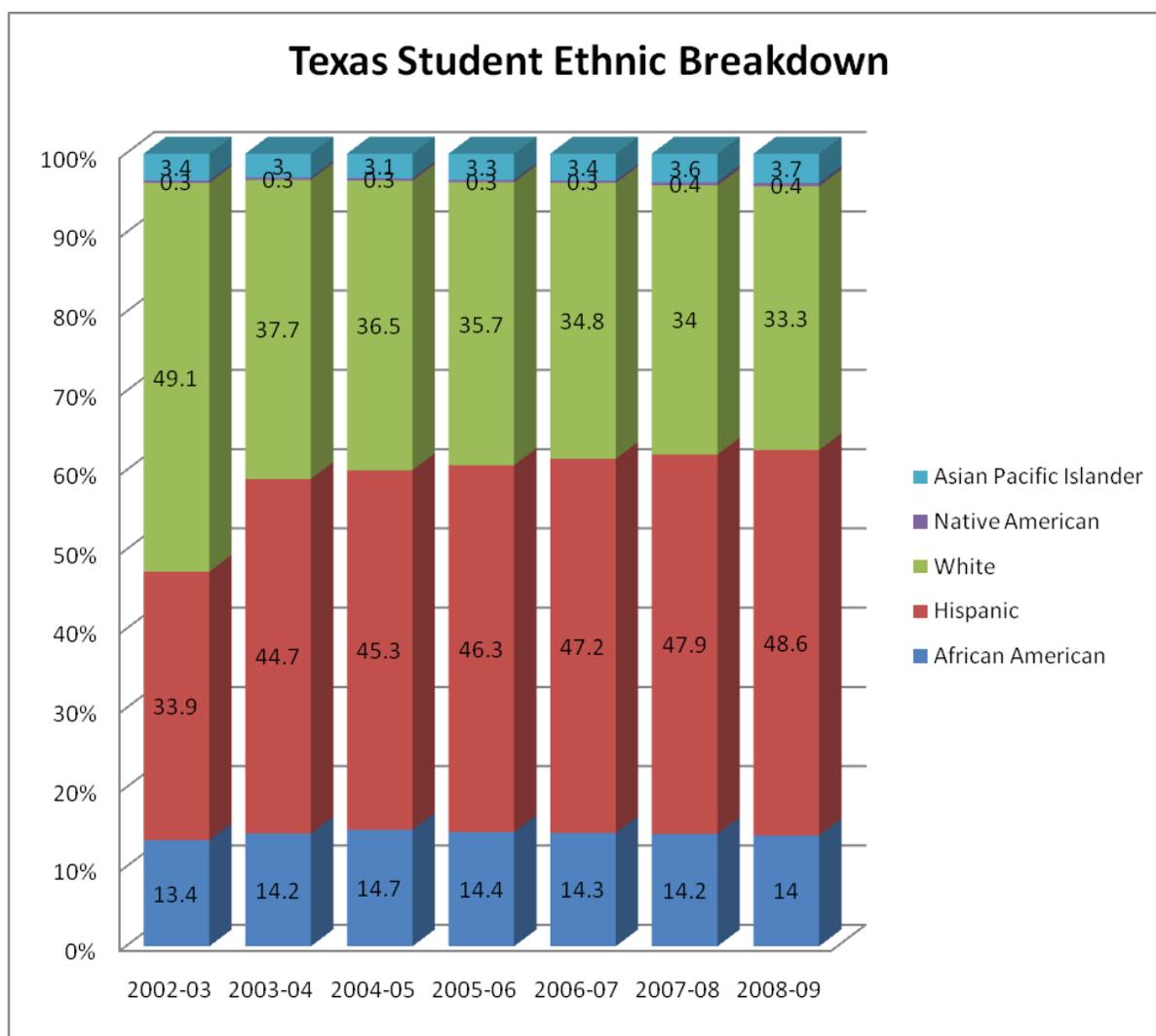
In Figure 2.3 below, the reader will notice that there is a steady drop of enrollment from 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Across the state, there are fewer 9<sup>th</sup> graders making it through unto their 10<sup>th</sup> grade and fewer making it through until 12<sup>th</sup> grade and actually graduating from high school. For Latino students, the percentage of attrition in high school is more dramatic. Every year, across the state of Texas, thousands of students drop out of school and eventually ends costing the state more money as the drop outs cannot contribute to the general income and are more likely to be criminals or dependents of the state.



*Figure 2.3.* Texas student enrollment. This figure denotes the total student enrollment for the state between years 2002-2009.

In 2009, Texas Latinos comprised 48.6% of the entire public school students. Figure 4 shows the steady increase of Latino students since 2002 and the decline of White students. Within the next decade, Latinos will make up more than half of the students enrolled in Texas schools. Although Latinos make up the largest ethnic group in

public schools yet have the lowest percentage of high school completion. With the state and national trend of having more Latinos in our public schools as the majority-ethnic group, the disturbing trend of Latinos dropping out of school and not advancing into college is going to be a major problem.



*Figure 2.4.* Texas student ethnic breakdown. This figure denotes students' ethnic demographics across the state from years 2002-2009.

The picture among Texas universities is not that much better. In a survey conducted by Kiplinger's Personal Finance (2010) of the top 100 universities in the

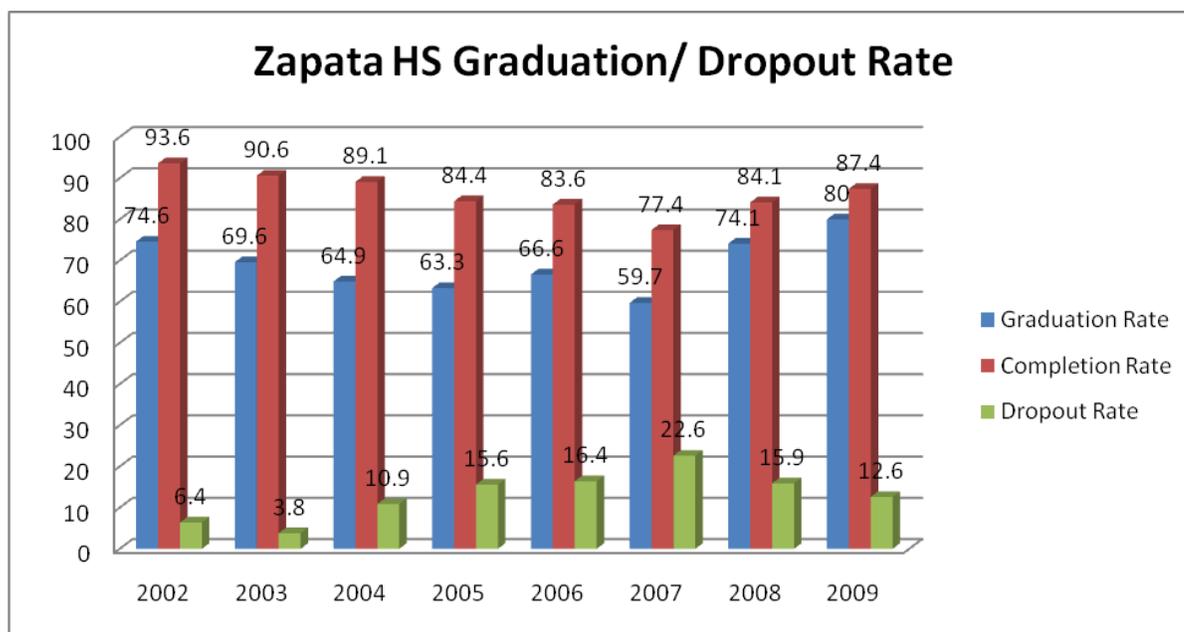
United States, based on outstanding academic quality and affordability, there were only three Texas schools that made the list: University of Texas at Austin (#25), Texas A&M University (#30) and the University of Texas at Dallas (#76); looking at the campus' 6-year graduation rates for all students of the three Texas universities each averaged 78%, 78% and 59% respectfully. If one were to investigate the four-year graduation rate, each campus would average less than 50%. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (2011) is mandating that universities are now going to become more accountable to not only make sure that Black and Latino students are recruited, but also to ensure that these students are provided with support systems to improve the likelihood that they will receive a college diploma at the end of their 4-6 years of college.

Just as the K-12 system is being asked to be more accountable with the funds the state provides, colleges are also being held accountable for the tuitions, grants, and loans that fund the universities. With a money crunch being felt across all public and private institutions, state legislators are imposing the same type of accountability of each college and university which receives public funds. Universities are now held accountable for each student which is admitted and is expected to graduate within six years. Reasoning for the new expectations and accountability is that universities have a reputation of not caring because it was either the student's parents or the government paying for the tuition, the student outcome was irrelevant. Too many students were taking out tuition loans and defaulting on the loans after they dropped out of college, so the government has attempted to make sure the universities support the students better through the process.

## Houston Perspective

The City of Houston has several school districts within its boundaries. The largest school district is the Houston Independent School District. Among Texas' four largest cities, Latinos in Houston actually fared worse in regard to graduation rates. Swanson (2006) found that Latinos in Houston ISD (43.3%), Dallas ISD (43.6%), San Antonio ISD (53.0%) and Austin ISD (42.8%) each had below average graduation rates compared to many of their less-urban neighbors. In a state where the Latino population will make up the majority ethnic group within the next decade, having the graduation rate below 50% is not an encouraging figure. Zapata High School is the school which the cohort members attended from 2003-2007.

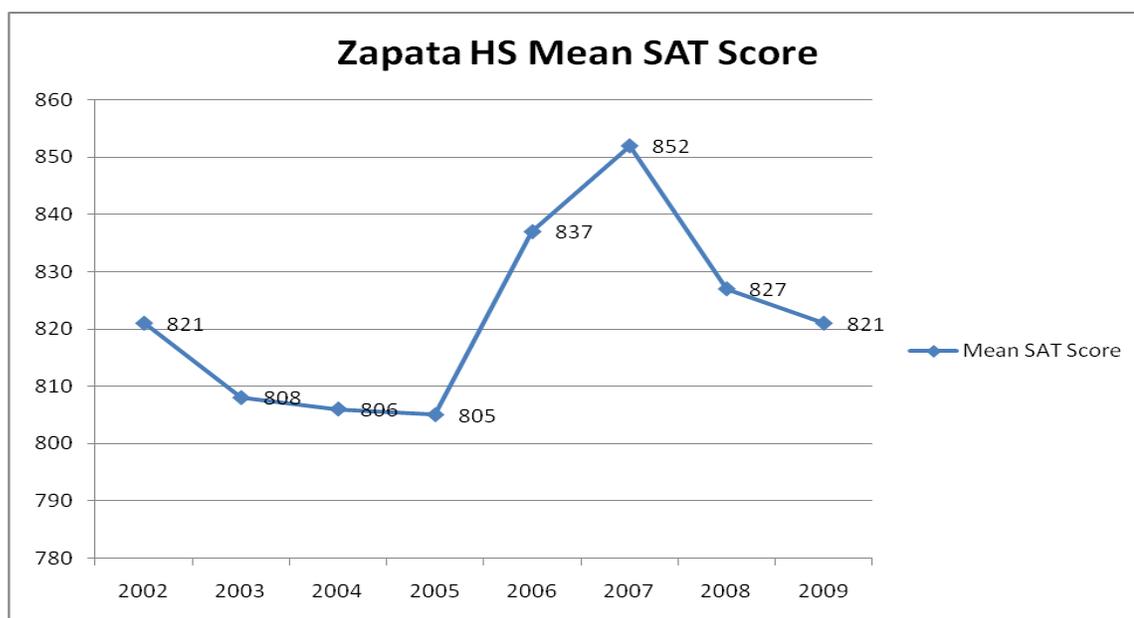
Figure 2.5 reflects the graduation rate and the dropout rate for Zapata high school to show what the environment was during the time the cohort members were actively enrolled at Zapata. The likelihood that the cohort which graduated in 2007 were least likely to have graduated as the reader will notice that the school's graduation rate had declined from 2002 of a 74.6% down to only 59.7% in 2007. The dropout rate for Zapata High School students in 2007 was 22.6% which was the highest from 2002-2009. Statistically, fewer Zapata High school students should have graduated than any year in that same time frame.



*Figure 2.5.* Zapata HS graduation/dropout rate. This figure denotes graduation rates, completion rates and dropout rates for Zapata HS students between years 2002-2009.

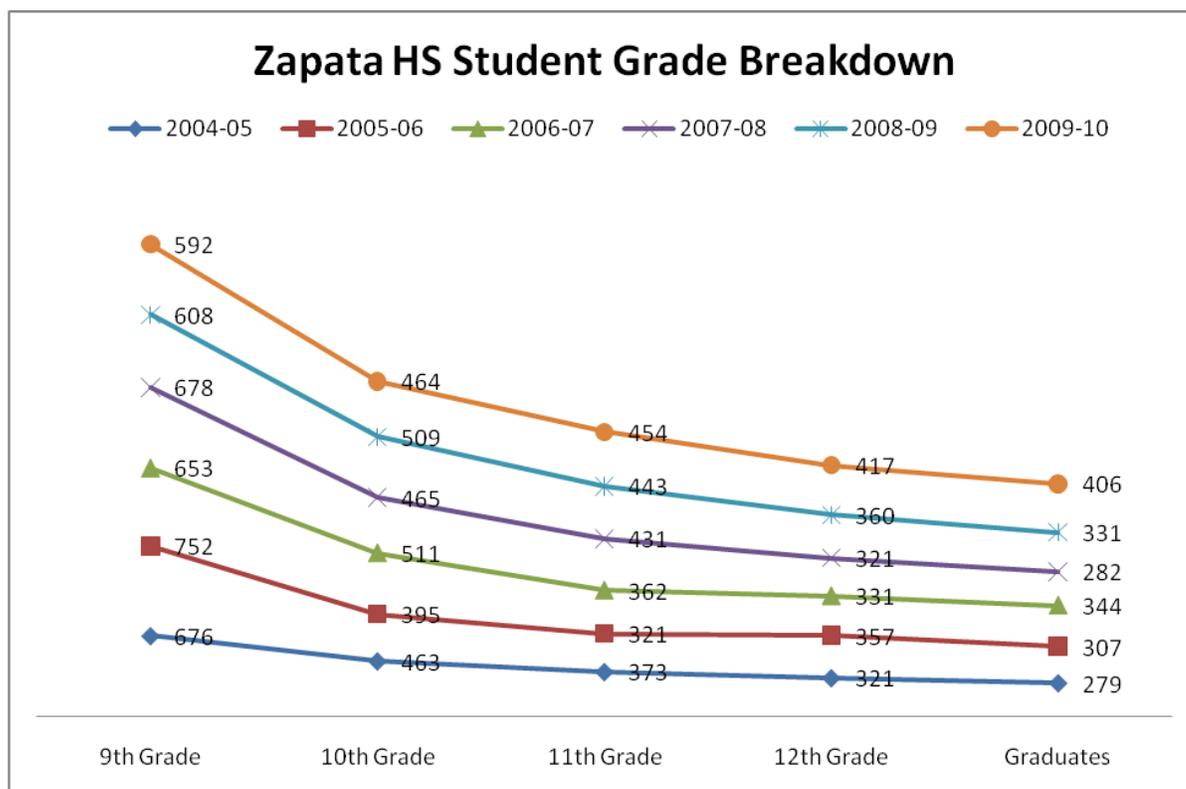
A way in which many universities measure whether a student will be successful in college is determined by how well the student performs on the SAT test. Figure 2.6 represents the SAT scores for Zapata seniors. Two things to take into account is that not all seniors will take the SATs and in 2007 was the year which this cohort was a senior group and the cHELP had made sure the students had received SAT preparation to help them with the test. In 2007, Zapata High school's SAT mean score was 852, which was the highest before 2002 and since 2009. To put this figure into a greater perspective, Zapata High School students even at the highest scores of 852 was still nearly 50 points short of the state average for Latinos. Zapata students are in actuality lowering the state Latino SAT score average. In 2007, the state average for all students on the SAT test was 992, Latinos state wide scored 914 and Zapata scored 852. As was mentioned earlier,

these are only of students which enrolled and took the SAT test, if all seniors at Zapata would have taken the SAT, the average would have been lower than it already is.



*Figure 2.6.* Zapata HS mean SAT score. This figure denotes Zapata HS students' mean SAT scores between years 2002-2009.

Within the Houston Metropolitan Area, the graduation rates of Latinos are very low. Houston ISD reported 43.3%, Cypress-Fairbanks ISD 72.0%, and Fort Bend ISD 67.8% respectively (Swanson, 2006). Figure 2.7 below shows Zapata High school's student breakdown by grade level. The constant trend demonstrates that from the cohort's 9<sup>th</sup> grade year through to 12<sup>th</sup> grade and finally to actual graduates just how many students are being lost. For the 2007 cohort which graduates 344 students, they started with a freshman class of 653. Within the four year which the 2007 cohort went through Zapata High school over 300 students did not graduate with them. What happened to 309 of the freshmen which started with the 2007 cohort? This has to be alarming to any concerned parent and educator.



*Figure 2.7.* Zapata HS student grade breakdown. This figure denotes Zapata HS students' grade enrollment number breakdown for 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade and graduates between years 2004-2010.

These school districts all feed primarily into one of two local public institutions: the Local Community Colleges and the local universities. As a public four-year university, Dream-Maker University is located in the fourth largest city in the United States. Being a major Tier One public university, The Dream-Maker University prides itself as being among the most diverse campuses in the United States. Among the six universities within the city, The Dream-Maker University would be considered as the only Tier One institution: two of the universities are open admission institutions (Urban

Dream-Maker University and the Historically Black University) and the other three universities are private universities. Dream-Maker University's history differs from that of other state universities: it began as a public high school and later achieved university status with emphasis on educating non-traditional students.

#### Evaluation of Programs that Address Latino Students

For the purpose of program evaluation, this study using a program that is very similar to HOPE. Unlike Upward Bound, which recruits students from all ethnic groups who meet certain requirements, the program being evaluated here primarily recruits Latino students but not exclusively. Furthermore, having the local university working with the local school district to support its members - again, very much how HOPE also operates. Engaging Latino American Communities for Education (ENLACE), a partnership with the University of New Mexico and the Albuquerque Public Schools, has worked together to help reduce the dropout rate and improve the graduation rate while getting more students into college (Tutoring Programs Leads, 2007). ENLACE focuses on helping Latino high school student members by providing tutoring and mentorship to support them through high school, but the program does not carry on as they move into college. The characteristics of this program are very similar to the ones that the Hispanic's Option for Promise and Excellence (HOPE) espouses within the Dream-Maker University. In working with prior student cohorts, the Center for Hispanic Engaging in Learning Process (cHELP) and the Office of the President has learned that there has to be a commitment from the University-level to support the HOPE students by providing support and financial aid to allow the students to be admitted to college.

## Program Evaluation of a Higher Education Only Programs

Houston Community College has successfully linked developmental courses in learning-communities, which has led to an increase in students' social and academic engagement (Cook, 2008). What this program focuses on are students who have graduated from high school but might be struggling in college. It is a state trend that students are graduating from high school, yet, they are being required to take remedial courses. Furthermore, students may not have the study skills or the college basics required to succeed in college. Universities and Colleges are now being held to similar accountabilities as their K-12 counterparts and have to find methods to improve their graduation rates. The issue here is that the program only helps students who have actually graduated from high school, yet are not fully developed to succeed in college. The program gives the members a social aspect that includes mentoring, support, and access to resources to support them and keep them from dropping out from college. The program is only designed as a two-year institution; thus, the student will either finish with an associate's degree or transfer to a four-year university to finish. This program is different from the HOPE program in that the cohort members were recruited from high school and given the tools during high school in preparation for college. Moreover, the cohort members change status from the HOPE Zapata High School to the HOPE Dream-Maker University. Once the cohort members are college students they participate as HOPE Dream-Maker University members, which will follow them through until they graduate from college. HOPE provides social support, financial aid, mentorship resources, and access to various other resources that will help each member graduate.

## Summary of Review of the Literature

In my research I was unable to find another program that duplicates what HOPE does and addresses a similar scope that HOPE program. There are many programs that solely focus on helping students finish high school and to decrease dropout rates among minority students. There are several programs that use a similar formula of providing mentorship, requiring tutorials and enrichment opportunities to help develop the skills a high school student will need to succeed in high school. There are even programs that, if students are selected as members, will almost ensure graduation and access to colleges. Unfortunately, however, no other program follows those members through into college or ensures their college completion.

Among the literature of higher education institutions there is an increasing emphasis on addressing students graduating from high school and entering college without the necessary academic skills or social capital that will allow them to be successful. Most of the programs that help students from dropping out of college only focus on students who are failing or are at-risk of not completing. There are no programs that follow the cohort members from their freshman year and through graduation. Fortunately, HOPE Dream-Maker University students are followed from their sophomore year in high school all the way through their college graduation, even if the student does not finish on time with their cohort members after four years of college.

Among recruitment, retention, and graduation programs across the nation that serve Latino students, the HOPE program is unique in that it has been developing its formula and design since 1988, when the first cohort was selected. Currently the HOPE program is working with its 8<sup>th</sup> cohort of students, who are currently sophomores at

Zapata High School. As a program alumnus I was fortunate to have been selected as a member of the pilot cohort group. I was fortunate to meet with the new cohort class in November 2011 in order to share my experiences as a Zapata High School student but more importantly as a former HOPE member; moreover I informed them that they were part of a very special opportunity, and to invite them to take advantage of the resources. I also spoken with the cohort members at Dream-Maker University who will be part of my study and, interestingly enough, I have taught several of them when I was a teacher at Zapata High School during 2003-2006.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODOLOGY

#### Justification for Inquiry

A unique focus of the Executive Educational Doctorate Program (Ed.D.) is to develop a research program with an emphasis on the practitioner not the theorist. Keeping with this theme, this study was created to uncover knowledge that would be applied, not only to help improve the program being studied, but possibly transferred to other similar programs which help Latinos and possibly other minority groups graduate from high school and from college. The Executive Ed.D. program at the University of Houston aims to develop the next generation of practitioner-centered leaders who will enter the various fields of education to enact changes and be agents for positive and beneficial research. Thus, this chapter will address the social, practical and personal purposes (Clandinin, Orr, etc.) of why I chose this topic for my research study, then launch into the method with which I will do so.

#### Social Purpose

The United States of America is projected to lose a very important educated and highly skilled labor force due to retirement within the next three decades (Dorning, 2010). At the same time, the Latino population is quickly surpassing other ethnic groups within the United States, even becoming the dominant ethnic group in highly populated states like California, Texas and New Mexico (Rivera, 2010). Across the nation, however, Latino students possess the weakest academic achievement among all ethnic groups. Among the ethnic groups across the United States, Latinos also tend to have the

higher dropout rate in high school, and perform lower in college admission tests.

Subsequently, Latinos across the nation are the least likely student demographic to attend and complete college (Swanson, 2006).

If the largest growing ethnic population is unable to replace the highly educated and highly skilled white populations, then, there will be a major national deficit in the available talent pool. Given the trend of jobs leaving the United States because of the cheaper wages elsewhere internationally, American companies are going to have to recruit foreign workers to fill highly skilled positions as they become available (Dorning, 2010). Meanwhile, Latino workers with poor educational backgrounds will most likely be unemployed and become a drain on the country's social services, which are already oversubscribed.

One aspect of the study is looking at the story of the program. (Connelly & Clandinin 1990, 2000; Craig, 2001, 2006) This program has roots since 1988 when it started as a pilot program at an East End Middle School near the Dream-Maker University campus. This story of the program extends from those 88 students which composed of the pilot program to its current 6<sup>th</sup> generation cohort, who are current 10<sup>th</sup> graders at Zapata High school.

A second aspect of this study is looking at the story of the program's effect on the lives of the cohort members. It is because of this program that most of these students are able to write their stories from university classrooms as supposed to prison cells or low skilled jobs. The stories of these cohort members vary in names and aspirations, but, nearly all can testify that it was because of the program that they're lives have been greatly impacted. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008)

### Practical Purpose

The reality for Hispanic student who are channeled into failing tracks is that they are like cattle being pushed through slaughter houses. They do not fully comprehend the reasons for being rounded up, yet the outcome is a bad one for them. Latinos are being instrumentally moved through failing educational systems and, although they will not be “slaughtered” as animals, Latinos will not be given the opportunity to advance and maximize their potential. Too many Latinos are groomed either for low skilled labor or for lives as criminals; conversely, little investment has been made to offer Latinos a route that will allow them to develop into productive, contributing members of society.

This dissertation thesis has major practical application in that it helps address several issues affecting the current educational landscape. Schools and school districts are accountable for student dropouts, failure rates, attendance, and academic performance of all students, especially those of the growing Limited English Proficient population. The alarming rate of Latino students who are dropping out of schools, and those who are underperforming academically, will continue to lower the performance indicators for most campuses. Therefore, having access to a program that supports these students navigate through high school and into college will address felt concerns in both the K-12 (Kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade) and P-16 (Pre-Kindergarten through College graduate) systems. The program being examined in this study should not be viewed as a panacea; rather, it is a structured combination of mentorship, social connection, and access to a college track education.

In addition to the programmatic implementation merits of such a salient program, there are also many research implications associated with this topic. Since this is a

relatively untapped field, a wide variety of studies about how this program has impacted the students economically, socially, and psychologically could be undertaken. In fact, the options and branches for research appear endless. The program itself has been in existence for over two decades and several organizations have tried replicating its story and success in efforts of increasing student success. Unfortunately, the replicated programs have not achieved the same degree of success mainly due to the lack of continued funding and to the lack of support which comes from an established program.

#### Personal Purpose

As a member of the Latino population, the lack of academic success unearthed in the literature review is deeply disturbing. What the literature review shows is that Latino students are more likely to be dropouts and become part of a social underclass in a way unlike students of any other ethnic group. In lieu of the population explosion, the Latino population needs to be contributing to the development of American society; otherwise researchers fear a catastrophic erosion of a once prosperous society. There is an immediate need to improve the educational under-performance of Latinos, given that the future of particular states and the nation as a whole is in jeopardy.

As an educator and school administrator, I am on the front lines trying to equip our students- especially our Latino students- to face a future that is laced with numerous obstacles and uncertainties for which some people seem ill-prepared. The schools in which I have invested my life's work have all been considered campuses that did not prepare youth to graduate from high school or for the future after high school. Thus, I participated in a system that propelled Latinos into a future where they likely not finish high school, not consider post-secondary education as a viable option, and not fully

contribute to society. I want to be part of the solution to help the next generation of Latino students to feel that they can navigate successfully through high school, graduate and succeed in college. As a teacher, in the three years that I taught, I identified merely 20 students who were under my instruction during their 9<sup>th</sup> grade who eventually graduated from high school and entered into college. The number of Latino youth experiencing failure—within my years of experience—is staggering.

After personally benefiting from this program, I am positioned as an administrator in such a way that I can contribute to ensure its success. This very program set me on a course for college success. I can honestly say that there were only ten other classmates who were not part of the program that also graduated from high school and college! The majority of my high school classmates who also graduated from college were almost exclusively involved in the program. I am convinced that had I not been selected for this program, my life could have taken a completely different direction. My two cousins, with whom I grew up in the same house are dropouts, one of whom has been locked up in the correctional institution since the age of 19, and we are all in the same age range. I was afforded the lifestyle and amenities I now enjoy because the program prepared and nurtured me through the college path. Although I may not have been destined for a life of crime, I would not be the dedicated and passionate educator I am today had I not been selected to participate in the program.

Lastly, this study is the story of how this program affected my life. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross 2008) I am a relatively successful individual, but can humbly admit that, because of God and this program, I have accomplished these feats. Prior to 1988, I had no direction, no aspirations, and no guidance. When this program

entered my life, my world entirely changed. Because of this program I was even able to direct my brother to a better education. Ultimately, I became a changed man; I am helping my own flesh-and-blood and others of my ethnic group to be similarly lifted by the program and the people associated with it. When one member of a Latino family gets into college, the likelihood that the subsequent siblings are more likely to follow suit; the trick is getting the first in the family to graduate from high school, get into college and finally get a college degree.

#### Role of the Researcher

The potential for bias, of course, exists in any research study. However, by approaching each interview with a standard set of questions, and by following the standards outlined in this document to conduct scholarly interviews, bias will be somewhat reduced. Readers, need to be informed, however, know that I was a former student participant in the pilot program in 1988. While my personal experiences may be different from those of the current study participants, connections—both positive and less-than-positive—can be made. For this reason, rigorous data analysis with an expert panel, member checks, peer reviews, and the auditing process will help me offer a balanced report on a topic in which I am obviously embedded as a participant.

#### Research Rationale

There are countless programs used across the nation to address student dropout rates, student retention, and graduation dilemmas in high schools and in colleges. Most programs that are currently in operation are finding success with their methods and have tangible benefits for the students who are participating; however, a salient question needs

to be addressed- namely, how many of these programs actually use the student's perspectives to determine the program's effectiveness? Statistics, numbers and figures are just one part of the equation. Yet, another important factor for improving program areas, and increasing overall programmatic influence, is through analysis of participants' dialogues and discourse.

The missing programmatic piece that combines the initiative and efforts of many of the programs which are targeting Latino students is that there is no bridge from high school into college. There are not enough programs that begin their focus from the high school level and follow cohorts of the students through the end of their college education. The focus of my study does just that. The program recruits students during their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year in high school. For the next three years of high school, cohort members are required to enroll in advanced courses, attend developmental and enrichment seminars, participate in tutorials and attend different social functions. The focus of this study is to see how this particular program works for the students. The researcher wants to identify and account for the effectiveness of this program through the student's perspective. Statistically the data shows that this program is effective and is viable. What is hoped to be determined is how it can be improved based on the students' elucidations of their experiences in order to aid in the evaluation of the program.

*Transferability.* This study does not attempt to make generalizations to all Latino students. The participants of this study each described unique experiences related to geographical upbringing, socioeconomic status, cultural background, and a variety of other variables. Nonetheless, in spite of the perceived uniqueness of their individual experiences, it is reasonable to expect shared, similar experiences from these participants

that may be transferable (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) to others. For instance, each cohort member attended and graduated from the same high school as the general cohort of students, and all members are currently attending the same university.

### Research Purpose

The purpose of this study is to identify how a program which focuses on Latino students in an urban setting can be improved based on student evaluation of the program to potentially be replicated to other departments and colleges. This program has been in operation for 23 years and is currently in the 6<sup>th</sup> cohort. The study will be conducted through the use of narrative inquiry, (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) which will aid the researcher in gathering multiple perspectives of a shared experience—the 11 participants--through the telling and re-telling of what they have come to know about it. Narrative inquiry, a personal experience method (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996), is a research methodology that studies people in relationship by researchers who are also in relationship (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). This research method fits beautifully with my topic because members of the cohort know each other and the program personnel, the leader and mentors (including myself) and I know everyone too. Acknowledging and being able to work with previously existing relationships is extremely important to the topic I have chosen to study. Narrative inquiry has three tools of analysis, which I, the researcher, use as the primary agent of the inquiry. As drawn from the research of Connelly & Clandinin (1990), the specific tools used in this study are fully explained below:

### A. Broadening

I looked at the abysmal results of the literature review of the topic. Among the disturbing points raised was that per capita Latino students are least likely to graduate from High School and graduate from college. The paucity in the review literature is that there are no other programs like the one proposed to study that intentionally seeks to improve the story lines afforded Latinos students in the metropolitan Houston. Broadening through the literature and noting the absences of programs sets the context of my dissertation thesis study.

### B. Burrowing

In the proposed research study, I also burrow into student cohort experiences as well as my own personal experiences as a member of the 1988 cohort. The goal of burrowing to reveal—through following individual people’s stories-- how this program has set them on a course for success. Furthermore, I have likewise looked at how this program has contributed to my personal success. Hence, the experiences of the 15 students in the present cohort as well as my own are burrowed into. Also, Dr. Puente’s life story is taken into account through personal interviews conducted with him.

### C. Storying/Restorying

Additionally, I will establish the link to how the program has forged connection and partnership between schools and the university, and how that has effectively helped Latino students re-story their own lives. The program has provided live story lines for students and has encouraged them to succeed but it has also provided them with guidance through the entire process. The program has offered

a blueprint through the use of mentors, providing resources and offering social support to each cohort member.

#### Nature of Interviewing

My research collection tools are interviews, focus groups, and archival documents. These data sources will now be sketched.

*Interviews.* One constant variable in the program's 23 year history has been Dr. Puente- the Program Director since its inception. Professor Puente is also the Director for the Center for Hispanic's Engaging in the Learning Process (CHELP) at the Dream-Maker University. Dr. Puente has been unrelenting in his support of the program, and he is currently on a mission to raise \$3 million dollars to help fund CHELP, the Hispanic's Opportunity for Promise and Excellence Program (HOPE), and to recruit students and talented faculty. The only interview will be conducted with Dr. Puente. Dr. Puente fully understands the operational background of the program. Finally, Dr. Puente was selected as the only interviewee because he is involved in the planning phase of possible replicating this model across other departments. The interview will be semi-structured. This means I have some questions I would like to pose of Dr. Puente. However, at the same time, I know that Dr. Puente has a great deal he may wish to share with me, regardless of the queries I ask.

For the second set of research questions, Dr. Puente will be asked different questions of the HOPE Program with particular emphasis on program administration:

1. How can the HOPE Program be replicated across different content areas or disciplines?

2. Is the HOPE Program more effective being a Latino or ethnic focus? Or can the HOPE program be just as effective if it was opened to all ethnic groups?

*Focus groups.* Focus group discussions between the 2005-2010 cohort members will occur once. I have chosen to elicit their stories in a focus group settings because it may be a more comfortable setting for the students and they will better be able to bounce ideas back-and-forth in a socially safe environment. In a sense, they will fuel each other's' storytelling and confirm and/or refute responses provided by their peers. Also, the use of focus groups enables me to work with all members of the cohort instead of one or two. The emphasis of the study is centered on the cohort of students. There are 15 cohort members who are going to be part of the focus group. The cohort members will be invited to participate during one of three one-hour sessions to share their experiences and perspectives. The cohort participants were selected because they had personal experience and are currently active in the program. Many different participants, which may have included active and non-active members, could have been selected as a potential sample. But, in the consideration of time limitations, it was agreed by the researcher to only include the current students that are in their current senior year in college. They are still on campus and accessible. Additionally, they are not too far removed from their high school experience, and are currently involved with the program.

For the structural research purposes, there are two sets of research questions- one set directed towards the student cohort and the second for the program director. These are the related research questions I will be looking to answer through this study:

1. What did the HOPE Program do to plant that college seed and help you achieve that university goal?
2. Had you not been associated with the HOPE program, would you currently be on a university campus?
3. What has been the difference between you and your high school friends who are not in college?

*Archival Documents.* The third tool used to gather information and data was through archival and historical data provided by the program and state records such as the Texas Education Agency and the Dream-Maker University. These archival documents will confirm the historical details that arise in the narratives that others offer of their storied experiences of the program.

#### Site and Research Participants

*Selection and description of site.* The site for this study was “Dream-Maker University,” (DMU) - the pseudonym for the four-year university in the state of Texas. The Center for Hispanic’s Engaging in the Learning Process (cHELP) is the pseudonym for the department at the Dream-Maker University which runs the program being studied. Hispanic’s Opportunity for Promise and Excellence (HOPE) is the pseudonym for the actual program being studied. The reasons for the selection of this site are the proximity of the university to my place of work, thus, giving me easier access. Another reason is because of the relationship I had already established with the program and the university. However, the biggest reason for selecting this site was due to a personal tie I have with the program as a former alumni.

*Communication with Site.* The researcher was fortunate to have been alumni of DMU and of the HOPE program. When the researcher asked the Program Director of HOPE regarding using the program as the subject of the study, the program director was supportive and asked the researcher to communicate with the Program Coordinator of HOPE to coordinate the program implementation logistics. The researcher has communicated via emails and face-to-face meetings.

My first communication with the cohort members came at a monthly meeting where I introduced myself and informed them of the research and discussed their particular role in the completion of this study.

*Selection and Description of Sample.* Why did I select the participants? The Program Director was interviewed because of his operational and organizational knowledge of the program. It is important to note that Dr. Puente has been the sole program director in its 23 year history. The student cohort participants have been invited to participate for their student experiences and prior knowledge of the HOPE Program during Zapata High School and at Dream-Maker University. All participants had the opportunity to not take part of this study.

Table 3.1

*Study Participant Profile*

Name	Major	Gender	Ethnicity
Alisia	Psychology/Human Development and Family Studies	Female	Latina
Benjamin	Construction Management Technology	Male	Latino
Carlos	Electrical Power Engineering Technology	Male	Latino
Diana	Business Marketing	Female	Latina
Eva	Pre-Business Administration	Female	Latina
Fernanda	Civil Engineering	Female	Latina
Gloria	Electrical Power Engineering Technology	Female	Latina
Humberto	Electrical Power Engineering Technology	Male	Latino
Ignacio	Communication/Public Relations	Male	Latino
Juan	Mechanical Engineering	Male	Latino
Kevin	Mechanical Engineering	Male	Latino
Cesar	Educational Doctorate	Male	Latino

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify and explore the factors that supported a cohort of Latino students in a retention and graduation program at the Dream Maker University in order to attain their college degrees. Of the fifteen cohort members, eleven students participated in the focus group sessions. Archival data from the program was also shared, and the founding director of the program for 23 years participated in an independent interview. This chapter, Chapter Four, presents the findings of my narrative inquiry. In particular, this chapter includes student narrative descriptions, my narrative description, the answers to the cohort questions, the responses to the research questions and the narrative of the program director.

#### Role of Leader

In 1987, the concept for the program was designed to see how many Latino student participants would, in fact, graduate from high school and go to college if offered the necessary support and assistance. For instance, urban Latino students here offered social and academic support, along with college and financial support in way of scholarships; nonetheless, the program did not commence until the fall of 1988. The current trends of high school dropouts, low academic achievement, and low percentage of college graduates among the American Latino populations was evident and foreshadowed over twenty five years ago. Though these trends may have improved slightly for many Latino students, one particular program has contributed to dramatic increases in the number of Latino students attaining their secondary school diploma, and, ultimately,

attaining their college degrees – surely a notable stemming of the tide with regard to Latino students’ academic success. With an expected 66% Latino population by the year 2040 in the United States, the urgency of ensuring that more Latino professionals are in position to transition our economy is now a powerful social imperative.

Regardless of the conditions of the past, however, there has to be an origin or a catalyst in the effort to combat deficiencies and make a difference, such efforts can be called “pioneering”. For many Latino students on the Dream-Maker University campus one man has supplied such a pioneering vision – namely, as the program director, Dr. Puente has been the dream engineer since the inception of the HOPE program. When asked why he piloted such a program, he responded with the factors led him to take action. He recognized from his own education and upbringing that the Latino population has a history of being underserved and underperforms academically. “So many of us who were in the ‘*movimiento*’ (*the Chicano movement*) of the 60s and 70s, I took that ideology very seriously. I was very much aware of the differences between Anglos and Mexicans in educational attainment and overall status in society growing up.”

Such life experiences allowed Dr. Puente to intuitively recognize the issue and use his resources to make a difference as the Director for the Center for Hispanics’ Engaging in the Learning Process (cHELP). He is currently conducting a three million dollar drive to sustain the program, which focuses on recruiting Latino undergraduates, graduate students in terms of fellowships and faculty by way of their visiting scholars program and the services that the cHELP provides within the university and out in the Latino community. The need is so large and there are not enough funds to help everyone; therefore, the program must make tough choices and stand firm with the expectations and

demands of its members. For many of the students that have been cohort members, Dr. Puente has been one of the first Latinos they have known with a Ph.D. degree – most certainly true in my own case (i.e., the present researcher). During my first interaction with Dr. Puente, while in the eighth-grade in 1988, I along with many of my classmates wondered why a medical doctor was particularly interested in whether went to college or not. We had no concept of what a scholarly Ph.D. was nor what it really meant to have a doctorate, for that matter to be a college graduate. To be honest, I really don't remember the actual words Dr. Puente and Mr. Calle spoke to us; yet, I understood that I was going to be part of some group, which I figured couldn't have hurt. I initially thought that participation in the group might entail a field trip or two; but, this meeting was pivotal to my future success because it was the first step on a life trip that I would have never imagined as a fourteen year old urban Latino boy.

Dr. Puente has been a constant role model and, as mentioned above, before meeting him, I do not recall coming into contact with any Latino with doctorate degrees. A story he often told the boys was that with more education you could make more money and beautiful women would find you more attractive. He would tell us that women liked college graduates, but that the more beautiful and classier women like men with a master's or a doctoral degree – hence, the more advanced the degree, the more attractive you became to the opposite sex. One might view this tactic as simple and playful ruse to captivate an adolescent audience, yet there is also a nugget of truth in Dr. Puente's witty, self-proclaimed aphorisms. This explanation alone provided enough motivation for me to want to get my doctorate. At 14 years of age, I had no idea what attaining a doctorate degree entailed but it sounded cool.

Since I grew up without grandparents, I give Dr. Puente the upmost respect and treat him with reverence as if he were my own grandfather. My admiration for him is shared by countless other cohort members and their parents. I always wondered how many candles have been lit in Catholic Churches – the dominant religion of Latinos – on his behalf. Dr. Puente is a modest, religious man and would certainly not subscribe to the insinuation that he be canonized, but he has contributed greatly to the stock of humankind by changed lives and made the world brighter place for many individuals. I personally feel that he has been an angel sent from heaven, and he has changed my life in ways I might not ever have been able to fully realize alone. Indeed, what he has done for his students is exemplary: His influence has spanned from current to former cohort members to their children and the children they interact with; and from the Dream-Maker University to across the nation. In fact, it may very well be said that through his reach, he has “touched eternity” (Barone, 2008).

I would never say that I am on the same level as Dr. Puente, but I really do my best to model my story after his story—that is, myself after him. It is my great desire to make an impact in the lives of individuals in the same manner which Dr. Puente has done for me. In my eight years in education, I have always shared how my job is to prepare students for a better future and that I had an opportunity to go to college because of a program. I feel that because of the blessings afforded me; it is my responsibility to pass it on and pay it forward. It would be safe to state that for every light Dr. Puente has lit in the lives of his students, it is an expectation for those students to pass the light and illuminate future generations. Dr. Puente is too modest to state that it is because of his vision that hundreds of students have a new light where there was not bright future. Dr.

Puente has had very dedicated staff members throughout the years and, as a team, they have facilitated the process for every cohort team, each time improving on the process. From the beginning of the HOPE Program, Mr. Calle has been at his side helping Dr. Puente formulate and structure the vision. In the twenty-three year history of the HOPE program, there has only been one Program Director, but there have been four Program Coordinators: Ms. Luz, Mr. Camino, Mrs. Luminar and Mrs. Socorro.

Dr. Puente has served as the catalyst for change in the lives of many students; it is because of his work that he has “bridged” the dream of college degrees to a reality. Hence, the reason I use the word “Puente”, which means bridge in Spanish. The significance of the word “bridge” lies in the fact that its very definition includes the literal meaning of a physical structure designed to join together two land masses which otherwise could not connect. Furthermore, this definition implies a degree of effort involved in designing, building, and maintaining a viable bridge that will last the test of time for generations to come – a poignant symbol when considering the said program. Yet, Dr. Puente’s efforts extend far past a merely symbolic paragon for urban Latino youth to gain entry into DMU. For example, his efforts have extended as far as getting Latinos into graduate school programs, recruiting Latino scholars to do research and join the faculty staff at DMU, and such efforts have reach out to the greater community within and outside of the Latino community.

Dr. Puente has not designed, built, and maintained that bridge of college access and college degree attainment to satisfy his own vanity; rather, his efforts are for future generations of Latino scholars. Inherent in the role of a pioneer, after all, is the notion that he or she realizes potentiality in future generations rather than the obstructions of the

present. Dr. Puente is the type of leader that stands up for what is right and sincerely hopes that at the end he has made a difference in this world. The great news for the world is that Dr. Puente understands that his work must continue and that more is expected of him; he is more than willing to keep working and is up to the challenge.

#### Effects of Program on the Lives of the Cohort

This section provides a report what was learned through the Focus Groups – research tools which helped to answer the main research questions, but also to provide an avenue for those involved in the focus groups to tell their story of how they came to be part of the HOPE Program (either during their high school experience at Zapata High School or at DMU), describe their current experience at Dream-Maker University, and to gain insights into what the program should be in the future.

#### Narrative Descriptions

##### Alisia (Latina)

*I have a stronger bond with, (staff and students from the HOPE Project) because they are able to understand where I'm coming from. And like my family, they do support me, but they really don't know why I'm staying to study or why I'm staying so late since they really don't know the aspects of college. They really don't understand it, why I'm doing this and why I'm so tired."*

It was fate that determined whether Alisia would participate in the HOPE Program. During her 9<sup>th</sup> grade year at Zapata High School, while in her Science class, a group of her classmates were invited to attend an informative meeting in the library.

Alisia inquired of the teacher why those particular students were invited to the meeting, and the teacher explained to her that it was for the HOPE Program. Upon further inquiry, Alisia informed her teacher that she also was interested in learning more about the program. Although she was not invited, she asked her science teacher if she might be allowed to attend anyway. The teacher wrote her a note so she could attend. Alisia recalls how the teacher “could have been, ‘no, you did not get an invitation and sit down.’” She probably would have just returned to her seat and continued to work on her worksheets. Fortunately for her, fate intervened. “I went to the library and then Mrs. Socorro was talking to the students about the program and that’s where I was like, wow, this is really good. And she had mentors there too talking about their experiences.” This meeting would prove serendipitous and crucial because it changed the very course of her life.

Though she was already taking advanced courses during her 9<sup>th</sup> grade year in high school, Alisia would soon blossom as the program helped her gain an appreciation for academics, community service, and to develop a realization that college was an actual option for her. Ultimately, this program changed her not only as a student but as an individual as well. One particular workshop dealing with personalities was very impactful for Alisia, and she reported “that was really good because you really did not know about that, in high school you really do not know that much about yourself.” She credits the program for instilling in her the dedication for her studies at Zapata High School: “I know back then they increased the time from 2 to 3 hours, why? We have things to do! But, as I look at it, that’s nothing compared to how I study now; I think

everything benefited me,” which has currently led up to her being a senior at Dream-Maker University majoring in Business.

It has been the support system which the HOPE Program provides that has allowed her to be successful. “I was a good student, but I really did not know about college. I didn’t have anyone of my family to go to college.” Alisia has always been a good student with a lot of potential, but the concept of attending college was far removed from her everyday reality. At most, she noted, she might have gone to a community college to get an associate’s degree so she could get a “little better paying job,” otherwise she always assumed that she would “graduate and work like everyone else in my family has,” working at such jobs as cleaning houses, retail, or as an entry level office assistant. Alisia is an example of how a talented Latina student might have been lost and never realized her full potential; she now symbolizes the realization of a dream, but also how the intervention of fate is often necessary. Today Alisia is not in entry-level workforce job; she is a college senior with aspirations of completing her Master’s and Ph.D. programs. Imagine how many more Latino scholars we would have among us if they only had the opportunity to realize their potential like Alisia did. Partly because she was admitted to the program and partly because of the value she derived from the program, she favors programs like HOPE. She would like such programs to be expanded to allow more Latino and non-Latino students to benefit. “I think it should be done, because when I talk to my mom’s friends, they ask her about the HOPE program, ‘No, it’s only at Zapata High School.’ The thing that sucks is that they only recruit every three years.” Alisia laments that offering more high schools the HOPE program “will help focus and

educate the parents about the importance of college and it will help them support them and take them to college.”

Benjamin (Latino)

*...because after school I would just go home, play, and sleep. But since we had the responsibility to stay after school so we had to do hours we had to study we need to do homework. That made us more responsible.*

Benjamin came to the HOPE Project through a different route than most of his cohort members. Instead of being invited to attend the initial informational session, he was introduced to the program by his cousin, who was a HOPE student at the Dream-Maker University at that time. Benjamin stated, “I heard this from my cousin.” He asked Benjamin, ““what was my goal after high school?” I basically told him I was after graduating high school, I was just going to go study probably at the community college and that’s it.” Had it not been for his blood relative who provided the application and told him about the benefits of the program, Benjamin might not have ever applied to the program. The HOPE Program at Zapata High School was ideal for Benjamin, he was already a good student, he found the tutorial requirements, high GPA, participation in workshops and enrichment activities suited for his personality. “I stayed after school for tutoring and now that I’m in college that really helped me because that made me more responsible to do better and manage my time for homework or any project.” The most influential area that affected Benjamin, and which made a lasting impact on his life, was the community service activities. Benjamin recalled an event during the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays when the students made holiday cards for homeless children and

orphans. The community service activity “for me it actually helped me to show love and sympathy for others, they are passing through.” An important aspect of HOPE instills in students a sense of academic responsibility, but another area is attended to as well: social responsibility. Even though Benjamin is now in college, he is still active in not only his engineering student clubs, but also in Latino student leadership clubs like AZTEC, which many of the HOPE members are active members.

Benjamin credits his academic success to HOPE. The program’s strict study hall policy, their emphasis on maintaining a high GPA, focus on attending workshops, and support in preparing his college admission and financial aid paperwork helped him to realize a dream that he did not know existed in him and showed “the importance of going to college.” Throughout his high school experience, HOPE consistently supported and monitored his progress by checking class grades, attendance, conduct and keeping track of the tutorial hours to ensure he stayed on course. What truly helped Benjamin transition from Zapata High School to Dream-Maker University was how HOPE supported him even during his freshman year in college: “I was so nervous, especially because it really was a big class. It was too big and I was not used to being with 50 students in a classroom.” Through HOPE, he came to know where his classes were located, where to buy food, where to go to hang out. Benjamin felt “familiar with the campus to find our classes especially since our mentors told us to come before our time: a week before classes started we came to see where our classes are.” When things became overwhelming Benjamin had the safety of the cHELP library and student lounge where he could use the program computers, study, eat lunch, meet up with friends, network with other students from the within and non-HOPE program students.

Benjamin truly believes in the value of HOPE, he feels that the program provides the “important tools” that students need in order to “succeed in life.” As such, he would like the HOPE Program to expand to help reach many more students and help them to go to college. He pointed out that, had his cousin not given him the application and HOPE not accepted him in to the program, “I would probably be at the Local Community College” and he would have gotten an associate’s degree but not aspire to anything higher than that. No one in his immediate family had ever gone to college. Currently, Benjamin is a senior Construction Management Technology major with aspirations of getting a MBA. HOPE has undoubtedly developed Benjamin’s study habits and allowed him to understand the importance and attainability of a college degree. However, his only regret is that there are not more programs like HOPE to help students achieve their dreams of a college degree—even if fueled by a cousin’s prodding. Benjamin recognizes the great gift he has being a member of the HOPE Program. For example, he stated, “There are too many students at Dream-Maker University that are not aware of the program.” Since program members are required to document their study hours, other non-HOPE students have noticed that – as Benjamin clarified as one of his scholarship requirements – “one time one of my classmates saw that I was writing my hours, and he asked what is that for.” His friend was so intrigued that they kept talking about it at length.

Both Alisia and Benjamin were not initially selected to participate in the informational session, yet fate fortunately intervened on their behalf. And, while both were “smart” students with lots of potential, they might have easily not been selected to participate in the program at all, had they not been awakened and influenced in their own

unique ways. Both students are currently seniors and both have aspirations to attain advanced degrees. How unfortunate it might have been had their paths ended with only a workforce associate's degree! At that time, however, going to college was an unattainable dream for both Alisia and Benjamin. Nothing in their lives could have predicted that they would attend Dream-Maker University or able to graduate in the Spring of 2011. For both students, the seed of this dream had to be planted, nurtured and developed until it blossomed. Countless Latino students with the necessary scholastic aptitude have enrolled in college-prep courses in high school, yet they are not realizing that a college education is a viable option for them. It is a cultural expectation for most Latino students that they contribute to the family financially as soon as they can. Even my own mother bought into the idea of simply aiming for a quick associate's degree so I might get employment. My well-intentioned, loving mother would ask me, "Why are you going to school for so long, isn't there a shorter career you can go for?" It is difficult to believe that she held lower expectations for me, or that she might have felt I was not smart enough to succeed in attaining an advanced degree; rather, the cultural expectations for many Latinos in the United States emphasizes that great value can be drawn from one's work ethic and one's ability to provide for family. It is not that the "Latino-cultural" expectations are contradictory to the "White-culture" in America. In fact, the immediate focus is different in that many Latino families are forced to live from paycheck-to-paycheck or survive within the immediate present. Moreover, planning for the future is not a luxury available to many Latino, and these families have a limited number of examples to demonstrate that *Latinos can* graduate from high school, they *can* go to universities and graduate with a college degree, and that they *can* get advanced

degrees. Nonetheless, there remain only 13% of Latinos in Texas with post-secondary degrees, as compared to 34% of non-Latinos post-secondary graduates.

Carlos (Latino)

*I was just shocked how the system worked to be honest. Zapata High School does not prepare you at all...I was not mentally prepared I thought it's going to be easy, Zapata High School wasn't that bad, I'm pretty sure the Dream-Maker University will be the same.*

Carlos was never part of HOPE during his high school years. Unfortunately, he could not even be considered for the program because of his family obligations – Carlos had to go home to babysit his siblings. He stated, “I wasn’t allowed to stay after school, just come straight home, so I couldn’t join even if I wanted to.” Unbeknown to Carlos, he was friends with and enrolled in many of the same advanced courses as many of the HOPE students at Zapata High School. Carlos did not benefit from the workshops, tutorials, study hall and the higher requirements expected of the HOPE students. “I would always just do my homework at home, or during school, or at any time I had free time, that it, I would just do all of my work,” he recalled. He also felt that he did well to just get by; he did not have aspirations for post-secondary education. “I originally, I wasn’t planning to go to college. Actually I was planning to go to straight working and helping my family and enter the workforce,” he recalled.

Had it not been for the high school counselor who strongly encouraged him to join the group of the Advanced Placement students into the office, and who forced them to complete a Houston Rodeo Scholarship application and essay, Carlos’s life would

surely be different now. Carlos recalled the turning point in his life, “Just to do the application, it took me pretty much all day...I’m not going to lie. I didn’t put all my effort into it, because I didn’t think that I was going to get it. I was like, ‘ah, great, look at my competition, there’s no way I’m going to get it. They’re some of the smartest people, way smarter than me!’” Carlos related that he and several of the AP students were all applying for the same scholarship. Moreover, his stress level increased substantially when he was informed that he would also be competing against other students in various high schools within the district, through the city as well as students from the metropolitan area schools. “Couple of months later during January or February I got a letter saying that I actually did get the rodeo scholarship, along with some other Advanced Placement students, I was so shocked, oh wow! I guess I am going to go to Dream-Maker University now!” Only after being awarded a \$12,000 scholarship – the momentous spark that ignited his future academic pursuits – did Carlos envision college as a realistic possibility. For many students in this country, attending college is a lifelong dream that requires significant preparation (e.g. either parents have made preparations by saving money into a college fund or the students have made sacrifices to ensure they will be ready for post-secondary education). In this particular case, Carlos only had three months to navigate the circuitous and confusing transition to college – all on his own, one might add!

Carlos was on a parallel path with HOPE students in route to Dream-Maker University; yet, his experiences were dramatically different in that, although he attended Zapata High School, took classes with other HOPE students, graduated and was admitted to Dream-Maker University, Carlos struggled unnecessarily once he enrolled at DMU.

However, in contrast to other HOPE students (i.e., Alisia and Benjamin), he navigated his way through the financial aid office and the office of admissions with minimal support and virtually no guidance whatsoever. While attending Dream-Maker University (DMU), he maintained his former high school friendships with HOPE students, which he later parlayed to use of the program lounge, computers, and to even access the program funded tutors. Carlos truly appreciated HOPE's willingness to extend their services and resources to a non-member. Carlos wanted to be part of the program so much but, even though he had applied during his freshman year at DMU, certain barriers remained. Unfortunately, he said, "I didn't meet the GPA requirements at the time, I met the GPA requirements a year later, when that year came up, I still couldn't join because they (HOPE) just didn't have any funds for any new students coming in." Not until after the completion of his second year was he finally accepted into the program. "I'm not even going to lie; I abused the heck out of their physics tutors. I would meet up with them every time. I don't want to fall behind, that went the same for math. I met with him a lot. I also went to their meetings. I just wanted to be a member, even though I wasn't. I used their computers they didn't tell me anything and they were okay with it." His dedication and persistence paid off as he is a currently a full member. It should be noted that HOPE did not have to extend their services and resources to a non-member, but that type of generosity proves how much those in the program are committed to helping all students who have a desire and willingness to work hard and meet the expectations of the program.

What Carlos regrets is that he did not have the study skills that HOPE instills in each of their students. For instance, the act of studying was more of an afterthought for

Carlos; something you do minutes prior to a test. And, regrettably, he feels that if he had learned the things the HOPE students learned during high school he may not have struggled as much as he did when he was a non-HOPE student. It is because of HOPE that he has learned the self-discipline required for maintaining a high GPA and, due to his participation in HOPE, he has developed life-long friendships with individuals he has known since high school but now considers more like family as opposed to mere acquaintances. “I’ve made that one best friend since taking classes with for four years we always study together. I wouldn’t be making As or Bs; I would be making Cs and Ds, if not failing.” It is hard for HOPE students to maintain strong friendships with their former Zapata classmates because most of them did not continue to college; these former classmates do not understand the difficult demands of maintaining high grades; and, finally, these classmates do not understand that college is substantially different from Zapata High School. “Everyone else went into the workforce or a trade school for about a year or two which is not the same as going to the Dream-Maker University, which is totally different or they are bumming around and live with their parents and do nothing.” Carlos also recounts how his former school friends would tell him to just skip class, and he would respond by saying, “I can’t just blow off school...I can’t. It’s not like the same thing as Zapata HS... it’s really not the same thing as Zapata HS, and they really don’t understand. After a couple of rejections, the invitations stop.” As a student who was not part of the HOPE project in high school, and who had to struggle a great deal once he got into college, Carlos believes that this program needs to be expanded in order to help future college students be able to transition more effectively.

In addition to the current Zapata High School program, Carlos believes that HOPE also needs to be expanded to many more school sites. He proposes that the program “pick certain high schools with high dropout rates to help them like in Zapata HS and transition them here. I think that would be a great idea. If not just here, maybe similar programs maybe at the two major state public universities.” He would also like to see the city’s two major public universities start, sponsor, and fund a HOPE program in order to assist students like the program at DMU. “I think it should be opened to anyone – not just Latinos”, he proclaims. HOPE is a program that has succeeded in allowing students with the necessary skills and aspirations to attain a university degree dream, which currently eludes hundreds of thousands of students across the nation, particularly Latino students. Carlos’s story is illustrative of the experiences of many Latino students across the country – that is, he initially had no intention of attending college even though he was taking advanced courses and had a high GPA. Had it not been for the counselor who forced him to apply for a scholarship, which he was subsequently awarded, this student would likely have not reached his full potential beyond high school.

How many talented Latino students are taking the required advance courses, which are supposed to prepare them for a college track, who are not even seeking a community college degree? Had Carlos been part of the HOPE project since high school, his preparation and dedication to his academics would have been stronger, but the college dream seedling was eventually planted during the student’s senior year. Nonetheless, since he was attending a high school that did not adequately prepare students for college success, this college dream could have easily been dashed when he came to the realization that he was not fully prepared for the challenges associated with the transition

to the world of higher education. Had he never been associated with HOPE at Zapata HS, or had he not gained entry into the HOPE program at DMU during his third year of college, Carlos stated, “I would be alone, maybe in my second or third year maybe would have dropped out. Because without this program, I don’t have enough money to cover the whole tuition. I always came up a little short, and I just pay for it out of my pocket and that is no big deal.” Carlos continued, “Without the program, I would probably be struggling a lot, my mentality would be really low.” It should be noted, however, that Carlos will graduate as a fifth year senior in Engineering next Spring, and will hopefully snag an engineering position that will place him among the top thirty percent of wage earners in the country – an achievement that would likely not have been an option had he conceded to his initial plan of stopping after high school graduation. Given that Carlos is a U.S. citizen, enrolled in advanced placement courses, and living in a city with four public universities, two private universities, and several community colleges and trade schools, it is would have been a regrettable scenario had he simply shirked the thought of higher education and entered the workforce without any intention of getting a degree, especially considering his current successes.

Diana (Latina)

*So I went to the bank and pulled out the money and came over there and I waited an hour to pay for things. When we went up, they’re like where is the rest of the money? I was like... ‘I have all of these scholarships that should be deposited in my name.’ Well they are not in; you have to come up with this money. We didn’t plan for this thing. I told ‘Mrs. Socorro’*

*and she told them that this student is in my program and she needs to have her money in there ASAP. Literally, I think it was two weeks later and the money was already in there.*

Diana was invited to participate in an informative session during her 9<sup>th</sup> grade year at Zapata High School. “They took us to the library and pretty much explained everything about the scholarship, about the tutorials, and how we would get help with our homework. They were trying to get information as to where you wanted to go and if you knew where you wanted to go college.” She was identified as a potential student who might be successful in college. She was also taking advanced courses and was eventually accepted into the program after the application and interview process. Diana felt that everything that the program did prepared her and others to be able to transition from high school to college with much success. “Almost everything that we did related to what we were going to be experience in college. Everything had an educational benefit. Other things that we were required to do was we were required to attend certain sessions during school at Zapata HS that they would have guest speakers come and most of the times it was like time management, dealing with stress and that was important. Everything we did, they did with the best intention of helping us get through.” She noted that she was glad and appreciative that she and her fellow cohort members were held to such high standards, such as keeping up with the required study hall hours, ensuring that their GPA was above a 2.5, that they were required to attend the informative workshops and enrichment seminars, that they had the opportunities make campus visits, and were encouraged and supported in filling out forms and completing the college and financial aid process.

Diana and her cohort members now would acknowledge that there was a great deal of “hand holding” along the ways, and that many of their activities made sense only later, while their senior year of high school. HOPE cohort members in high school had to participate in more activities than the general Zapata High School student population; yet, each cohort member understood that the payout would be great and that the \$12,000 scholarship would be their golden ticket out of the failing high school – ultimately, their shot at college and a better future.

For Diana, the study hall tutorials requirement was one of the greatest benefits of the program while attending high school. Through this element of the program she felt supported enough to directly approach the teachers of her advanced courses – courses which she struggled with the most – in order to secure additional tutoring. Due to the HOPE program study hour requirements, she stated, “I felt more motivated to go to my Algebra teacher, geometry teacher, most of the time I got tutoring was for math and or science. Because we were required certain amount of study hours that kind of further game me a push I needed with my teachers to get extra help.” In her view, she would not have been as daring in attaining extra help had the situation been otherwise. In fact, she would likely have simply failed the class rather than petition for much needed extra tutoring. Diana felt empowered and realized that she had a vested interest in her own education. It was then when she changed her academic life; the program consciously builds the student’s confidence and helps them develop pride in their studies. It was cool to be smart with HOPE students, whom shared this mentality. Most Latino students at campuses like Zapata HS think it is okay to fail and not take their academics serious.

Diana was fortunate that, unlike most HOPE parents, her parents were able to save some money to help pay for a part of her college tuition. She realized, however, that they would not be able to pay the whole amount and, had Mrs. Socorro not stepped in the first semester, her dream might have never gotten off the ground. “I had a couple of extra scholarships. And I did the math, okay mom and dad. The only thing we have to pay is such and such money. So I went out to the bank and pulled out the money and came over here and I’m waiting an hour to pay for things. When we went up, they’re like, ‘where is the rest of your money?’ I was like, ‘I have all of these scholarships that should be deposited in my name.’ ‘Well they are not in, you have to come up with the rest of the money or you will be dropped from your classes.’ Obviously, I cried because I was so stressed from everything. Oh my gosh, I don’t know how are we going to come up with this money. We didn’t plan for this thing. I told Mrs. Socorro and she told them, ‘the student is in my program and she needs to have her money in there ASAP!’”

Dr. Puente and Mrs. Socorro have built a strong relationship with the offices of Admission and Financial Aid and have been able to get the assistance their program members needed. Diana has had a love-hate relationship with the office of Financial Aid since her first semester at DMU. She tells the story of how she engaged in a battle with the financial aid office each semester, and about how every semester she needed to call on Mrs. Socorro, the Program Manager, to contact the financial aid office to intervene. “‘Hey Mrs. Socorro, here we go again, school’s already started and my money is not in there and I kind of need it.’ Each semester she has to make that call; tell them to put my money in there, which is a little sad, but it’s kind of good because, had it not been for her, they wouldn’t have put that money in there until the very end of the semester.” Diana

continues to say that it is sad that even though she is currently in her senior year, she has had to engage in this dance with the financial aid office each semester. Nevertheless, she is quick to point out that she is glad that she has someone to support her and step in when she faces complications. She recalls a story of one of her friends, who was not in the program, which had issues with the financial aid office and it was not until the very end of the semester that she was finally awarded her scholarships and financial aid award. Had the friend not had the fully amount to cover the tuition, she would have had to drop out that semester. The benefit for Diana is more than merely having influence with people on campus when financial aid is not cooperating. For her, the true benefits of the program are the relationships she has with a program staff that she can call on and count on for help.

On many occasions she has been able to walk into Mrs. Socorro's and Dr. Puente's offices and talk to adults that do not judge her; rather, they are there to support and encourage her. Diana is so appreciative of Mrs. Socorro's willingness to be there to talk too. "I know if I'm having a bad day or something is going wrong with my family, oh Mrs. Socorro or this happened. I feel like this. Her door is always opened. If something wrong ever happens or if we need to vent, she is there." She noted that Mrs. Socorro is always available and accessible for anyone seeking guidance. The bond shared by Diana, the program staff, and the other cohort members is strong. The current cohort has been together for the last 8 years. During that time period, they have grown up, experienced similar issues, and most expect to be lifelong friends. Diana is not a traditional college student whose parents have planned for her college education from the age of two years old. She states, "To be honest, I had no intention of going to college. I

remember I was like, 'I'm going to work I'm going to be successful.' My idea of being successful back then was nothing to my idea of what it means to be successful now. Had it not have been for the HOPE program at Zapata HS, I probably would not have gone to college at all."

If she had been like the rest of her friends at school, she would most likely have never gone to college. Her parents were fortunate and able to sacrifice and save as much as possible with the anticipation of her going to college from her 9<sup>th</sup> grade year, but most Latino parents are not able to save enough for a full four-year tuition for their child. They are able to save even less when the child finally realizes that college is a real option for them while during the high school level. Diana mentioned that her parents went to the bank and withdrew money to help pay for the tuition her first semester at DMU, that in itself, especially for most Latino parents, was a major sacrifice. You could still tell that even after a few years later, she was still traumatized when she recalled the event and said that she cried when the financial aid office representative told her that her pending scholarships she had planned for were not posted. Eventually she fortunate that Mrs. Socorro was able to help intervene as the thought of coming up with the full amount of the tuition, which seemed insurmountable given that the family had overextended itself just come up with only a portion of the tuition.

Diana's story is an example of how although a college dream can be planted, nurtured, and developed, yet, ultimately, there must also to be substantial financial backing to fund that dream. How many talented Latino students have the potential to succeed in college, yet were never able to enter into a college classroom because they were unable to pay for school tuition? As the United Negro College Fund slogan states,

“A mind is a terrible thing to waste.” Many Latinos are so intimidated by enormous tuition fees that most are more likely choose their local community college, which is cheaper, and are unfortunately never able to transition into the university level because of lack of funding over time. Diana believes that the HOPE program has given her a new license on life and recognizes the urgency. She professes, “I can’t slack off because I would be letting down the people who believe in me. There are other people who need that money and I could be replaced, and they could get it. It gives you that competitive edge to stay on top of your game so you can stay here and maintain that. I’m not going to lie...if it had not been part of this, I probably wouldn’t be making much of an effort in my classes. I feel like I don’t want to let people down. It has helped me a lot in my classes.” Diana makes two very important points in her last statement in that she particularly assiduous because she does not wish to let down those who have invested in her education. Moreover, the program is not going to simply throw money away. There are many benefactors who are counting on their money to be used to help students reach their dreams, and it is the students’ responsibility to keep their part of the agreement. A student must realize that he or she may lose their scholarship if they do not take care of their academic expectations and requirements. Students that go on probation and do not make the necessary efforts to get off probation risk losing their source of funding – a subsequent condition that is usually motivation enough to place the student back on track.

Eva (Latina)

*I struggled a lot when I was applying for scholarships and financial aid, not only because I couldn’t apply for FASFA, I had to apply for TASFA.*

*My teachers didn't really help me; I was the one that was always going to my counselor's office. I would go in and get her stack of scholarships from her desk and be the one looking for scholarships, she wouldn't even be helping me.*

Throughout high school, Eva was not a HOPE student; however, her boyfriend at that time was a member of the program. Eva's route to HOPE is one of determination, perseverance, and overcoming obstacles. She attended a district's college preparatory East End Charter School that predominantly pulls students from the Zapata High School's enrollment zone. Interestingly, she was not able to participate in the HOPE project during high school not because she was attending another school; rather, because she was a girl. During high school, the program had more than enough girls, but HOPE was not able to recruit enough male students at Zapata High School to join the program, so the enrollment was opened to a few male students at the nearby high school. Interestingly enough, Eva's boyfriend was a HOPE student, so she was aware of the program throughout her high school career.

Eva would have qualified for the program since she was taking advanced courses in her school and was very dedicated to her studies. Though Eva did not participate in the required study hall hours require of actual HOPE participants, she recognized that she had to do her own studying in order for her to maintain her status in school. She states, "Because I already did my studying. I already studied a lot. I really didn't see it as something I couldn't do. So, I just didn't keep track of how much time I just spent I just studied." Due to her legal status, she encountered additional challenges attending college than most other students. For students without legal status their mere existence and

survival during the current political climate is stressful enough; thus, accessing scholarships would be nearly impossible. However, Eva was very determined not to let her status prevent her from pursuing her college dream: “I struggled a lot when I was applying for scholarships and financial aid, not only because I couldn’t apply for FASFA, I had to apply for TASFA. My teachers didn’t really help me; I was the one that was always going to my counselor’s office. It got the point where I would go and get her stack of scholarships from her desk and be the one looking for scholarships and she wouldn’t be even be helping me. I’d be the only one interested, and I feel if I had the opportunity to know more about financial aid before I got here, I probably wouldn’t have transferred to HCC than to here. I would have probably come straight here.” Texas has special programs that support undocumented students to attend college and pay in-state tuition instead of international rates.

Upon graduating, she was able to go to the Local Community College and was able to transfer in to the Dream-Maker University, but she was only be able to pay for school if she was able to gain admission into the HOPE Program (i.e., through program’s scholarship funding). Fortunately, she was able to be admitted to the HOPE program and for the last two years of college she has been a member. Since she graduated from a high school with a graduating class of only 48 students, and given that classes at the local community college were capped at 25-28 students per class, Eva was very intimidated at the prospect of going to a university where classes can be as large as 300 students in one auditorium. “Whenever I came here, ‘am I going to be able to do this?’ I mean the first semester was very painful, I was, ‘I don’t know if I can study with these many people.’ I didn’t feel I was getting enough support or information from my teachers. ‘How am I

going to do this?’ Since I found out about the program, I’ve always been here. Even though I didn’t know anybody because I was new in the program, I would always be here. If it wasn’t for the lounge or the library, I’d be frightened to go to the library in the main library with so many people. How can you study with so much noise?’ If it weren’t for this little room, I don’t think I’d be okay. I can do it, now that I see my classes – in one class it was in the auditorium with 900 students. Oh my gosh, and how different it is. And now it doesn’t scare me anymore. So, it was a pretty big transition.” Eva is currently a senior and is expected to graduate this May with her degree in business.

The fact that Eva is at Dream-Maker University is a testament to her power of will and determination; she noted that she did not get assistance from her teachers or counselors from her school. Instead, she struggled alone to navigate through the college admission process and to secure funding for school. Eva is the exception to most students with legal status issues; she could have easily accepted the lack of support as a sign that she was not meant to go to college. In a conversation with Mrs. Socorro, I found out that she had the upmost respect and admiration for Eva, especially for how she remains on campus all day long to ensure that she does well in her classes. There are countless numbers of students throughout the country who have the potential to go to college yet, simply because of their legal status, they are discouraged (or at least not supported) in their efforts to achieve their college dreams.

For most undocumented students, the Dream Act is their salvation and ticket to a more productive, secure life in the U.S. Many expect the current President to pass legislature as an executive order to make the Dream Act a reality. When I was a student, for example, I was undocumented and I and my family were afforded political amnesty

because we came from a war-torn country. Thankfully, I am now blessed to be an American citizen. I remember the stress my family endured during that time, and I remember my friends and their families who were not as lucky as my family and me. For countless numbers of students in the United States of America, because of their legal status issues, the prospective of going to college is bleak. Moreover, if they do, in fact attain their degree, their prospects for a better future are not necessarily guaranteed. Therefore, great hope lies in the passage of the Dream Act – for both students like Eva and countless students’ families. Being an undocumented student is not an exclusive Latino issue. In fact, many other nationalities also deal with this issue in their own unique ways. Yet, one unifying factor present in each of their struggles is that each of these families has risked everything for the chance to obtain a better, more prosperous future, particularly for their children.

Fernanda (Latina)

*I think if it hadn't been for the program I wouldn't be here either. Mainly because school is so expensive; I have all of the courage and all of the willingness, to keep working hard, but, it's not what they are looking for. Schools really don't care that you want to go to college; they also need to get paid. They need that tuition money. Probably without the program I wouldn't have had enough funding to pay for school.*

Fernanda transferred to Zapata High School during her senior year from another local high school. Although she was enrolled in the same advanced courses as most of the HOPE students, two challenges in particular nearly derailed her college dream. First,

since she was not part of the HOPE program, she did not have the opportunity to learn and benefit from the workshops and requirements, which all HOPE students are expected to experience. She states, “I think that my transition definitely could have been better if I had been used to it, like at Zapata HS you didn’t have to buckle down. I’m not going to lie, and you really didn’t have to. You could “wing it” and get by. If I had to do the study hours, I would have gotten used to the constant studying.” Secondly, and equally as daunting, was the issue of her legal status (i.e., Fernanda and her family are undocumented). It was a chance occurrence that her mother happened to be watching the local Spanish news when Mrs. Socorro, the program manager for the HOPE, was interviewed about a program that helped Latino students get into college. Fernanda remembers, “My mom was feverously writing down the number all the contact information. She made herself in contact with Mrs. Socorro, she told her about the program.” Fernanda told the story of how she and her mother would come to the Center for Hispanics Engaging in the Learning Process (CHELP) office at DMU and meet with Mrs. Socorro to find out exactly what would be needed to help transition from high school to college. She states, “I applied for 32 scholarships that senior year. It was my mom that got me contracted with Mrs. Socorro. I would come to her with my mom and we would talk to her for any advice. On how to fill out FASFA and I had to fill out TASFA too.”

Since Fernanda had a rather low high school GPA, but high SAT score, they established a game plan at that time: “After I graduated, I went to the Urban Dream-Maker University. After two years, I transferred after I fulfilled all the requirements of GPA all of that and the hours credits.” Then, Fernanda applied and was admitted to the

HOPE program at DMU. Fernanda also had legal status issues and, had it not been for the guidance from Mrs. Socorro, her college dream might not have ever been realized. “It was extra complication for those students with that situation. To even think about coming to college because it was so much harder on us to get admitted and after that to get the funding to pay for it.” Currently, Fernanda is on track to graduate as a fifth-year senior in Engineering – an admirable accomplishment considering her particular situation, and the fact that graduation rates are presently averaged on a six-year basis for the average college student. She credits her success in college to the HOPE program because while attending the Urban Dream-Maker University she was still experiencing success even with minimal study efforts. Upon her transfer to Dream-Maker University, she quickly realized that she needed to incorporate the good study habits that HOPE requires for all program participants. “But when I transferred here, me and Carlos were doing engineering, so Engineering courses are tough on their own. I was like, ‘really?!’ The teachers were not going to stop because you don’t know what’s going on...that’s your problem. You got to find a way to fix it. So, I had to literally keep track of the study sheet, that thing helps a lot because it keeps track of how much time you are spending in each class. You can even plan it out.” She jokes by adding, that currently if she is not in class, she is most likely at the computer lab or the student study lounge, which is where she literally lives.

As with most of the other students in the focus group, she felt that the program needs to be expanded. She would really like the HOPE Project to include other state public colleges, and states, “just that it would be good to have chapter around to expand this type of program.” Moreover, she believes that part of the admission criteria should be

need-based, but that there should be efforts made to increase Latino participation since they are the least likely to attend college and more likely to drop out from high school. Fernanda represents an increasing number of students who are in our public school systems. This student population does well in high school and aspires to continue to college, but because of the legal and political climate in the United States most of these talented students will never reach their full potential. It should also be noted and emphasized that this is not solely a Latino issue; this issue pervades the lives of undocumented students of all races and ethnicities.

The commonality shared by Carlos, Eva and Fernanda is that each of the three came to HOPE as college students. Therefore, they are fundamentally different from those who started at Zapata High School. Namely, these three students could have easily dropped out prior to being admitted into the HOPE program. In the case of Eva and Fernanda, a more critical emphasis needs to address students with legal status issues who are capable of exceptional academic performing. Efforts must be made to ensure they do not get discouraged and become statistical dropouts before getting a real chance at living the American dream.

Gloria (Latina)

*I still receive all the help I need and support from HOPE. I think the only thing that has changed is my role in HOPE: I feel like now I'm more of a role model for the other students and I'm answering the questions and helping other students transition to Dream-Maker University.*

Gloria was admitted to the program during high school, but not because she was selected to participate in the informative session. She had a friend who suggested she apply for the program. Gloria remembers, “I had a friend who was already in the program and she suggested that I joined. I received an application from a mentor, filled out the application and turned it in. I was called in for an interview and a few days later received my acceptance letter.” It is conceivable that, had her friend not suggested, she might not have ever applied on her own. Although the Zapata High School HOPE experience was not as beneficial to Gloria during the early years, she quickly found the best value for her during her senior year. “They helped me with my advanced placement classes and tests. They also guided me through the DMU college admission application process and the FASFA financial aid application process. I also took my SAT for a second time my senior year and we had workshops in HOPE that gave us a tremendous amount of help preparing for the test.” It was not surprising that HOPE members at Zapata High School scored higher on average in their SAT scores than Non-HOPE students at Zapata High School (Average SAT for HOPE= 932 and Average SAT for Zapata HS Senior= 852) as most Zapata High School families cannot afford to pay for SAT Prep Courses, and the school does not provide those types of resources for their students. During her senior year that Gloria and her HOPE cohort members received free SAT trainings, workshops, and college admission and financial aid assistance.

Her support did not end with preparation for academic life after high school. Gloria noted that she was able to build strong relationships during high school, which allowed her transition to Dream-Maker University more easily. She stated, “During my time in HOPE I became really close friends with some of the other members and mentors

and it really helped make my transition to DMU a lot easier to have those relationships. Any time I had a question I had someone to study with.” She was able to cultivate a core group of friends with whom to study, people she could count on to motivate and support her and others. The college experience is itself an intimidating and solitary experience, having others individuals whom she has known from her childhood is comforting. Her relationship with the staff was also very vital to her transition. She is very appreciative to Mrs. Socorro for her support and interventions with the admission and financial aid offices. “The admissions and financial aid office at DMU were so difficult to get a hold of. I waited in long lines and emailed without ever really getting the information I needed. Mrs. Socorro had the connections with the advisors and she would get a response quickly for me.”

Gloria credits the HOPE project with her being in college. Had she not been part of HOPE, she said the odds she would attend college were “not very likely.” Fortunately though, she was admitted and provided with the tools she needed to be successful in college. “They have basically provided me with all the tools it takes to be successful in college: a scholarship, academic workshops, motivation, emotional support, places to study and an amazing network. I have received so much guidance and great opportunities by just being a member of the program,” Gloria states, crediting the program. If not for the HOPE program, she would not currently be a senior majoring in Electrical Power Engineering Technology slated for graduation in the spring of 2011.

Humberto (Latino)

*...I can say that I love this program and that it has helped me in more than one way in college. Mrs. Socorro is like a second mom to me.*

Humberto was not a HOPE student from Zapata High School. According to Humberto, “I came into the program my junior year in college.” Humberto was enrolled in advanced courses during high school not because he was forced to; rather, he wanted to prepare himself for when he went to college so that the experience would not overwhelm him. “To me high school was really not that helpful. In order for it to truly prepare you, you had to choose the hard classes. I took Advanced Placement courses because I wanted. I know plenty of students who did the bare minimum and were really shocked when they got to college.” Even with the preparation offered in high school, Humberto really acknowledges the value that HOPE provides: “I like the fact that they instill a sense of commitment by requiring you to turn in a certain amount of study hours. Also they require you to keep a certain GPA which gives you a goal. Most students don’t have a goal.”

As a transfer student, Humberto knew how challenging and frustrating the admissions and financial aid offices could be. A true benefit of being part of the program is the luxury of priority registration and having a student’s counselor schedule classes according to his or her requests. Humberto notes, “With priority registration I can avoid dealing with the offices and do my schedule myself. I don’t worry about classes getting full.” Moreover, having the scholarship helps students by not having to deal with the long lines in the financial aid office, or experiencing high stress concerning how to fund their education. Humberto recalls how there was a complication with the financial aid office

and “one semester, due to complications, I had to wait till October to get my financial aid.” Those perks, however, do not compare to the fact that the relationships he has developed in the last two years have been special. Humberto has the highest respect for the program manager. In fact, he declares, “Mrs. Socorro is like a second mom to me.” Even though college students are adults, it is comforting for them to know that there are individuals on staff willing to play that maternal, nurturing role.

In the 20+ years of supporting students achieve their dreams of getting their college degrees one thing is a constant: HOPE has recognized that, whether dealing with a high school teenager or a college young adult, each student needs structure and individually tailored support to succeed. “The program gives structure to a student’s career. Having students meet the requirements that we have would benefit many of my friends. Also it makes you feel more part of the school.” Humberto would be in favor of expanding the HOPE concept to help more students reach their dreams, but he also insists that the requirements instituted through study hall, mandatory meetings, workshops and leadership retreats would benefit most students. He states, “Requiring me to study and maintain track of my study hours. Dr. Puente’s inspiration speeches give me a sense of passion for my education.” Humberto demonstrates appreciation for how the program goes beyond the student’s expectations to provide the support each student needs to be successful in stating, “The constant hiring of tutors to help us in specific classes. Anything that you can think of, HOPE tries in order to get their students to succeed.” Yet, the relationships that have emerged and develop between the staff and students are the true key to keeping the students in school. Humberto is currently a senior Electrical Engineering student and – prior to HOPE – he was still on track for graduation.

However, due to his admission to HOPE, he feels more confident and has improved his study habits. Moreover, he himself states, “I think I would still be here, but my life would be more stressed, and I would owe more to the school in loans. With the program I am able to focus in my studies and really succeed.” Humberto represents the very small percentage of Latino students in the program who would have been successful with or without the HOPE program; but, since joining the program, his dream has been strengthened and seems much less like a nightmare than before.

Ignacio: Latino

*The staff make themselves available for assistance in matters regarding education and other personal matters as well.*

Ignacio did not start in HOPE until college, and what has truly benefited him has been the financial and emotional support. Funding higher education is important; yet, the human relationships that are established and nurtured are what keep students motivated and connected to the school. One of the HOPE program’s greatest assets resides in its potential to create and develop human capital. Dr. Puente, Mrs. Socorro and the rest of the staff are well regarded among all members of the cohort for their tireless efforts and commitment to the students. It is one thing for staff members to merely tell the students, “try your best, good luck, and get back to me,” and it’s a completely different experience through which the HOPE staff shows their support by being part of the students’ lives. “The staff make themselves available for assistance in matters regarding education and other personal matters as well. Not only is the HOPE staff always available, but also always ensuring the students are performing at their personal best.” Throughout the years,

HOPE staff members have been invited to weddings, baby showers, quinceañeras (traditional Latino Fifteenth birthday celebration), Citizenship swearing-in, birthday parties, and funerals. Students really appreciate that the staff are there to celebrate with them through small and large accomplishments. Ignacio, for example, stated that “HOPE staff take pride in their students and provide a number of resources to maximize the college experience.” For most of the HOPE students, the staff, in particular, Mrs. Socorro, serves as the program “Den Mother”. Unlike the actual parents of the cohort members, Mrs. Socorro has a better understanding of exactly of what the students are going through. For most cohort members, their parents have no real concept of what they are going through in college. In addition, the majority of their parents do not have a high school education. Hence, they are disconnected in regard to academic needs of children attend institutions of higher learning. More specifically, they often cannot provide the necessary support or guidance needed by first-year and/or first-generation college students in order to navigate the difficult waters of university life. Most first-time college goers experience the feeling of drowning in the pressures of college life because they feel that no one in their family that has entered into similar waters before them; there is no life-preserver or “floaties” to carry them along. Nevertheless, Dr. Puente has hired excellent lifeguards to save and, if necessary, resuscitate the students that otherwise may have drowned on their own. Given her many connections, Mrs. Socorro is able to resolve many of their issues and subvert potential catastrophes before they occur. Most of the parents of students in the HOPE program do not speak English; they have not completed high school; and they are not aware of how to navigate the university system waters. Ignacio is another prime example of a student who was able to be admitted to college,

and be successful, with or without HOPE, and he will be graduating with a double major getting his degrees in Communications Public Relations and Advertizing. Nonetheless, due directly to the support he has received, his experience has been more pleasant and memorable because he has established a connection with the university and this program.

Juan: Latino

*I would say that without their help I wouldn't have gotten more than \$20,000 in scholarships.*

Juan started the HOPE program as a student at Zapata High School. He stated, "I was told from a friend to join HOPE, which is how I knew about the program," and it was not because he was invited to the informative session, Juan credits part of his success in college to the required study hall sessions that developed his study habits since his time in high school. Additionally, he states, "Being required to study in the HOPE study room helped me keep track of school. It was a good place to study with friends and get help from the mentors." Study hall not only helped him focus on class, but it also provided him with an opportunity to meet with his friends and get extra support from his tutors. The support he received in high school was not limited to subject tutorials; he was encouraged to apply for as many scholarships as possible. "The HOPE program helped me tremendously in applying to scholarships in every way. They helped us from finding scholarships, helped us write and proofread the essays and applications," he recalled. Moreover, the program ensured that the scholarships would be mailed on time. In fact, Juan's mentors actually drove him to deliver the applications directly at the post office. Juan and many of his cohort members stated that they thought it a really good idea that

all students were required to write essays, which could be edited and adjusted to the different scholarships – a program element that remains intact since I was a high school senior at Zapata High School. Each essay was proofread and edited many times by the HOPE mentors before it was mailed off. This practice provided each student more confidence in applying for more scholarships, which they might not have done otherwise. Most seniors avoid applying for any scholarships that required an essay; thus, limiting how much money they might potentially be awarded. Because of the aforementioned persistence, Juan stated, “I would say that without their help I wouldn’t have gotten more than \$20,000 in scholarships.”

The HOPE experience was not just all work no play; plenty of fun was had by all. Juan recalls attending field trips to the Moody Gardens in Galveston, dodge-ball tournaments, and many other team building activities and competitions. “Going to field trips like the Moody Gardens at Galveston and a quick dodge ball tournament didn’t help academically, but they were fun experiences and made everyone in the group closer. Those trips were also a great way to relax from school,” he said. The staff members understand that the social aspects of the HOPE program is critical in keeping students motivated and helping them to stay connected with their friends and school. Although HOPE students are required to maintain high standards, participation in the program also provides plenty of rich opportunities to engage in unadulterated fun. Before Juan and his cohort members were ever part of the DMU family, each was already familiar with the campus. “Before coming to DMU, we had many campus visits and different events on the campus that made us feel comfortable around school. They also showed us where to study, eat, and where to hang out on campus.” The transition for the cohort members

from Zapata to Dream-Maker University has been nearly seamless. As part of the programmatic support system, current DMU HOPE members served as mentors to the cohort members at Zapata High School (i.e., the same students who, only a few years ago where themselves Zapata cohort members were now provided mentorship opportunities). Therefore, upon making the transition to college, high school cohort members and their former mentors had often already established mutually beneficial, enriching friendships.

The bond that HOPE students have with their cohort members and staff members is permanent. A point that illustrates the relationship between the students and staff members was made as when Juan described the experience of his younger brother (whom is also a student at Dream-Maker University, but a current member of a different program similar to HOPE which helps students). Juan said, “DMU sort of has a program like HOPE, but they’re not very good. My younger brother signed up for a 1 hour class that he said it didn’t help him.” Juan continued by explaining that “they have counselors but the main differences between them and HOPE is that they don’t know the students personally like HOPE.” Juan makes a great point that his program really does much more than simply provide scholarships, workshops, and facilities that help student reach their academic goals. According to him, “HOPE has helped me financially in school, they provided me mentors, and they helped me apply for scholarships which wouldn’t make me worry about paying so much for school so that I’m able to go full time.” What HOPE does well is it shows how much the people behind the program really care for their members like family. The program also helps students to connect with each other and their community. Additionally, Community Service is a vital part of their development. HOPE works hard to help instill a sense of obligation to self, family and community,

through the variety of community service activities to help out throughout the years, members learn compassion, empathy, service, and leadership skills.

Juan feels that he was destined to have his college degree; yet, had it not been for HOPE, he may not have been exposed to certain career options, volunteer opportunities and gained an awareness of social justice issues. Being a HOPE student forced him to recognize that he and others have an obligation to pay it forward and be the catalyst for other family members and youth in the community. Juan plans on “giving back to my community, I plan on donating to the HOPE program because of all the help they gave me.” Juan is now on track to graduate as a Mechanical Engineer from DMU and, although he may have easily graduated with or without the program, it because of HOPE that he has been able gain valuable skill necessary in becoming even more successful. Lastly, his participation in the HOPE program has opened his eyes to the realization of the commitment to one’s local community.

Kevin (Latino)

*Community service was very helpful to me. I felt it build my character, and promoted social skills. Also, it encouraged me to take leadership roles in school organizations and also to become reliable.*

Kevin came into HOPE as a college student and described the application by saying, “I believe that the interview is exceptional since it really lets the HOPE program get to know an individual.” He felt that HOPE assisted in building his character and fostering the development of his social skills by requiring him to participate in community services activities. He recalls, “Community service was a very helpful to me.

I felt it build my character, and promoted social skills. Also, it encouraged me to take leadership roles in school organizations and also to become a reliable individual.” As part of the application process, HOPE wants to know whether or not the student has leadership potential. HOPE students, while at Zapata High School and currently at Dream-Maker University, are encouraged to participate in leadership roles in student organizations and clubs. Leadership development is such an important component of the HOPE model, and each student participant is required to attend the summer leadership retreat. In fact, social awareness and responsibility are traits that all students are encouraged to develop as a conduit to academically responsibility.

Kevin readily admits that had he not been part of the HOPE program, he would have been completely entrenched in his academics and would have focused exclusively on his own studies. “If I were not part of the HOPE Program, I think I would have not become the well-rounded person I am today.” Kevin admits that he might not have been as strong academically had, “I would have been completely focused on academics, without much assistance and tutoring which the HOPE program would have provided.” For most HOPE students, there are many courses in which they require additional support and “HOPE goes out of their way to find tutors, even if it is impossible to find one for a particular subject matter. I recall the time when I was struggling in Circuits class. I mentioned it to Mrs. Socorro (i.e., the HOPE program manager) and she somehow managed to find someone to tutor me. I ended with one of the highest grades in the class.” It was HOPE’s study requirements that got Kevin on track. He stated, “I was required to record all the hours I spent studying. This helps me reflect on how much work I was actually putting towards my academia. In addition, it helped me understand

the importance of focusing while studying.” Because of the social awareness of the program, he feels that he is now a more well-balanced student and more invested in his education and his need to contribute to his community. Kevin is currently a senior Mechanical Engineering student, but he is also planning a major student leadership conference during the spring semester at the Dream-Maker University. Each member is required to attend the leadership retreat each summer, and this year Kevin was responsible for preparing a leadership conference for middle school students that was designed back in August 2010 as this year’s leadership function.

#### Program Effects on the Researcher

Cesar A.... (Latino)

*If HOPE did not exist in my life, I would not have the life I now have.*

Although not member of the cohort being studied, I am a former HOPE student and will include my personal narrative here as I feel my story needs to be laid alongside the students’ narratives. I was fortunate to have been selected to participate in the 1988 pilot program. Initially the program recruited 100 students from East End Middle School. Dr. Puente and Mr. Calle came to our campus and we met in the auditorium. In fact, we thought we were in trouble and I remember some students sneaked-out through the back just because they were scared. Some students were scared to go into the auditorium, and some just snuck in even though they were not invited just to see what was going on, plus they didn’t want to be in the classroom. For the next four years, we were monitored and supported by cHELP in the HOPE Project in particular. Of the 88 students who were finally accepted into the program, over 80 students graduated on time

from high school in 1993. Of those students, over 70 have entered college, a vocational program, or into military service. In quantitative terms, this is a statistically significant number. As of the year 2011, there are several students who have gone back to college after being out for a while. Therefore, the program continues unofficially.

As one of the selected students, I can honestly admit that I had no idea what college would entail, and even less of an idea that I would one day go to college. Because of HOPE and cHELP, I was able to realize a dream that I did not know existed in me. And here I am: finishing my thesis to complete my Educational Doctorate. I can honestly state, that if I were have never been selected to the HOPE program, I am confident that my life would not be as it is today. Furthermore, no one my immediate family has a college degree. My father was the most advanced scholar of the family with an associate's degree from Nicaragua. My mother was forced to stop attending school after her 6<sup>th</sup> grade year due to the cultural expectations assigned to women in her family. I have been able to parlay my education to become a teacher and am currently a secondary school administrator. I continue to pay it forward; that is, I push the next generation of Latino students to excel in school. I have used what I learned to ensure that my younger brother graduates this year from Dream-Maker University. My story is very typical of any HOPE alumni or former student. Without this program, most of the former students would not have had the opportunity to go to college and change their lives for the better.

When I entered the HOPE program, I and my mother were living in government public housing. I also felt that I was a good student – not terribly smart or an over achiever, but well behaved and was always trying to do right and be a “teacher’s pet”. As

I progressed through high school, I realized that I was not a top scholar. And, although I failed Chemistry, I excelled in my history and social studies classes! In regard to my SAT test success, I had to take it twice and my highest score was a 740. Again, I was not setting the scholastic records ablaze; yet, in because of my social activities and community services (and, truth be told, because I was one of Dr. Puente's students in HOPE), I was admitted to DMU on a probation status. To make a long story short, after getting kicked out of DMU three times, I finally received a degree from Urban Dream-Maker University in 1999, and ten years from starting at DMU, I returned to DMU and received my bachelor's degree in History in 2003.

Although I am embarrassed to admit that I am not making the best case for HOPE by citing my shortcomings as a student, I can confidently assert that, due to their assistance, I was able to continue and was continually supported even when faltering academically. While experiencing successes, Dr. Puente and the staff were there to support me; conversely, when I stumbled, I was supported nonetheless. Mrs. Luminar, a former program coordinator, drove me and my mother to go to our U.S. Citizenship Swearing In Ceremony (Who else would have done that for me and my mother?). In addition, when I married my wife, Donna, Mrs. Luminar and Mr. Camino (both HOPE members) drove more than an hour in heavy traffic out of town to wish me well on my special day . I've been out of the program for nearly 11 years, yet they were still excited for me when I graduated with my master's degree – and will undoubtedly be even more proud upon graduating with my doctorate degree. I believe I will be but the second member of our original cohort to attain a doctorate – not bad for a student who should have not been a high school graduate, not a college graduate, or a doctorate candidate. I

fully understand I am a statistical anomaly, and what is most wonderful about HOPE is that they have been able to turn my story, and the life stories of countless other students, into one of success rather than failure, despair and continual struggle.

Without a doubt, I believe that this program requires expansion in order to help other students who possess the potential to become college graduates. I have been blessed above more than I have ever deserved or would have ever imagined. My two cousins, whom grew up with me in the same household, from when I was five years' of age until my thirteenth year, were not as lucky as me. One of these cousins has been in the correctional institution for the last 15 years, and another who is a high school dropout. I could have easily gone down a similar path (e.g. becoming a high school dropout) and could have potentially been another statistic within the Latino community. I have been blessed by God and have had the opportunity to assist other students by becoming a role model who brings them to the realization that Latinos do, in fact, have other options. If I can get a college degree and a doctorate, then more Latinos should also to be aspiring and achieving college degrees, especially considering the level of instruction that students are receiving in today's schools.

### Narrative Responses to the Three Research Questions

#### Narrative Responses to Research Question One

Research question one asked, "What did the HOPE Program do to plant a college seed and helped the participant achieve a university goal?"

The HOPE Program provided a three-tier system for supporting student members. Latino students characteristically tend to reflect the highest percentage of dropout rates

and among the highest achievement gaps when comparing the three dominant ethnic groups in the United States school system. As a particularly salient example, HOPE students attend an academically “Recognized school (as defined by the Texas Education Agency [TEA] Academic Accountability System), yet the school has one of the worst dropout rates in the city, if not the nation. As further proof to this claim, for the cohort presently being studied, only 344 out of over 653 freshmen graduated in their senior year (i.e., within a four-year time frame). In an attempt to overcome the deficiencies of the school, HOPE requires all candidates to follow their program’s strict policies and expectations. Each student selected only after an application and interview session, and each student must to commit a seven-year educational journey. The program organizers have discovered that the strategies are not complicated, or really scientific for that matter; they are merely best practices. HOPE uses three main tiers for their support system: (1) Academic Support, (2) Social Support, and (3) Financial and College-Ready Support.

#### Academic Support

*Theme one: Tutorials/study hall.* Among the participant cohort members, the most common response pertaining to their academic success is related to the amount of time spent in study hall. Students who started at Zapata High School in the HOPE program tended to do better in their transition into Dream-Maker University because of the prior training and workshops concerning how to improve their study skills. When students enter HOPE for the first time at the college-level, the use of study time is a factor that program organizers notice significantly helps the student become more successful and focused.

The concept of doing your homework is not a novel one by any means; hence, there is little need to do scientific research to understand that increasing one's study time will yield better results. Yet, I do not mean to imply that merely putting in the seat time during study hall translates to academic success. But forming a habit of studying which includes on how to properly study (eliminating distractors or creating an environment that helps them focus) practicing time management strategies, and documenting their study hours with their tutor. For most HOPE students, even though each has taken Advanced Placement courses in high school, many will still have academic deficiencies that require additional tutoring, which the program is more than willing to provide at no cost to the student. What the program does for students, most importantly, is that it forces them to commit to maintaining a mandatory set of hours in tutorials and study hall. Initially, while in high school, a student's minimum study time is 3 hours per week. While attending college, however, a student's required time could be as few as 34 hours per semester based on his or her GPA and academic standing. Each student quickly realizes a simple, yet powerful, aphorism: The more hours studied, the better the grades obtained. Also, if they wanted to maintain a good GPA and good academic standing in order to keep their scholarship, they realize they need to put in the seat time and request tutoring when struggling. The second thing that the program does for each student is to ensure that the tutorial seat time is accompanied by a very effective and skilled paid tutor. Those running the program have been known to go out of their way to hire subject-specific tutors for area of study as a way to ensure that students grasp the said material better and pass their classes.

*Theme two: Workshops/enrichment.* Given the fact that most students do not possess the skill set needed to effectively transition into most universities and colleges, workshops and enrichment activities are incorporated into the program in order to support students in learning new skills that will help them cope with the pressures of school while also being successful. These workshops and enrichment seminars do not stop at the high school level; through their three years of high school, and during their college experience, the program expects each member to participate and be engaged. Workshop topics could range from Dealing with Stress, Peer Pressure, How to Deal with Test Anxiety, Identifying Leadership traits, to SAT training workshops for the high school students and GRE training for the college students. Cohort members found that the different enrichment sessions and workshops helped them build a toolbox of coping skills as well as academic preparedness. Also, one of the most refreshing aspects of the program is that each forum provides fresh and interesting perspectives, rather than canned seminars that are redundant, dull and uninteresting for students. The presentations were always well-planned and had salient messages for students, never just thrown together. A great treat was also having guest speakers introduce different careers to the students, especially those in which they may not have previously considered. The main idea here is to expose the students to as many diverse options and skills as possible so they might be able to get something useful.

Many parents and well-funded schools provide large numbers of similar training sessions on a personal level; however, as is the case of most high schools like Zapata, time and resources are not used for these types of development or enrichment opportunities. Regretfully, the sole focus for most schools is maintaining their state

designated accountability standing vis-à-vis their state assessment tests. Those at the HOPE program, however, have learned that students also need to learn how to adjust and sustain themselves as much as possible without having to rely too much on the program itself. And, one of the best ways to achieve this goal is to equip the students with a set of effective study skills. Most of the workshops are held during school time and the school supported the students by allowing them time to participate.

*Theme three: Advanced courses.* With the hope of getting students through to college with a degree in hand, the program has learned that, in order for that to happen, students must take more challenging classes – namely, Advanced Placements (AP) courses. Even though the school’s AP program may not be as rigorous as in other campuses, the very fact that a student is taking more advanced classes helps to place him or her in the correct frame of mind. For instance, students in AP classes subject themselves to academic content more akin to the demands of college, and they can possibly also attain college credits while still in high school. For example, high school students may get credit for college courses in Spanish, Physics, Calculus, English and Economics, among others. In Texas, any student may opt to take Pre Advanced Placement or Advanced Placement (AP) classes, but some schools discourage certain students from enrolling. Students in AP classes benefit from having smaller classes, a more rigorous curriculum, tend to be taught by AP certified teachers that are among the better teachers on campus, and AP classes tend to have fewer disciplinary incidents as compared to the general education course equivalent.

*Theme four: Program monitoring student’s progress.* In an effort to ensure accountability, each HOPE member is tracked to guarantee that they are maintaining the

requirements and expectations of the program. Each student is required to maintain a 2.5 GRE in high school and a 2.7 GPA in college. If a student fails a semester, and/or dips below the aforementioned threshold for the first time, he or she is placed on a warning status. Further, such students are expected to participate in additional tutorials with a tutor and to pass their following semester with a high enough grade to overcome their previous deficit. At that point, if successful, he or she will no longer be on the warning status. If the student passes the following semester yet fails again to raise his or her GPA above the minimum, then he or she will continue with their warning status. Then, after a second warning, the student is suspended or the scholarship may be suspended pending further academic improvement. On some occasions, students may have two consecutive semesters of low academic performance and, in addition to the loss of their scholarship eligibility, can also receive an academic suspension from the university as well. Just as students are typically eligible to reapply for reinstatement to the university, HOPE may reconsider reinstating the scholarship provided the student meets the requirements of the program. The majority of students will never require such a degree of intervention, but for the few who are placed on academic suspension, most still continue at other institutions and can eventually attempt to return to DMU.

On the Zapata High School campus, and on the Dream-Maker University, there is a program coordinator specifically assigned and is responsible for monitoring the progress of each student in the program. Each grading cycle in high school – and periodically at the college level – members have to demonstrate their individual progress in each of their classes. Program coordinators do not want to be surprised that certain students have failed without proper interventions being taken. At both institutional

levels, students that require tutors to help them pass are provided with individualized tutors funded by the program.

The cohort model itself tends to be among the best monitoring system HOPE has in place. It is the cohort members themselves that help each other the most. Throughout their high school careers, cohort members are taking the same advanced courses and are conducting team building exercises in order to develop a sense of family and interdependence among the group. Furthermore, within the cohort model, the students are accountable to each other and will create study groups to help each other. Thus, the group norm is that if your friend fails, and is at risk of being removed from the program, it means something to you personally. The HOPE program at Zapata High School is very proud that nearly all of the members who start the program during high school will complete high school together with the rest of the cohort, unless the student's family moves out of the Zapata High School enrollment zone.

This statement demonstrates a critical element in ensuring that your members are being academically successful. Interventions for students who are failing only work if the student is able to correct the issue before it is too late. Students feel a sense of pride and responsibility when they know that their performance matters to someone they respect. This allows the student to feel that they are part of something bigger than themselves; having friends and people who genuinely care about a student will encourage them to perform better in school.

#### Summary of Academic Support

The organizers of the HOPE program have learned that to simply tell a student that he or she can go to college yet not prepare or provide him the tools needed to survive

is not an effective strategy. Through the four-step process previously described, HOPE uses mandatory study hall hours, provides workshops to develop new skill sets, requires that students enroll in Advanced Placements courses, and offers constant monitoring of the student's performance. As earlier stated, these are elements of a practical prescription that has repeatedly survived the test of time. In order for this process to effectively work, however, the student must take ownership of their education and ensure that he or she is attending the tutorial sessions, attending and participating in the workshops, and enroll and do well in the advance courses. Moreover, the program must hold student accountable for their number of tutorial hours, and provide an adequate number of skilled tutors for students who need extra assistance. The workshops provided must also be effective and relevant to the students' interests and assist in building the skills students will need in high school as well as college. The program must ensure that their student members have good relationship with the school; they must to ensure that the cohort members are enrolled in the advanced courses; and they must also monitor students' progress throughout the semester, and incorporate interventions whenever and wherever they are needed. But, the most important "programmatic" component is for students to feel as though organizers do not simply regard them as a number, and that they are not simply conducting check list activities that have little or no relevance to their actual lives. Ultimately, each individual student must understand that the program organizers genuinely care about them, and that these individuals are deeply (and personally) invested in their success. Only when such conditions are fulfilled will cohort members care deeply about each other and make genuine investments their own educational performance.

## Social Support

*Theme one: Community service.* An important component of HOPE involves the act of ensuring students develop both academic *and* social responsibility. The roots of this philosophy are reflected, partly, through cHELP, which was established in the 1960s – a result of student-led activism and awareness of social liberties and cultural identity considerations evident during that time period. HOPE students are required to participate in community service activities from high school through their college careers. For many students, it is the community service activities that truly “draws them out of their shell” and allows them to recognize their obligation not just to their academics but to the Hispanic community at large. It is through such community service that most students learn to hone their leadership skills and become more well-rounded individuals. And, this social awareness and recognition of having an obligation to their community is often where most members eventually acknowledge the program’s ultimately purpose and legacy: that is, someday soon they too will be expected to give back or “pay it forward”.

Community service activities are a vital component of the program for three important reasons. First, students need to recognize that make up a greater community, and they need to develop leadership skills therein. Secondly, cHELP was a direct by-product of the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 1970s – the focus of which was to make a difference in the Latino community. And, thirdly, university admission committees favor applicants who are both well-rounded students in academics *and* make contributions in the way of social service.

*Theme two: Mentorship.* Throughout their whole experience from high school through college, students are fully supported by their mentors. While in high schools, for

instance, mentors help to monitor students' academics, attendance, and behavior. Each mentor's responsibility is to guide and serve as a role model for the students. HOPE members at the college-level mentor each other as well. Seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshmen students can ask those in the grade level above them for guidance and support. Finally, the students also have on-campus staff members who regularly offer both their professional as well as personal opinions. There are enough students to help each other because they see themselves not just as school-mates; rather, as family members bound to one another by common purpose and common good.

*Theme three: Cohort interaction.* At the high school level, cohort numbers can range from 25-30 students; at the college level, there are currently 50 students. With so many fellow members and adult staff members, student participants can rely on each other for support and guidance. Throughout the years, each cohort member has found that some of the strongest bonds present in their lives are with their fellow cohort members. Some cohort members have participated in the program together for as many as 7-8 years. This does not include members who can trace their friendships as far back as elementary school. The program supports a significant number of team building activities to support students, which allows them the opportunity to not only to learn about themselves but about their fellow cohort members as well. On many occasions, cohort members have actually married and/or maintained lifelong friendships.

### Summary of Social Support

HOPE understands that students are human beings who may often shirk uncomfortable and difficult situations or tasks, especially if they experience difficulty connecting these things to their personal experiences (i.e., the student are, therefore, both

un-invested and unmotivated). More than not, if given the choice, most students will opt for fun instead. Therefore, the “human element” represents an important aspect of the program. The follow are all important elements which have helped students successful; not only in the program, but in their personal lives as well: Social responsibility, accountability to one’s self and one’s community, and having the opportunity to simply have fun and enjoy their individual journeys. These elements are the reason why those in the program celebrate most holidays, birthdays and why they participate in so many social functions.

For cohort members, the program is not just an organization or an office that provides them with tutoring and scholarships; the program is an extended family, and such relationships that have been developed as far back since high school for most members. Students genuinely enjoy their time together; when they come together it is like having a family reunion were they each get to catch up and see how the others are doing. One new format that has helped cohort member is the social networking platforms, such as Facebook, Emails contact, and Text messaging.

#### Financial and College-Ready Support

*Theme one: Scholarship application process.* Establishing a dream without offering the proper resources or pathways to realize that dream does no one any good. If HOPE program organizers tout the notions that if students stick with this program, and that they are college-bound, yet – at the end of the students’ three- or four-year journey – tell students they will have to find the financial means on their own, how could program organizers claim to be “fully supportive”? There are three ways HOPE students are eligible to receive funding for college: (1) the student is eligible for a \$12,000 scholarship

from the program to attend the Dream-Maker University; (2) all students are expected to apply for as many scholarships as they can; and (3) most students can apply federal grants and loans.

Unfortunately, however, not every student qualifies for scholarships – primarily due to their legal status, or the fact that they did not complete the paperwork correctly. Students within the program have been known to gain between \$20,000- \$50,000 in scholarships, which does not include amounts gained in the HOPE program scholarship. Moreover, the average tuition in America is increasing at a higher rate than the national debt, which makes it increasingly difficult for students to cover tuition with scholarships alone.

*Theme two: College admission process.* HOPE would love for all of the students to attend Dream-Maker University upon graduation from Zapata High School. However, there are several students that will be accepted to (and whom will attend) other state universities, both in and outside the state of Texas. All students are required to apply for college admissions to multiple schools because, on occasion, some students are not accepted at their first choice institutions. For students who are not admitted to at least the Dream-Maker University, they are either redirected to the Urban Dream-Maker University or to their local community college. The student's scholarship money is not waived; the money will still be used to pay for their schooling at those institutions until they are ready to transfer to Dream-Maker University.

*Theme three: SAT training.* Statistically, we know, as the literature review indicates, that Latino students tend to perform the lowest among all of the top-three ethnic groups in the United States. By comparison, in many affluent schools, SAT

workshops and courses are offered starting in students' 10<sup>th</sup> grade, and even as early as their 9<sup>th</sup> grade year. Zapata High School, however, does not have the resources to spend money on SAT workshops for students whose parents do not have the resources to get them enrolled on their own. HOPE provides an intensive SAT training sessions to prepare the students for the test.

*Theme four: College campus visits.* Getting students involved in campus visits is also very important. College is merely a concept and vague idea until they see the brick and mortar, observe the daily activities of college student, and experience the classrooms. It is important to allow students opportunities to visit different campuses in order to see whether they might be interested in attending other state colleges. By the student's senior year, most would have visited at least six different universities. A student experiences a special feeling when he or she physically walks on to a university campus; before which had only been experienced on-line or through brochures. These real-life experiences truly determine whether or not students can actually see themselves as future students on a given college campus. One theme common among most Zapata High School students is that most have never travelled far enough out of their community to attain such an experience, and these students are generally unaware of what the rest of the city looks like. Although downtown is less than 5-10 minutes from the campus, most students have never really travelled and visited the downtown area; in fact, for most of Zapata High School students, their world revolves around what they see day in and day out.

#### Summary of Financial and College-Ready Support

Obtaining financial and college-ready support is like participating in a boxing match. Despite all the hand bags, punching bags, crunches, pushups, cardio and agility

training, these preparations have no meaning until the student gets a chance to enter the ring and strap on the boxing gloves and finally fight at least a three minute round. The “boxing ring” in this case represents the universities themselves. Training and conditioning are key elements in the fight, and when it is time to enter into the ring it will not count for anything if students do not know how to maneuver within the ropes. In this regard, the HOPE program greatly aids students in cultivating resiliency to the systemic forces that could cripple them and hijack their academic dreams.

This is the level when all the connections are being established. This process commences when students begin applying for the schools and, subsequently, arranging their funding. The process continues as students make school visits and when all of the tutorials, workshops and hard work align in a singular purpose. The majority of the cohort members indicated that it was the HOPE program that helped them apply for their scholarships, apply for federal financial aid, apply for the different universities and, ultimately, assisted them in connecting the dots. I do not want to give the reader the false impression that Latino students at Zapata High Schools would not have been able achieve such accomplishments alone; however, having individuals that you trust help you do the process really helps! What is most regrettable is that there were many more students who did not apply for scholarships, financial aid, or college admissions simply because they did not have the necessary tools and/or guidance. It is not that these students were ineligible or unmotivated; rather, that they simply did not have someone guiding them through the circuitous college application process. Therefore, the HOPE program replicates a phenomenon present in many college-educated families. For example, as a result of their own direct experiences, parents in college-educated families already understand how to

navigate the university waters. Thus, if one's parents are high school dropouts, or if they have not undergone the application process themselves, how can their children be expected to plunge into the treacherous waters of the college application process?

### Summary of Findings for Research Question One

This chapter presents a central research question: “What did the HOPE Program do to plant a college seed and helped the participant achieve a university goal?” The HOPE program offers a three-tiered method for preparing students to make their dream of college attendance a true reality. First, the program provides Academic Support; then, the program provides Social Support; and, thirdly, it provides Financial and College-Ready Support. No one tier in particular holds priority over another. In fact, each three tier must work together to allow the program focus holistically on each student. Within each tier of support, HOPE makes sure that the types of support all focus to either build skills needed in college or help make the college experience a realistic goal. For families involved in the planning, preparation, and decision-making process of the child's college education, the HOPE process may seem like a long, drawn out endeavor. However, neither parents nor most HOPE students have a full concept or realization of what going to college is about, much less the important steps involved in the process itself.

### Chapter Summary

Chapter Four began with the role of the leader; the focus was on Dr. Puente – namely, how and why he started the HOPE Program with the intent and focus on trying to get Urban Latino students into college. The second section examines at the effects of the program on the lives of the cohort members as documented during their focus groups.

The third section involves the effects of the program on the researcher, and I reflected how this program has impacted my personal life. The fourth section deals with the narrative responses to the research question's break down of the three tiers to the HOPE approach to help students achieve their university goals of getting a college degree: (1) Academic support deals with the requirements of having students participate in Tutorials and Study Hall, Workshops and Enrichment Sessions, Enrolled in Advanced Courses, and how the program monitors each student's progress; (2) Social support deals with requiring students to participate in Community Service Activities, how each student has a mentor, and how each student feels part of something greater being part of the cohort model; and (3) Financial and College-Ready Support dealing with helping the student apply for scholarship applications, college admission applications, SAT training workshops and having college campus visits.

Although Chapter Four mainly provides a narrative account of what the HOPE program has done for the program members, it does not necessarily deal with raw statistical data with regard to the program's effectiveness. Yet, throughout its history, the program has been more successful at getting their students to be retained, and actually complete their degree, at a higher percentage than for the same demographic of students at Dream-Maker University. Moreover, the program has maintained a higher graduation rate in comparison to the state average. As an institution of higher learning, which is now under more accountability for each student admitted, program organizers have to ensure that efforts are made to support students to complete their college degree within 4-6 years. Hence, the focus is not whether the program has been effective, but, until this research, no research has examined or reviewed how this unique program is addressing

some of the current issues within the Latino community (i.e., high dropout rate in high school, low academic achievement in high school and in college, and low graduation rate at the university level). This research has presented the successes of the program in helping many Latino students earn a college degree where they may not have otherwise even graduated from high school or gone to a post-secondary institution. Although this program has predominantly been focusing on Latino students, this program model and concept can be replicated to help all students. Program replication is especially possible considering organizers takes pride in using best practice strategies to help each student be successful. Another reason why this research is so timely and critical is that all state-funded universities are trying to ensure that they receive the largest amounts of federal funding possible, and there are greater accountability standards which did not exist five years ago.

Finally, this chapter summarized the themes that were identified within the findings. Chapter Five will provide a discussion of these themes and the interview insights with Dr. Puente and their implications for practice and further research.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS

#### Review of Study

This study examined the student's perspective of a program intended to help urban Latino students attain their university degree. In comparison to similar documented programs, this program is unique for a number of reasons: (a) It has been in existence since 1988; (b) the program focuses specifically on high school students from Zapata High School during their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year; (c) during their three years of high school, this program helps by developing and nurturing each cohort members' progress through high school, but with skills that will help them transition into college; and (d) this program facilitates students' admission process into the Dream-Maker University by providing scholarships, tutoring and other resources until they successfully graduate with a degree.

The program being examined here is titled Hispanic's Opportunity for Progress in Excellence (HOPE), which is supported at the Center for Hispanics Engaged in the Learning Process on the Dream-Maker University. Of the many programs across the nation attempting to address topics most affecting Latino high school students (e.g. high dropout rates, the prevalence of academic achievement gaps, attaining higher graduation rates), none is addressing those issues directly or effectively. In addition, other programs do not currently address the issues of Latino student recruitment, retention and the need to ensure that college graduation is attained. The primary method the researcher used to understand the results of the investigation was through focus group interviews of various

cohort members. The Latino cohort members were derived from one of two samples: (a) students whom started at Zapata High School who started the program in 2005 and will be seniors in 2011, and (b) those who entered the program while in college but would have been the contemporaries of the students in the first group and are on course to graduate from Dream-Maker University.

#### Findings and Conclusions Related to Research Purpose

Utilizing the focus group questions, individual interviews with the program director, reviewing program archives, as well as university archives, all contributed to the researcher's understanding of the research questions. The research questions were as follows:

1. What did the HOPE Program do to plant that college seed and help you achieve that university goal of a college degree?
2. Had you not been associated with the HOPE program, would you today be on a university campus?
3. What has been the difference between you and your high school friends who are not in college?

The second set of research questions will be asked of the HOPE Program administration:

1. How can the HOPE Program be replicated across different content areas or disciplines?
2. Is the HOPE Program more effective if it exclusively had a Latino or ethnic focus? Or can the HOPE program be just as effective if it was opened to all ethnic groups?

This chapter, the final one of my doctoral thesis, discusses each of the research questions, and provide a summary of the findings and a comparison to the literature.

#### Discussion of Findings for Research Question One

Research Question One: What did the HOPE Program do to plant that college seed and help you achieve that university goal?

In order to answer this question, the reader needs to know that there are two types of HOPE students at DMU. The first type is the student that was recruited while at Zapata High school and, upon graduation from high school, was admitted to and is currently a student at DMU. Of the thirty-seven total HOPE students at Zapata High School, only nineteen would start their college career at DMU. The remaining HOPE students from Zapata began college at either the two largest state public universities, the Urban Dream-Maker University, or the Local Community College. The second type is the student may or may not have attended Zapata High School but would have been a contemporary. Moreover, this particular student was not admitted into the HOPE program at DMU until after their first two years in college. Some of the later HOPE students may have had prior knowledge of the program since high school, yet they were not admitted into the program until later.

In relation to nearly all of the first types of students, the researcher observed that, above all, the influential factors of the HOPE program were primarily responsible for planting the seed of determination in them. The program confirmed that college was a reality for them, not just a dream; it gave them the tools they would needed for success; and it provided the guidance to ensure that they would stay on the path to college. And,

more than anything, the students believed that HOPE would commit to supporting them through their entire journey. The majority of Zapata High School students who were not HOPE participants were not as fortunate. For these cohort members, it was the program itself that individually supported them in being able to focus, and it provided the clear direction they would need to make a smoother, more tranquil transition into college. Of the thirty-four cohort members during their senior year, everyone graduated and was either admitted to Dream-Maker University or another public community college or university. This particular trend was not reflective of the general student population at Zapata High School. A more impressive consideration is that, of the nearly 656 freshmen that started with the cohort, their senior class only graduated a total of 344! The amazing fact is that all thirty-four students that started the program during their sophomore year actually made it through and eventually graduated with their senior class. Unfortunately, Zapata High School has a less-than-positive reputation for being a dropout factory where over 40-50% of the freshmen classes do not graduate. However, as the evidence of this study demonstrates, the HOPE program represents a highly positive, shining example that Zapata students *can* succeed, *can* enter a college program, and *can* graduate with a four-year degree.

The second type of student (those who entered the HOPE program once they were already at DMU) obviously had aspirations to go to college, and were able to get into college; yet, these students struggled once they enrolled in their respective collegiate programs. Following their admission to HOPE, however, these students quickly realized the benefits associated with the requirements and expectations of the program. The program personally benefited students academically by endowing them with the skills

and strategies to be able to excel in their classes. Yet, the question of “What did the program do for them to plant the college seed?” is more applicable for the HOPE students who first started at Zapata High School. It was during high school that the program germinated this seed, because most students at Zapata High School had no intention of going to college. If anything, the typical Zapata student might have strived for an associate’s degree or vocational certificate. Yet, for the HOPE members at Zapata HS, the program helped and instilled a focus in the HOPE members at Zapata High School that academics should be a top priority. More importantly, the program created the conditions necessary to support and prepare students to be ready for college by ensuring that each student was enrolled in advanced placements courses, receiving workshops, enrichment sessions, tutorials, fieldtrips, college campus visits, applying for scholarships, applying for college admission, applying for the federal financial aid, and mentorship that would keep them motivated and encouraged. The HOPE model utilizes a system that focuses on the holistic needs of the individual student; thus, program organizers and administrators eschew the notion that there should be one prescriptive solution for all students. Rather, those involved in HOPE work hard to ensure that each member is supported in their efforts to meet the strict requirements of the program. It truly is a comprehensive process that helps students visualize, conceptualize, and realize that college is not only a genuine option, but also an expectation of the program.

With respect to the second part of the question (i.e., how the program helped them achieve their college goal), the findings of this study demonstrate that the high school component is critical for ensuring that students will be viable candidates for college. Yet, what the program does for the HOPE student once the student is enrolled at DMU is more

complex and highly nuanced, depending on the individual. Of the remaining 15 students who are now seniors or on course to graduate, the participants indicated that the program has supported their efforts in ensuring that they are on the path to graduation from DMU.

The participants stated that three main programmatic factors helped them finish college: (1) the tutorial and study hall requirements, (2) the scholarship and financial aid office provided, and (3) the relationships the program nurtures. On many occasions, the participants identified that the greatest reason for their success in college was the program's strict study hall hours and tutorial support. When students did not follow the guidelines, they quickly recognized that they were falling behind; subsequently, they made sure diligently document their study hall hours and ensure that they were scheduling time with program tutors. Secondly, the financial support, as well as intervention with college financial aid office staff, served as another critical component that contributed to students' collegiate success. Each of the participants deeply relies on scholarships and financial aid to subsidize their tuition costs and expenses, and if the program did not guarantee at least part of the student's financial security, most would have to resort to full-tuition loans. Since many of these students might not qualify for the loans, they could resort to dropping out, effectively ending their dream of college. Finally, the third significant contribution of the program is something that is intangible, yet absolutely critical: Cohort members view HOPE as a family, rather than an office or an organization. All of the cohort member responses alluded to the bond the students have among the other members. Moreover, the cohort members also highlighted how much the students respect, admire and truly love the program director and the program coordinator as if they were their own family members. Hence, it is evident from the

students' responses that each has truly valued the relationships they have created and nourished throughout the last 7 years.

#### Discussion of Findings for Research Question Two

Research Question Two: Had you not been associated with the HOPE program, would you today be on a university campus?

Of the eleven participants, the majority of the students indicated that if they had not been associated with the HOPE program from either starting at Zapata High School, or starting at Dream-Maker University, the majority stated they would not have been a college student today. Nearly all of the students indicated that if they had not been part of the HOPE program at DMU that they would have likely dropped out of college after their first two years. It is to assume that if the eleven students out of the total fifteen cohort members had not been associated with HOPE, their likelihood the college dream would have been dim. And, had they been admitted to college in spite of their significant barriers, their likelihood of having a successful first year of college, and returning for a second year, would be very unlikely. The program essentially supported students by allowing them to build a skill-set necessary for college success. More specifically, students constructed this skill-set through the training they received with regard to study skills, as well as how to manage their overall college experience. For nearly seven years, the program has provided students with the support, resources, and motivation that has given them an opportunity to develop and experience success while making the transition from high school to the university level. With so many variables that might prevent a student from starting college, there are many more factors that can cause them to dropout

and relinquish their college dreams. The program is credited with helping the individual student with all aspects of his or her college experience, which effectively removes all of the excuses that might prevent a student from successfully graduating with a degree.

### Discussion of Findings for Research Question Three

Research Question Three: What has been the difference between you and your high school friends who are not in college?

To answer this question the researcher seeks to identify three different groups: (a) the current cohort members which started at Zapata High School whom are currently enrolled at DMU, (b) the cohort members that started at Zapata High School but are not enrolled at DMU, and (c) those that are non-cohort members but were classmates at Zapata High School. Firstly, for those students who were part of the cohort at Zapata High school and are not at DMU, the majority of the relationships between them and cohort members who are still attending DMU remain ongoing. In many cases, the relationships between cohort members are stronger simply due to the fact that they tended to be in the same classes. In addition, these students also participated in the same tutorials, program events, and participated in school related organizations; therefore, their friendships still continue despite any preference of school choice, economic struggles, and/or personal family issues that may have prevented the students from continuing at or attending DMU. In relation to those students who were part of the HOPE program at Zapata High School, yet are not currently enrolled at DMU, their current circumstances are not always related to any academic deficiencies. In fact, although a few students have been suspended or have left DMU for academics-related reasons, there may have been

other underlining factors that contributed to their departure from DMU. For instance, their decisions and circumstance may not have been directly related to their academic perseverance or stick-to-it-ness; rather, it may have been more directly related to life's extenuating circumstances, such as family issues, pregnancy, and/or unanticipated economic shifts. The majority of the students indicate that most of the cohort members still keep in touch via social networks.

Connections between former classmates from Zapata High School that were not cohort members – but whom were friends with HOPE cohort members – did not fare as well as the connection between cohort members themselves. Traditionally, most Zapata High School students do not go to college. Of the students who actually continued on to a post-secondary institution, the majority have attempted a vocational certification or attended the Local Community College; however, a far larger number of their friends simply went into the workforce. When asked about to what degree were HOPE students from DMU were still friends with their former classmates, the consensus was that best friends of the inner circles maintained strong bonds; however, extended friendships quickly disbanded and lost communication. Though social networks help friends remain in contact, the students recognize that their friendships have changed as they have taken different life paths.

The HOPE students at DMU are distinguishable from their friends who are not in college on the basis of three general characteristics: their areas of life focus, their increased levels of discipline, and the preparation they received through their program involvement. In very simplistic terms, HOPE students at DMU and their friends who are not attending college have two different areas of focus in their lives. For instance, in

relation to the students enrolled at DMU, their world must revolve around their education and the completion of their degree. Families of these students support their sacrifice, and if students are employed it tends to be part-time or as an internship. Thus, all means and decisions are directly connected to their end goal of supporting school obligations.

Friends that are not in college, however, are most likely to have either full-time employment or are actively seeking employment because they have more complicated family obligations. Further, these particular individuals may bare an increased responsibility and burden of providing for immediate and/or extended family members. Nonetheless, HOPE students must also assume a complicated, challenging, and ever-shifting list of priorities, and each of their actions requires a consistent, assiduous effort. The consequences for failing to meet programmatic demands and expectations could, ultimately, jeopardize their scholarship funding. For all tense and purpose, it is unfair to crudely compare obligations of college students and those in the workforce, because every HOPE student, in effect, has a “job,” which makes them obligated to their scholarship.

College time requirements necessitate that students understand the importance of planning, preparation, and that they will be held accountable for their academic performance in each class. Non-students will invite DMU students to social events and functions, but a dedicated student attempting to maintain their high academic status will avoid participating in most of the functions; there is simply no option to miss school, or to miss study time. Having to decide between accepting a friend’s invitation or maintain focus in their class expectations may cause a relationship to eventually breakdown and disintegrate. Being that DMU is an intentionally non-traditional campus, most students

are also employed and have less available time to socialize. Students are more likely to be employed part-time or full-time if not participating in an internship; and, these students must be extra focused because as they understand that they have less time to devote their studies.

Nearly all of the participants felt that the program made them more disciplined, mature, responsible and accountable. All of the training and expectations the program has instilled in them since Zapata High School (maintaining high GPAs, maintaining tutorial sessions, participation in social activities, being active and leaders in community service activities) also presented unique opportunities for growth, which the typical Zapata High School student did not experience. The majority of Zapata High School students passed through high school without exerting much effort: they avoided advanced placement courses; they lacked participation community services activities; they did not take part in any workshops; they did not experience any enrichment seminars. With this consideration in mind, it becomes easier to understand why HOPE students are unique from their former high school classmates.

It is also likely that HOPE students are more disciplined than their former classmates who did not participate in the program. Rather than through some kind of innate characteristics, HOPE students had to learn and develop this particular attribute as a skill-set necessary for good standing while at Zapata High School. Thus, HOPE students are not necessarily more gifted than the average student; however, they are more accustomed to doing extra work and taking the more difficult academic road. It stands to reason that a HOPE student at DMU would be more disciplined, focused, dedicated and

responsible – not only to their academic course load, but to their future job and career aspirations as well.

HOPE students have entirely different skill-sets than non-HOPE students might possess. For years, the HOPE student has benefited from workshops, enrichment sessions, extra tutorials, extra mentoring and guidance, fieldtrips, and simple participation in activities intended exclusively for cohort members. Everything that the program provides has a singular end in mind: that each cohort member becomes a self-sustaining student who can transition to college and get his or her degree. It should also be emphasized that through community service project involvement, HOPE instills a greater sense of social awareness in its cohort members. Community service is a vital component of the program, and student participants recognize that they are expected to give back to their local community, and not simply expect government to provide social support. At the end of their community services experiences, students realize understand the crucial importance of “people helping people”, and that the responsibility and power to make a difference lies in their hands.

#### Discussion of Finding for Research Question One for Program Administration

Research Question One: How can the HOPE Program be replicated?

The HOPE program has quantitatively proven that its cohort members successfully enter into four-year college institutions; that cohort members are retained in college; and that they successfully attain their college degrees. Statistically, the program boasts a 76% graduation rate among its cohort members. And, at this time, the program would like to do is expand to be able to assist greater numbers of students. HOPE at

DMU currently has 50 student cohort members, ranging from freshmen to seniors. These 50 students represent only a small portion of the 38,752 total student enrolled at DMU, which consists of 8,641 students who are Latinos. Thus, with specific regard to the Latino population attending DMU, the HOPE student representation is small by comparison. Yet, one still needs to acknowledge the value the program is adding for both the students and the university. Several agencies have communicated with the program coordinators to explore the feasibility of expanding the program, but such an endeavor has yet to become a reality. Dr. Puente is excited about potentially having this opportunity, but he also recognizes that the HOPE model would have to be maintained and adhered to if successful expansion were to occur.

#### Current Model

Thirty students are interviewed and recruited during their junior year in high school at either Zapata High School or at East End Charter school, which also feeds into Zapata High School, and would be followed through their senior year of high school. At this time, if the students choose to attend DMU, they could apply for the program at DMU and receive a four-year scholarship of \$10,000. There are five requirements to apply for membership for the HOPE program at the high school level: work towards a high GPA of 2.7 or better; enroll in Pre-Advanced Placement and Advanced Placement course; complete at least three hours of supervised study hall hours; attend all program sponsored activities and events; and participate in community service projects. Program expectations for the cohort members during high school are for the student should be a junior, have good grades, have strong college aspirations, possess a need financial

assistance for college, have leadership potential, and be willing to sign a contract agreeing to adhere to the requirements of the program. The requirements are not overly demanding, but the program organizers recognize that they must stay firm and consistent with all members. The logic behind attaining and maintain high Grade Point Averages (GPA) is that it helps students become more eligible for scholarships and college admissions with higher GPAs. As far as the justification for their requirement that students be enrolled in Advanced Placements (AP) classes, it is statistically proven that a student who enrolls in AP classes is more likely to perform better in college. Even if the student does not do as well in an AP class, his simple exposure to the advance level of instruction and rigor benefits the students greater than if the student had never taken that type of courses in high school.

The support mechanisms that have significant, long-lasting benefits are the tutorial and study hall requirement. Given that most students in high school have awful study habits, the program counters such trends by creating a structured environment that teaches students how to study, and helps them to receive the additional help needed to be successful in college classes, especially if enrolled in AP classes. However, the program is not exclusively academic focused. The last two requirements are applicable in that they help participants to develop into well-rounded students overall. Furthermore, requiring students to attend program events and functions help them to develop a sense of connection with the other cohort members and the staff; it serves as an outlet and/or escape from schoolwork; and it establishes conditions that allows for the transfer of different skill-sets students will need to succeed in both high school *and* college. The last requirement is two-fold. Firstly, students must participate in community services

activities that will help them to develop their leadership skills. In a practical sense, however, this particular requirement also helps them recognize that the world does not evolve around them, and that it is their generation which will need to leave a lasting legacy for the next generation to follow. Further, students experience a great sense of ownership knowing that their efforts represent a critical part of the history of the Center for Hispanics Engaged in the Learning Process, the program was created as a reaction to Chicanos wanting to address issues within the Latino community. In regard to the second component, students also participate in community services that will help to bolster their resumes for scholarships and college applications.

Of the 30 students recruited in the current program, each candidate must apply and be interviewed prior to program acceptance to establish whether they will be a good candidate. If accepted, the students will begin the program during their 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and continue throughout their senior year. The students will be supported academically through the following methods and strategies: workshops, enrichment sessions, monitored for academics, tutorials, conducts, attendance monitoring to make sure they are performing well in the school. A second form of support will be primarily social in nature, which will take place through individualized forms of mentoring, guidance, counseling, and team building. The students will also receive college-ready support that will include college campus visits, fieldtrips, SAT Workshops and preparation of documentation for their transition. Students' primary objectives during their senior year are as follows: Each student will apply for multiple scholarships, admissions to different universities, the federal financial aid process, and have everything ready for the college transition. Students will also be responsible for applying to the SAT, and attending the

SAT workshops provided by the program. In addition, each student is expected to be admitted to a college prior to their graduation date.

On many occasions, cohort members have been admitted to other tier-one state public universities, for example, Yale, Rice and with Harvard being arguably the most prestigious placement of HOPE graduates. Moreover, cohort members have been admitted to both universities in-state and out-of-state. Many HOPE students have graduated in top 10 percent of their senior class and have the option of going to any state public university in Texas. Given the program's high expectations and requirements, most of the HOPE students have benefited and are eligible for admission to both other Texas Public Universities and out-of-state public universities. However, not every HOPE student that graduates from Zapata HS will transition to DMU. In fact, more than half of these students will tend to stay home. For those students who do not meet the requirements for general admission to the DMU, the HOPE program has established agreements with two open-admission campus, and have financial arrangements with Urban Dream-Maker University, as well as the Local Community College, to help students to enroll in their institutions. And, in these particular cases, the HOPE program still subsidizes their tuition after one to two years; the student may also be eligible to transfer to DMU. Once in the university setting, the second phase of the program then takes precedence for students. More specifically, the requirements for HOPE students at DMU are as follows: students must be enrolled full-time; they must maintain a 2.7 GPA each semester; they must complete mandatory academic tutorials and study hall hours; they must attend skills workshops; they must attend the annual leadership training; they

must attend academic counseling; they must attend monthly meetings; and, finally, they must sign a contract agreeing to abide by the requirements of the program.

The students will be monitored just as they were while at Zapata High School; however, since they are now college students, they will have more overall autonomy and freedom. Students are also given priority registration every semester, helped with admission, financial aid office, and their tutorial requirements take on a critical emphasis. During their first year at DMU, students are expected to attend tutorials and study hall for 34 hours during each semester. HOPE students must submit their study hall document every two weeks in order to verify that they are participating in and fully utilizing the tutorial program. The program provides paid tutors to support students in their course work. The majority of the tutorials are for freshman- and sophomore-level courses. Yet, as they transition, students may not need to have the additional tutoring. Hence, if students are consistently maintaining (or exceeding) a high academic performance, have a high GPA, and are consistently in good standing, they may be required to participate in fewer hours. On the other hand, if they do not improve and/or experiences a significant drop in their grades, students will be required to attend extra tutorials to get help. Students are required to have progress reports signed by their professors to verify their grade status during the mid-year. Many professors are surprised by this particular request, yet they tend to be very supportive of the student's efforts. The above description explains how the program functions to support students from their high school career through to their entry into college. The research question here asks, "How can the program be replicated?" In lieu of the current economic and political climate, I feel that there really are only two options for programmatic expansion at this time.

### Programmatic Expansion: Option A

In addition to both Zapata High School and East End Charter School programs, it may be advantageous to expand the program to include 3 to 5 other schools which serve predominantly Latino populations. It is important to reiterate that the program is not exclusive intended for Latino students. In fact, the program has also served African American and Asian American students. The fact of the matter is that the student demographic of the Houston Independent School District (HISD) is predominantly Latino. Furthermore, Latino students within this district represent the largest populations with the highest dropout rate and lowest academic achievements in high school. Reaching these particular students, therefore, is absolutely critical if educators hope to overturn the negative trend in those schools. Subsequently, if an expanded version of the program recruits 30 students from the five campuses, this would represent 150 students whose lives will be impacted. Yet, in order for that change to occur, Dr. Puente believes that there has to be a 50:1 ratio (i.e., for each 50 students, there has to be one staff member to monitor them). Establishing such a scenario, however, poses a complex and challenging funding issue, especially considering the current program spends \$1,500/student each year during their high school years. Upon graduation from their high schools the members would feed into DMU, Urban DMU, one of several Local Community College cites, or the other State Public Historically Black Universities where a HOPE Program would support them and facilitate the transition and progress through their college degree.

In order to such a model to be successful, DMU must expand to be able to support an increase of students on the college level, and the program currently allocates \$4,100

annually per student. The expansion of high school programs would inevitably translate into a programmatic expansion at the collegiate level as students transition into college. Hence, HOPE will eventually need more money, and CHELP will need increased funds to expand their facilities.

#### Programmatic Expansion: Option B

As another option, the program can be operated exclusively at DMU. For instance, the program would be available for any student who qualifies and wants to apply; but the 50:1 still apply, as well as the program requirements and expectations. The current program allocates \$4,100 annually for each student; thus, the total number of participants would have to take that expense into account in addition to the new staffing requirements. The only way this would be viable is if the facilities were expanded, more resources became available, program organizers hired more staff to fulfill their ongoing commitment. Presently, CHELP maintains a \$5 million dollar fundraising effort; part of their goal is to expand the program either within the high school, or merely at the college level, to help out more students. This is a real consideration that program organizers are keen to pursue. Unfortunately, given the current economic state of public universities and fundraising efforts, initiating this particular effort presents a significant challenge.

#### Discussion of Finding for Research Question Two for Program Administrator

Research Question Two: Is the HOPE Program more effective being a Latino or ethnic focus? Or can the HOPE program be just as effective if it was opened to all ethnic groups?

Since this program is operated through cHELP, there is a common assumption that their services are offered solely for Latino students. It is important to clarify, however, that the program is not exclusive any single student demographic, from any single ethnic group. For example, in addition to the Latino students served, the program has also served Asian American and African American students. For some in the Latino community, if we are trying to address the Latino dropout rate, Latino retention and graduation rates on the college level, then Latino students need to be the focus of the program. All of the students in the program believe that the program should continue to be open to all ethnic groups as long as they adhere to the program requirements and want to be in the program. This program can truly help any and all students, regardless of their individual ethnicity or race. This program has helped numerous students who, in reality, would not have likely been successful in graduating from high school, much less finishing college, had it not been specifically for the program.

The primary contributing factors related to why most students members are Latinos is that program recruits are drawn exclusively from Zapata High school. This school is located in the southeastern part of the city, and the demographics of the school, more importantly, are predominantly Latino. More specifically, this particular ethnic group represents 95-98% of the school's population. Thus, by default, there are unavoidably going to be more Latino students in the program. The program's student focus is not intended to discriminate against of their races and/or ethnicities; rather, this is merely the population pool represented within the school from with recruits are drawn.

## Implications for Practice

Part of the Executive Educational Doctorate (EED) program focus is to create educators and administrators who can effectively delve into the practical applications of their field. A program that merely generates theoretical and/or quantitative research, or one that is based on scholarly theory alone, runs counter to this program. Rather, program directors Dr. Steven Busch and Dr. Angus MacNeil at the University of Houston aligned with the Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate hold the belief that practitioners should utilize research findings (i.e., the theoretical base) as a guide that will help them make a greater impact within their daily work. The program promotes the research topics to be utilized once the thesis has been completed: whether the final result may be applicable to the classroom, program evaluation, or to add to the research literature. As a result of my research, I feel that this paper will add to many subtopics in the literature dealing with Latino student issues such as: decreasing the dropout rate, increasing academic achievement, increasing SAT scores, mentoring and monitoring for student success, increasing college enrollment and increasing college graduation.

In alignment with the researcher's topic, the Executive Educational Doctorate program also examines the various complex issues facing Latinos in the world of education. Latinos have among the highest dropout rates, among the lowest academic achievement, lowest high school graduation rates, lowest SAT scores, lowest college admission and graduation rates. The reasons that contribute to negative Latino standings are multifaceted and complex: economic struggles, social issues and stigmas, and that the majority of their students attend low performing schools that do not adequately prepare them to be able to transition into the college level. In terms of the economic reasons,

such as dropping out of high school to help pay and contribute to the family living expenses, Latino students may assume significant paternal leadership in their homes. In addition, they may be dealing with their own (or a partner's) pregnancy; they may be involved with gangs; and/or they may be involved in other criminal activities. Further, the aforementioned reasons are usually linked – for better or worse – to involvement with their families or loved ones, rather than their own selfish intentions. Nonetheless, some Latinos put education in the back seat.

Many Latinos also experience significant language barriers, which contributes to students' inability to be successful in schools and classrooms. In fact, 47% of all Latinos in Houston are foreign-born. And, in addition to experiencing language issues, they are more likely to be older than the average school-aged student entering public school in America. Rather than starting their school career at an academically appropriate grade level, a foreign-born student who migrates into the United States is usually one or two years chronologically behind his or her classmates. Therefore, students' academic and intellectual capacities are inevitably delayed simply due to experienced language acquisition barriers. An earlier study participant, Juan, illustrates a salient example of the struggles a student faces when entering into the U.S. school system after arriving from Mexico. For instance, a student may be 13 years old and, instead of being placed in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, he is forced to start the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Unfortunately, even though such students are often placed at a lower grade level, these students are still more likely to fail their first year within the U.S. school system. In Juan's case, in the following fall semester, he will be 14 years old and will be placed in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade again. Hence, he is now two years older than his classmates and is more likely to cause behavioral problems to compensate

for his feelings of inferiority, or to counter the possibility of being made fun of due to his lack of language ability. Juan is statistically likely to be a dropout by the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Another significant obstacle some Latinos must face, which contributes directly to high dropout rates and low college attendance among Latino students, has to do with the fact that there are a high percentage of students enrolling in the public schools without legal documentation. All students are required to be in compulsory education; thus, the undocumented students have the opportunity to a free education. However, issues begin to arise during their senior year of high school as they do not qualify for most scholarships, or in-state college tuition. Given their undocumented status, many of these students are not even seeking a post-secondary degree; they are more concerned with trying to be employed – even though it is illegal to work while being undocumented. These are some of the variables that make it difficult for many Latinos to consider life after high school or the possibly seeking a post-secondary career. This last variable (i.e., why many Latinos dropout and do not achieve in schools) is sometimes more related to the individual quality of the schools in which they are enrolled, rather than issues associated with their home environments.

It is the researcher's intention to use this research to examine the specific types of implications for research and practice. More specifically, there are three areas one can focus on in regard to areas of publication. The first area is in secondary schools, which takes into account middle school and high schools. It is within students' middle and high school years where they most need experiences that will shape and mold their notions and ideas about college. One of the central objectives of high school is to determine a student's path after they have finished (e.g. enter the workforce, get a certificate from a

vocational trade school, get an associate's degree from a community college, get a degree from a universities, or start a career in the military [experience gained which could eventually lead to college or a career]). This study attempts to provide a guide – or at least an idea – for additional research opportunities that might be applied in the educational field. It is my hope that this research contributes to the literature in helping find possible solutions that will help combat the high dropout rate, and low academic achievements of Latino students at the high school level, as well as the low college degree attainment among Latinos. There are three levels of implication within Chapter Five: Implications for secondary schools, implications for colleges and universities, and implications for pre-college programs.

#### Implications for Secondary Schools

For Latino students, schools need to have banners and flags posted on the walls which communicate messages “stories to live by” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999) about college, or a signs stating imperatives students to attend college, especially for buildings serving significant proportions of Latino students. Unfortunately, most Latino students view such décor as mere decoration void of any real substance or meaning to their personal lives. For many Latinos, Ohio State, Michigan, and Florida State flags and pennants mean nothing. These school artifacts are merely pretty flags with pretty logos. Yet, at a deeper cognitive level, the real issue at hand here is that Latino students cannot connect these messages to anything they know or can associate with. For a campus to truly embrace a college-culture there has to be a systematic, uniform, and a focused attempt on the part of the whole school to create personal meaning out of such abstractions. When students start high school, they really need to have been exposed to

what college is, and truly understand that it is an option for them. Most school districts are pushing to have their campuses embrace a college-going culture. However, such advocacy involves more than simply posting college banners and wearing college t-shirts. Creating a college-focused campus culture involves ensuring that students are hearing and understanding what going to college is all about, giving them examples of why college attendance is important, and demonstrating that going to college is an attainable dream. Students, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, clerks, custodial staff, cafeteria staff and even the campus security must be on board.

*College culture campus.* Regardless of the readers' perspective on whether all students should strive for [or are capable of] going to college, it is the researcher's stance that educators should prepare every student for the likelihood of going to college. The researcher understands and concedes that not all students can, wants to, or necessarily needs to go to college. However, if the United States of America is going to be able to compete in a competitive global market, it needs to ensure that there are enough highly-qualified, highly-trained, highly-educated individuals entering the workforce. With this consideration in mind, Latinos are going to serve as the most likely population to help ensure that the United States will keep majority of the future industries within its borders, and not have to outsource such jobs overseas. Furthermore, individuals seeking a prosperous future without a college degree will find it difficult to do so.

Therefore, it is imperative that administrators, teachers, and practitioners make genuine, innovative and creative efforts to help each and every student to have the choice and the opportunity to attend college. Otherwise, there will be significant implications for both the student and the nation as a whole. Unfortunately, for most Latino students,

the option of college attendance is being taken away, limited, discouraged, or simply not offered. Thus, educators need to ensure that all students – whether they are the most advanced, regular, English as Second Language, or Special Education student – are receiving an engaging, rigorous, and high-quality curriculum. Furthermore, all students should also be receiving a course load that will help them transition out of high school and into post-secondary studies, whether that be a vocational trade school, community college or university. At the very least, educators need to ensure that every student attains the option to go to college, especially considering that Latinos have had a tradition of being denied that opportunity. Thus, with these considerations at the forefront of one's mind, having banners and college signs are only important if they create meaning in students' daily lives, and when they allow students to make concrete associations related to their future successes at college.

*Teachers.* As a former secondary teacher, the researcher contends that one of the most influential factors that can steer a student toward success in college, career, or sports is his or her classroom teacher. Regrettably, the same classroom teacher may either help them graduate, or reinforce and contribute to a student's negative self-esteem of himself or herself. It is the classroom teacher that needs to be invested in the lives of all of the students, not just in the lives of those poised for college success. There are countless stories of individuals who trace their decision to go to college – or their decision to dropout – to a single teacher. One theme that is evident in the cohort member's stories was that teachers were a critical factor in their overall development. Given my experience as a secondary teacher, it would always bother me when students would tell me that particular teachers had said, "You are going to be a dropout," or "you're not

going to amount to anything,” or “you are going to be a criminal and be in prison soon.” Such displays of ignorance are part of the reason why I have worked so hard to help change the minds of my former students. My central goal in this regard was to positively influence Latinos students, and so negative opinion would not become a self-fulfilling prophesy. Negative statements toward students only serve to reinforce a lowered sense of self-esteem; subsequently, the students will be more likely act out negatively as a corollary. Throughout my own teaching career, I truly vested my energy, love, and dedication to ensure that each child would feel as though they could excel in my classroom, and to feel as though that they could excel in life as well. I did not have special training on how to connect with these students, only a natural ability, I suppose. Given that my teaching position at Zapata High School, and the fact that I was an Alumnus of that very school, my experiences served as a significant example for my pupils, especially considering that I did not have great teachers that pushed me or supported me. I would often tell them that I wanted to become a teacher because I knew I could do a better job than they did with me. For this very reason, I decided to become an administrator, because I quickly realized that I could have great and successful impact with all of my students, but I could not help them once they left my class.

As an administrator, exercising the ability to impact the learning, welfare, and success of each child has constantly motivated me, and made me feel as though I have made a positive impact in the lives of many students. The Texas Education Code (TEC) describes professional communication as how and what a teacher says to parents, teachers, community members, and other staff personnel. For instance, if it is discovered that a teacher has expressed negative sentiments about a child (out of frustrations

connected to a child's behavior, regarding his or her potential or future, or otherwise), it is my duty as an administrator to engage in the difficult, yet necessary conversations which communicate that such actions are not acceptable. It is high time that teachers understand that they need to stop saying hurtful and debilitating comments; instead, they need to use empowering language and comments which add true value to the lives of their pupils. Successful adults, athletes, and stars have specific teachers whom they have connected with in a way that changed their lives. It does not take much for a teacher to tell a student that "you can be successful," or that "there is something special in you," or that "you have the potential to do great things in life," or "you can be the first in your family not only to graduate from high school but also go to college." In fact, when repeatedly heard, such empowering language becomes contagious in that students subsequently adopt their own positive language in regard to their efficacy. It does not take much to make a student smile; all they need is to have someone to believe in them. When a teacher believes in them and genuinely cares for them, students will be more willing to take chances they might not have attempted otherwise.

During my time as a classroom teacher, I would challenge all students to work, to read constantly, and to respect both themselves and others. I would often say, "I am going to pump you up so much that when I bleed you will still be able to survive!" As a child growing up, one thing that especially terrified me was reading aloud in classes. I would turn red, my blood rush up into my head, my throat would close up, my eyes would get blurry, and I felt as though I was about to drop dead right there in my chair. As a teacher, I recognized the value of engaging my students in literacy building activities. For example, my expectations for students were clear: everyone had to take a

turn reading a paragraph, and it was not acceptable to laugh or make fun of anyone while reading. Another critical component to my success in applying these expectations lied in students' understanding that I was working too hard to help all of my students, and if one student were to shut down or refuses to work because they felt embarrassed, I would be extremely upset. My specific procedure was to move to each student one-by-one, walk or kneel in front of them, and guided them if they needed help or had difficulty pronouncing specific words. Eventually, the entire class – even my most difficult students who had formidable issues with the English language – would read a portion of text. These students could also be between two or three years below reading grade level, or students who have always hated school; yet, each and every student would read for me. I would ensure that they felt protected from ridicule, that they knew they could trust me, and they would try for me because they trusted me. Even in spite of failing nearly every one of their other classes, some of my most difficult students would make “As” in my class. For example, on one occasion mid-way through the school year, one student told me, “Mr. Alvarez, thank you for all you have done for me. I’ve taken this class for the third year and this is the first time that I can say that I have learned something.” Regretfully, he and his family eventually moved away and I was never able to follow-up with regard to what ever happened to him. And, most unfortunately, most of his teachers had written him off and casted him as a lost cause. It was clear that this particular young man was very “rough around the edges” and probably might have made it difficult for most teachers to try to teach him; nonetheless, under no circumstances did he deserve to be relegated as a lost cause. Teachers do not have the right to determine any student’s future or fate. As educators, our job and our calling should be to prepare each child to the fullest degree of

our abilities to go to the next level, not to assign a criminal inmate number, or a toe-tag headed to the mortuary. Thus, it is imperative that teachers establish high expectations for their struggling students as well as for their high achieving students.

Many Advanced Placement course teachers make the honest mistake of not challenging their high achieving students. As illustrated in the present study, most cohort student indicated that the AP courses at Zapata High School were a not of the rigor of other high school campuses in the city, nation or country. I would venture to say that in many schools where the dominant population is Latino, that same criticism will most likely be replicated. Either the cohort members would say that the course was so easy that they could just coast through the class. This indicates is that the teachers of these individual courses did not care about the students enough to challenge them and make them work harder. However, students also describe how teachers would stay with them for tutoring sessions after school and provide them with extra help, which demonstrates the positive effects teachers can have when dedicated to their students' success. When not exposed to the appropriate rigor and expectations, having participated in an AP class will not help them to transition to college. Thus, teachers need to utilize the techniques learn during the AP training sessions, and look for opportunities to challenge their students academically.

AP students are not working as hard as they need to be working. In fact, in many cases, teachers feel it unnecessary to challenge the "smarter" students or those students who might be best described the "hard worker." In some cases, if teachers do not push them, or hold them to lower academic expectations, students may enter college with a false sense of accomplishment or be ill-prepared to reach their highest academic

potential. It is critical to ensure that they are working, learning, and mastering the materials because simply being in an AP class is not the solution. Lastly, teachers need to ensure they are communicating expectations that can be understood by the student. Within this notion of high standards, teachers should also communicate that students are expected to meet the established high expectations; not to satisfy their teacher's ego, but rather to avoid undue shock and stress they could experience as they leave their homes and families for college.

After the senior class graduation in 1993, I and my fellow cohort members, who included the valedictorian and most of those in the top 25%, made the important transition to college. During our first semester on campus, however, nearly the entire group that started at DMU was required to participate in remediation classes, which included Fundamentals of English and Fundamentals of Math! I remember looking at the class and saying, "That's crazy, we used to be smart!" During my senior high school year, like many of my cohort members who graduated in the top 25%, most of the students were enrolled in at least one-to-two Honors classes! It was difficult not to feel angry, and as though I had been cheated during my high school years. For example, during my Honors English course students were slated to read four or five novels throughout the year, yet we never finished one of them and would instead simply watch the movie version. If my teachers really cared about us, they would have forced us to work harder knowing that we were going to college. Regretfully, teachers are often times limited in what they can teach. However, there are creative ways within a given curriculum for teachers to increase rigor and relevance to ensure that each student is maximizing their learning potential.

The teacher's role is more than simply distributing information, implementing program and hoping that students pass their tests. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig & Ross, 2008) Their primary role includes developing, nurturing, encouraging and challenging students to perform to the best of their ability-that is; they work alongside students as curriculum makers. (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992; Craig 2009a, 2009b) I have met countless students that indicated their teachers have told them that they were stupid, useless, and that they would never amount to anything. Regardless of how many times similar stories were told, my heart would always break. I have made it my mission to reach those students to ensure they left my classes stronger than when they first entered. Not every student that walks into the high school classroom can predict whether he or she will go to college, but it is each teacher's responsibility to build students' confidence nonetheless. Furthermore, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that students have the skills necessary if student wish to pursue the college dream. Teachers need to learn to stop being prejudiced towards students whom they feel are not "college-material". Moreover, teachers also need to use creativity and flexibility in their pedagogical strategies to ensure that advance students are being challenged to their full potential. What an embarrassment for our nation's educational system when students who are enrolled in the "most difficult" Advanced Placement courses while remaining ill-prepared for college success!

*Counselors.* The traditional role of the counselor has shifted in today's American high schools. It used to be that a counselor was there to help the students' schedules, counsel with personal or family issues, but also to help guide students determining their options for the future. Recently, however, the trend has been to either eliminate the

counselor's position entirely, or assign the counselor as the testing coordinator. In fact, there are very few counselors who actually provide genuine counseling services or career guidance for students directly. The counselor's job is not easy because there are many more students that want to go to college who have no one with experience to turn to. Thus, counselors need to be able to guide students to careers and college.

During my senior year at Zapata High School, I can remember meeting with my counselor. At the time she knew a lot of information about me: I was going to go to college, I was an average student, I was enrolled in Honors English and Honors Government and Economics, I was the senior class officer, I was President of the Photography club, former school band officer, AJ ROTC cadet, I was a member of the school Morning Announcement Team, on the yearbook, and on the school newspaper. And, when she inquired about my plans following high school, I knew I had the best answer: I was 100% sure that I wanted to study Radio Television so I could one day be a reporter or a news anchor! Her response to my declaration is still vivid to this day. She replied, "Well, maybe you need to have a back-up plan, maybe you could be the guy behind the camera?" I was devastated, angry and determined to prove her wrong! How many Latino students out there who have actually listened and believed what a person in authority told them they could not be what they really wanted to be in life? Many Latino students unfortunately experience similar scenarios. And, although some students may have aspirations to "reach for the stars" in life, such high dreams are often not supported, reinforced or encouraged within our nation's schools and classrooms.

Three things are needed to ensure that counselors actually have adequate time to fulfill their obligations of preparing students to make the transition from high school to

college. First, administrators should help to ensure that students have access to counseling social services. Second, school leaders and administrators must enact measures and processes to ensure that counselors are sensitive to the students they serve. Rather than squashing students' dreams, sensitive and supportive counselors should encourage students by providing a game plan, but also offering concrete, supportive statement such as, "You will need to do the following things to ensure you can reach your dreams." Third, counselors should be given the opportunity to invite guest speakers to their campuses to expose Latino students to real-life role-models who have achieved success.

*School curriculum.* If educators' expectation is for students to go to college, that option needs to be made available to a wider range of students, rather than just those students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. Obviously, students enrolled in AP courses are more often than not prepared to pursue college, but it should not be a death sentence if they are not – all students need to be directed to college. Unfortunately, there are many Latino students enrolled in AP students who have no intention of actually attending college. This is a complete shame considering these students are taking more difficult courses and preparing for college, yet they have more obstacles which prevent them.

Schools need to ensure that the students they serve are leaving their institutions properly prepared for college success. Recently, since this was the last year of the administration of the Texas Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (TAKS), the Houston ISD incorporated the use of the State of Texas Assessment of Academic Readiness test (STAAR) assessment and the College Board Curriculum as its predominant focus.

Therefore, the emphasis of the courses, state assessments, and school curricula also need to shift in order to ensure that all students will be prepared to rise to the expectations maintained at the collegiate level.

*College access.* School's notions of communicating a college-centered culture must entail more than simple "college days," or encouraging students to wear the t-shirt or sweater of their favorite college – as though these ceremonial gestures might will students into accepting college as a viable option in life. If schools hope to communicate a common notion of the authentic college experience, students must be exposed to full-fledged campus visits; they must actually walk the campus ground and venture into classrooms; and they must explore a campus's student lounges. In essence, they must gain their own firsthand experiences as to what life on a college campus is about.

Participating in career days and taking part in field trips to college campuses makes the idea of going to college more real for high school students. For instance, KIPP and Yes Prep Charter schools, conduct university campus as outside visits beginning in the students' sixth grade. The traditional school districts usually support taking only certain students to possible 3-4 universities if lucky. By the time the students reach their senior year, each has visited over ten campuses both in and out of the state. Thus, the campus also needs to ensure that students are getting the proper assistance in filling out their various college admission forms, scholarship applications, and with their federal financial aid process. It is not enough simply direct students to a "college scholarship information" binder in the counselor's office. This communicates a sad message to students: If you have time and if you know what you are doing, you can stop by the counselor's office and do everything by yourself. Many resources binders will simply

collect dust! In addition, educators must establish a focus that institutes a quality SAT program for seniors so they will be able to have the preparation needed to be able to achieve and maintain higher test performances.

*Tutorials, enrichment and development.* The campus needs to ensure that every student receives an effective intervention plan that focuses on their individualized needs. Unfortunately, there is a singular trend common within American schools: too many students are failing or underperforming. Student dropouts do not leave school on a whim. These students typically display multiple warning signs that require immediate intervention. For instance, these students' grades may drop significantly; they may begin failing classes; they could also experience becoming truant for extended periods of time, which eventually translates to their complete absence from school. Sometimes these students may feel that no one would miss them, or if they come to the realization that there is no way to catch up on class assignments and tasks, the student will often stop coming to school at all. Most students "dropout" long before exiting the schoolhouse permanently; they feel that they were never really part of the school. Enrichment and developmental seminars for the students are important because they provide students with extra tools to store in their toolbox.

Attending SAT workshops as a component of normal school practice is important for a number of reasons. These activities teach students how to adequately manage their stress, develop study skills techniques, and help the student cope with academic adjustment associated with their transition from high school to college. Enrichment and workshops can also be conducted during Saturday sessions, advising sessions, homeroom classes, or afterschool.

Tutorials must be included as a part of any school's normal system, and they must function to monitor all students adequately. If a student is failing, and it is up to the teacher's initiative to suggest to the failing student to stop by if they want any assistance, then that student will most likely not get the help he needs. Sadly, if a student is given the opportunity to fail, he/she will take it, after all it's the least path of resistance. Another option for schools is to adopt a tutorial room somewhere in the school (or in the library) where students can go to receive additional support and assistance when needed. These services should also be available not only during normal school hours; they should also be open before school, after school, and on Saturdays. If they are to be successful, these tutorial activities cannot be optional; they must be mandatory for all students who are failing. If failing students are to be held accountable, schools must also encourage and institute a system that includes support from both teachers and parents. Finally, students would be given opportunities to come to the mandatory tutorial sessions to support and encourage their fellow students to do well.

*Connecting parents to college culture.* This is one of the most difficult and most critical components that tends to be neglected or rarely tapped into to its full potential. Parents need to be a driving force in their child's success. Once a student enters his or her high school years, parents tend to be less active and engaged in the process as compared to their years at the elementary level. Nonetheless, parents have to acknowledge that their son or daughter has the opportunity to go to college. Parents also need to be informed as to the obstacles their child will inevitably face, such as finance issue that must be overcome, and the legal documentation issues that represent a significant bane to college entry and attendance.

Parents need to believe that their child not only has the capacity to go to college, but that their decision is in the best interest of the family to ensure that their child prepares themselves for a better future. Unfortunately, many Latino parents come from a tradition where their grandparents started working at a young age, their parents started working at young ages, and where they have worked since they were equally as young. Therefore – in their minds and experience – it is only natural to expect that their child (or children) should begin full-time work at least once they turn 18 and finish high school. The Latino culture truly values the work ethic of their people; they want to make sure that they are contributing to the whole family, even at the cost of one's happiness or individual freedoms. It is considered being selfish if, instead of working and contributing to the family's economic health, the student wishes to leave from the house, go to college and not contribute by getting a job. Historically, Latinos have developed a self-worth based on their ability to work and provide for the family.

As indicated in a Pew Hispanic Center survey (2009), 75% of Latinos that have left school or discontinued their education did so due directly to family obligations. Whether their reasons are the result of economic issues, pregnancy, marriage, medical issues, or just to avoid conflicts with the family, Latinos are among the very few ethnic groups that actually appear to have to stay tethered to their nuclear families and are expected to sacrifice their own dreams for the sake of the family. Among the Non-Latino and African-Americans, it is an expectation that the child moves out of their house at the age of 18 and starts their own lives, sometimes as far from their family as humanly possible. It is common that when a Latino son or daughter leaves home they tend to do so later in life, and they usually live within close proximity of other family members.

Many Latinos live in environments where the family survives paycheck-to-paycheck; not all live in government housing, but many are living in multi-family houses or apartment; and family members often have multiple jobs. Life itself is a struggle of survival for many these families. Latino parents are more likely not to have finished high school because they have been forced to sacrifice for their family when it was their turn. The important challenge for educators will communicating with parents to ensure them that it will be okay for their son or daughter to continue with college, as they will be able to secure a better-paying job with more security and benefits, and that their children's efforts will eventually benefit the whole family. Latino parents undoubtedly love and support their children; yet, educators' challenge lies in how to change parents' mentality from "work now" to "go to school, get a career and then support the family". That is the underlying historical and culturally-based struggle related to serving Latino families and their children. The struggle is contributing for the family now for the short term, or developing self and going to school to help the family in the long term.

#### Implications for Colleges and Universities

Colleges and Universities need to ensure they are recruiting heavily among the Latino populations. More specifically, these institutions must acknowledge the inherent differences of the students they serve, especially with respect to their individual ethnicities. Not all students enrolled are traditional students, and DMU tends to have older students from non-traditional populations. Therefore, the DMU campus needs to acknowledge and account for such student differences because they contribute directly to the overall campus culture. Campus leaders and administrators should provide more opportunities for Latino students to socialize and network with other Latinos and non-

Latinos. In short, the students need to feel as though they are an important part of the school, rather than simple commuters.

*Professors.* A very large percentage of undergraduate students enrolling to colleges are not as proficient as they need to be academically prepared. This concern is evident among all ethnic groups, but it is of particular importance among Latino students. Whether or not students in high school are taking part in AP courses, students may not necessarily be as college-ready since most Texas schools are more interested in preparing students to be able to pass their state assessment tests rather than preparing them with the skills necessary for college. Professors need to acknowledge that there are more students that need the extra support, and help struggling students to receive access to various campus resources, such as writing labs, tutorials, and TA access for extra assistance.

*College admission advisors.* In an effort to recruit more Latinos into the university, advisors need to make sure they communicate with the department advisor in order to share information about which students will need additional support. Hence, they will be an important connector responsible for ensuring that Latino students are receiving the extra support needed to become college-ready. Not many of these students possessed the development, nor had they acquired the necessary skill-set typically learned by traditional students from either their school or their parents. Taking this common trend into consideration, admissions advisors should assist the students during their transition to help them find or access programs best suited to their needs.

*College academic advisors.* Communicating with the students who are struggling, and who are at risk of dropping out of college, entails helping them to connect to tutors, academic labs, computer labs, and counseling to support their stay in college.

The reasons why some students do not return after their first year of college is not so much related to academic performance; rather, such reasons are more closely associated with the fact that students did not feel a strong connection to the university itself. If students are to find a way to connect to the college, and to feel as though they are valued and a part of the campus, the college advisor must connect students with the necessary mentors or agencies.

*Enrichment/Developmental programs.* A summer bridge program is an excellent idea for helping Latino students with the transition from high school to college. In many universities, the summer bridge program is a requirement for admission. The idea is that the student will take courses but, more than anything, he or she will be able to learn how to be a college student. Through such programs students will learn more about study habits, how to access necessary services, how to deal with stress and test anxiety management techniques, and simply allowing them extra support prior to commencement of their fall semester. I am not indicating that *all* Latino students should be required to attend simply because they are Latinos. However, all students who were admitted to the university with a conditional status, those students should be required to attend a week-long session on campus, this exposure will help each participant considerably.

At many universities, students are sometimes placed into class to help them learn the necessary study skills, as well as the stress and time management skills they will need throughout their college experience. Although students do not receive academic credit for these courses, they would inevitably translate into beneficial gains in the long run.

*College access sensitivity/awareness.* This is an issue for the advisors, admission and professors. Therefore, it is essential that these individuals be aware that not all

Latinos are ready for the transition into college. With Latino students, educators need to ensure that the university and its personnel understand that, in addition to the deficiencies that a student may have, many may also be dealing with the added issue of not being a documented student with legal status. The majority of Latinos may have to be dependent with regard to their financial aid, and may need access to student services. The college needs to make sure that they have interventions for their students so that their students do not become dropouts.

*Connecting parents to college culture.* Most universities have homecoming events where parents are invited to visit the campus and experience events with their children. Universities also need to have different social events where parents are welcomed to visit the campus. Such events should warmly welcome Latino parents coming onto campus; allow them to observe what their children see daily; look at the individual campus classrooms, the student dorms, libraries; and experiencing what campus life is like will give parents more of a perspective to be able to further support their children. Yet, when dealing with Latino parents, the university should take language accommodations into consideration in order to allow parents to feel more comfortable and welcomed.

#### Implications for Pre-College Programs

This area focuses on elements similar for programs like Upward Bound, which helps student in high school to attend college. The central idea here is to consider how HOPE operates their program, and for them to consider emulating the HOPE program model.

*Recruitment of students for the program.* Students in college-preparatory programs need to apply to the program to see if the student would make a good candidate. Random selection of students into the program might not be the best option, especially considering the program must demonstrate accountability. Nonetheless, the candidate must be not only willing to demonstrate a need, but he or she should display a strong desire to attend college.

*Program requirements to ensure student success (The HOPE model).* The HOPE program model requires that students participate in tutorials. The students must also be tracked through attendance and academic progress monitoring methods. The program also must ensure that students maintain at least a 2.5 GPA; that they have enrolled in AP classes; and that they participate in field trips, outings and program-related events. Having a program will support the student by helping them earn their right to be in the program. The student must work to be a dedicated cohort member; thus, by forcing the student to take more accountability, the student will develop the discipline and focus to help transition into college.

*Preparation of students for transition.* Another implication for pre-college programs is that there has to be a connection to cohort members, especially throughout their transition to college. If programs fail to provide students with the necessary support and services after they have worked so hard to lead them toward college attainment, program organizers would be setting students up for failure. The program must help the students apply for college admission, federal financial aid, scholarships, and even the SAT test registration, so that, upon completion, they will be able to transition.

Otherwise, students would be left at the train depot with luggage in hands but no boarding pass for their journey.

*Recruitment of staff.* In the twenty plus years of the HOPE program's existence, there have only been four program coordinators who have worked to develop, shape, and modify the program into its current form. Consistency is very vital in the program, because having the same coordinators in the program helps the students feel more confident. Those in these positions have to be individuals who are committed to the success of each student. Their involvement cannot simply be on a transitional post basis, or involve individuals in place until they find someone better or more qualified. This position must be staffed with a very committed person, which poses a formidable challenge in regard to staffing. The key requirement here is for candidates understand that the program expects and demands a unique, non-negotiable type of commitment.

*Building connections between schools and universities.* When the program is not housed on the high school campus, there needs to be an even stronger relationship between the campus and program organizers. This critical relationship needs to be established in order to ensure that the coordinator has access to the student records. The students feel special and are thankful that their coordinator is following up and ensuring that they are working hard. These follow-ups are more than mere procedure; they constitute the coordinator's commitment to fulfill their part of their agreement with students.

## Researcher Reflections

What did I personally learn from examining the literature, conducting the focus groups with the cohort members, interviewing the program director, and looking at the student archives? There are a number of the true advantages that I, as the researcher, had on this study. Firstly, I am a former member and alumnus of the program being studied. Thus, I had first-hand account of what the students had to experience, all be it during different years. This particular benefit allowed me to gain insight with respect to experiences students lived and what they went through while at Zapata High School and at Dream-Maker University. Secondly, since I am an alumnus and former student, I was able to fully use my relationships and connections with the Director Dr. Puente, and the Program coordinator, Mrs. Socorro. Through my interaction with these two individuals, I was able to gain access to archival materials and inquiries to get additional information. As a former student, I had the personal access and formal support of the program to have such access. Thirdly, I realized that while many changes have occurred since my time at Zapata High School, many of the negative characteristics and trends associated Latino students have continued to persist.

## What Researcher Learned as a Product of Zapata High School

This project taught me that the Latino student's plight has not undergone much change over the past few decades. For instance, as products of Zapata High school, both my 1993 cohort and the 2007 cohorts finished from Zapata High School with almost identical school demographics, came from similar housing, and experienced similar family issues. Our environments were essentially the same for the most part. Currently,

there are more African Americans at Zapata than my time as a student, but still only by 1-2%.

In sum, what I learned was that for as much things change, things do not change. We had very similar responses from the two cohorts, especially in the areas of themes. Zapata High school did not prepare their students for college. This is a startling finding considering the 2007 cohort took mostly Advanced Placement courses throughout their high school careers. Further, given students expressed collective disappointment with their AP courses, such sentiment says a great deal about their school's programs. When I graduated in 1993, I had only taken a grand total of three advance classes. In 1993, I felt that Zapata HS did a relatively decent job at preparing students up until their graduation. Yet, my opinion quickly changed after entering college and having to participate in remedial courses to account for a lack of preparation during my high school years. Other HOPE members, including the 1993 Valedictorian and several of the top 25% graduating seniors, also had to take remedial courses upon entering DMU. I was especially embarrassed given that the best of Zapata HS were admitted to DMU – most on conditional status, yet nearly everyone had to take Fundamentals of Mathematics and Fundamentals of English. This provides a clear picture of how well Zapata HS had prepared their students.

In 2007, the majority of the students did not have to take fundamental remedial courses. Yet, despite having participated in AP classes throughout their high school years, they needed extra help and were ill-prepared – an issue the program has known about until this point. The program has also had to institute additional workshops and enrichment seminars. The requirements of students are to take advanced courses, to

undergo academic monitoring, and tutorial participation. It is not so much that students from Zapata HS are inferior; rather, the preparation provided by the school is not effective in allowing its students to transition to the college level.

### The HOPE Program Evolution at Zapata High School

My particular cohort group started Zapata HS in 1989 and ended in 1993; the program was then a pilot program. At the time, the program was making constant adjustments, finding out what which strategies and methods worked best, and there was a great deal of trial and, unfortunately, error inherent at its inception. The program wanted to express great hope for the students at that time; however, their idealized reality did not work out as program organizers had hoped. There were several elements that the program had to change from their 1989 model, which had been modified and adjusted by the time cohort members started in 2005. The 2005-2007 cohort marked the 5<sup>th</sup> cohort since the beginning of the program, and organizers had learned to adjust and modify to help strengthen the program considerably. The aforementioned changes were, indeed, a necessary part of the program's evolution of the years – surely another reason for its great success today.

*Evolution one.* The first evolutionary change of the program was the selection process for the program members. In 1993, the cHELP wanted to start the HOPE Program and, with the cooperation of the middle school, they gathered input in the selection process of potential members. Dr. Puente wanted to have a list of 100 students to participate, and the list was modified by the principal, counselor and teachers. What the program received was a true motley crew consisting of advanced students, ESL, Special Education, Regular Education and students with behavioral issues. In total, 88

students accepted the offer to become members of the program. The true spectrum at the middle school was represented.

The way the program runs now is that the admission process now incorporates an interview process. This restricts what type of student is being selected; hence, the selection process is more focused. In the pilot program, a student that was statistically not likely to graduate from high school was admitted to the program. Now the student is more likely to be more successful based on the interview process and course enrollment. Program organizers want to know what the student wants to do after their post-secondary experience, and they want to see if the student has leadership potential as well. The program requires lots of community services activities but also they want to see if the student takes the lead and wants to be better in life for themselves and their family. Now the pool requires students to have to be enrolled in advanced placement courses, which was different from the pilot program. The program wanted the students to be on a College-Track; unfortunately, for the students, Zapata HS did not have as many AP classes as they do have now.

The district focus was different from what it is now. In the 1990s, school districts encouraged Latinos to go to the vocational trade routes. Zapata HS had one of the best cosmetology and mechanics programs. In the 1980s and the 1990s, a student could easily choose to be in the trade courses because they were more comfortable because of the school and district vision. In 2005, the districts and schools changed their perspective and it no longer wanted to focus on giving students trade school options, going as far as eliminating the cosmetology and auto mechanic programs completely. Those options were no longer available, and the district and school wanted to focus more on having

every student in greater alignment with a college track, and the program had to adjust. The majority of the students from the pilot program had an average of one to two advanced classes; as compared to the 2007 senior cohort where most of the students were averaging 3-4 advanced courses.

*Evolution two.* The second evolution of the program relates to strengthening of the tutorial requirement. The pilot program's notion of tutorials involved students being picked up from Zapata High School in a private school bus and dropped off at the Center for Hispanics Engaged in the Learning Process offices at Dream-Maker University. The reason why that model did not work was very evident after the first couple of times. Firstly, the tutorials only occurred once a week, the bus would not be as reliable; we could not adjust for which students came; we could not adjust to match up enough tutors for the subjects which the students needed help in; thus, there were not enough math and science tutors, and some students did not get any help. Most students went for the social experience, but did not benefit from the tutorials – partly due to the maturity of the students. Some students had not developed a maturity level to be committed to going to college. Eventually, tutorials changed from bringing students directly to DMU. The tutorials are now held at Zapata High School. There is an actual room for the students to come after school, and until 6pm Monday through Friday. Students now have a dedicated room and it facilitates to monitor their progress and ensure that students always have a tutor to help them. This change represents a huge shift from a once a week tutoring session that could not adjust for how many students would attend and which subjects would be done. Time was not being used effectively as they had to account for picking up the students from school, the travel to DMU, meeting times and snacks at the

CHELP office. Then, organizers solved many of these issues by simply having the tutorial sessions on the Zapata HS site. The same room serves as a meeting room. The students do not have to go looking around the campus to find out where the tutorials would be held. All the student had to do was simply focus on attending the better-structured, more accessible program, which became a more effective overall process.

*Evolution three.* The third evolution of the program came by monitoring. More specifically, the program coordinator came to the campus and monitored the students' progress. The majority of students' progress was done mid-year through report cards and progress reports. Currently, the school district can monitor the students' academic records, the student's grades from each class, and attendance. The use of new technology has benefitted this process significantly, and such information is now more readily accessible from off-site locations. During the pilot group, student grading was nearly always recorded on paper. However, in 2005, the technology was more readily available for teachers and parents and program coordinators in order to monitor on a real-time basis.

*Evolution four.* The fourth evolution has been the type of requirements needed to stay in the program, such as the high GPA, grading standards, and participation components. During the pilot program, students simply focused on passing their classes, but students in the current program are now also required to maintain a 2.5 GPA, they are expected to enroll in AP classes. Furthermore, with the institution of the tutorial program, students in today's HOPE program tend to perform at a higher academic than the rest of the Zapata HS students. To ensure that the students are maintaining high GPAs, tutorial attendance, and other expectations, organizers openly inform the students

that they are at risk of being removed from the program, and that they will be replaced by another student who is willing to participate and do their requirements. For the Pilot cohort, no one was scared of being kicked out. There were a few students who were eventually replaced because they had moved away, but most current cohort members that were at Zapata HS clearly recall being concerned about losing the opportunity to go to college and being kicked out of the program.

### Looking Forward

As a researcher, I hope to use this study to add to the literature of strategies and initiatives that are addressing Latino issues related to: dropout, building academic achievement, increasing high school graduation, college recruitment, retention, and attainment of college degrees. Currently, no other program can be found in the body of educational literature that recruits Latino students and supports them during high school through college degree attainment.

I also hope to use this study to get additional funding for HOPE. Although the program has existed for over 20 years, and can attest to numerous success stories, it still does not have enough recognition in the way of accessing major grants and funds that would help expand its overall focus to be able to help more students. I am hopeful my Ed.D. thesis can be used productively in grant-makers and raising the public profile of the program.

### Main Themes within the Study

If the HOPE program had not exist during my high school years, then I would not have gone to college. Of the eleven participants and the researcher's own statements, the

majority acknowledge that they have benefited from the support of the program and had they not been part of the HOPE program the consensus was that many might not have graduated from high school. Many also cited that they might not have even attempted to go to college, and nearly all believe that it has been because of the program that they are now college graduates or on the path for degree attainment.

#### Students Enrolled in Advanced Courses and Eligible to Attend College

Ineffective high schools are an issue that the federal, state, and local education agencies are attempting to address. After analyzing information gathered from focus group sessions, the researcher realized a significant reason for many Latinos' lack of success in high school and in college. This reason is not so much their lack of parental support, or even their environment; rather, most of these students attend ineffective high schools that were not effective in preparing students for a future past high school.

#### What HOPE Does that is Different?

Many organizations and agencies throughout the country work to help Latino students stay in school and graduate from high school. There are also organizations and agencies that help Latino student get into college, and develop study skills to help them stay in college. What HOPE does is that it takes both concepts and follows through from the beginning all the way to college graduation. In short, HOPE works seemingly across institution and programs while attending to individual student's needs.

## Methods of Programmatic Improvement

HOPE is limited to what it can do and does not have the resources to be everything to everyone. Therefore, there are some issues where the program needs to work on finding solutions.

*What needs to improve in the high school level?* The consensus among cohort members was that the program's current format, requirement, and support systems really benefited them. Yet, what concerned the researcher was that in a campus of over 2000, and in a class of over 600 students, why was Zapata High School not able to fill of the spots for the program, and why had they needed to recruit students from the East End Charter School? In a class of over 600, I found it a bit insulting, as an alumnus, that the school did not have 34 students that would have applied, qualified, and been admitted to the program. The researcher was informed that there were over 75 candidates who applied for admission to the program. It is not that the students from the East End Charter School do not deserve the opportunity to participate in the program; however, the students who are admitted to the East End Charter School tend to have higher academic aptitude and have fewer issues to that are associated with a larger failing public school like at Zapata High School. While I was a student with HOPE, the majority of the students went to Zapata High School. However, there were a few students who transferred to other high schools. The difference between my 1993 cohort and the 2007 cohort is that the students started with us, and some moved away or transferred to more successful schools, as compared to admitting a student who already was enrolled at a different school and was allowed into the program.

*What needs to improve in the university level?* The cohort participants feel that the strongest component of the program occurs at the university level. The university program has monthly meetings, and is constantly monitoring tutorials, progress reports and final grades. Given that there are so many students, it is difficult to schedule functions where all of the members can participate. Yet, if anything, creating events is important because they give cohort members and their families opportunities to come together and simply catch up and socialize. Many of the parents know each other since they have been going to family meetings for several years and their children visit each other's homes since high school. Therefore, organizers could host more events where the students and their families can catch up and further strengthen relationship bonds.

#### Retention of Original Cohort Members

With respect to the 2007 cohort, the program successfully graduated thirty-four students from Zapata High School. Only nineteen students were officially admitted to Dream-Maker University, and only ten of the original thirty-four are currently enrolled at DMU. Understandably the whole focus of HOPE is not to exclusively recruit all of the cohort members to enroll to DMU. Though the tutorial system does demonstrate that there is a direct correlate between hours participating in tutorials with classroom success, there were still too many students who would fail and eventually were released from the program. The question is what are the interventions that the program is doing to fully support the student? If the reason for the student's lack of performance in the classroom is not indicative of the knowledge, aptitude or effort in tutorials, why did the student fail the semester or flunk out of school? If the idea is to replicate this program and expand

the concept as to help more students, there have to be better interventions set up that will help students who are at risk of failing.

### Transferability

It is the researcher's contention that the HOPE program can be replicated to have the same types of benefits for the student participants. I feel that there are three viable options to consider. By utilizing one or any of the three options, there will be great numbers of Latino students who will be the benefactors, which will, in turn, support the American economy.

Option one involves expanding the current HOPE program to include more high schools. If DMU were to support the cHELP's effort to include more schools, then the program would be expanded from currently one campus to a possibility of five campuses. All five schools would have the same type of demographic populations, with similar economic and social issues. Further, instead of help 30 students in one high school, the program would be helping 150 students from five high schools. From those 150, the students would still have the option of which schools to apply for, but admission to DMU would be the preference. DMU would have to support the program by allowing for expansion of their facilities and of hiring personnel.

Option Two would involve expanding the HOPE Program to other universities within the city. Instead of only being housed at the Dream-Maker University, the idea here would be to open an office at the Urban Dream-Maker University, Tiger University, and at several of the Local Community College campuses. Ideally, each campus would be paired up with the high school that is near in proximity. Then, upon graduation from

high school, the student can choose one of the HOPE campuses or any other state public university which he or she may have applied for admission.

The third option is expanding the HOPE Program to include more DMU students. Thus, program focus will shift from building the students during high school, and emphasis will be with the students that are already on the university campus (i.e., helping them complete their degree using the same HOPE model).

#### Implications for Research

With the idea that there can always be further research to help add to the vast literature, the researcher suggest that there are more methods and options which could either reinforce this study or confirm what the researcher has documented.

#### Methodological Reflections

The following are ideas for the replication of the current study with different populations of HOPE cohort students:

- Conduct a narrative inquiry with the next cohort to see if their lived experiences are the same.
- Do a narrative study of the High School cohort in two years when they are seniors in high school.
- Do a narrative study of the high school cohort in three years after they are freshmen in college.
- Do a narrative study of former HOPE students looking at students 15, 10, and 5 years removed from the program as college graduates.

The following are ideas for comparative evaluation to study HOPE cohort college students and their siblings who did not go to college:

- Do the study looking at the students that were admitted to HOPE and their siblings who were not admitted to HOPE but went to college or post-secondary institution.
- Do the study looking at the students admitted to HOPE and their siblings who were not admitted to HOPE and did not go to a post-secondary institution.

With the use of social networks, finding future participants will be facilitated and would allow the researcher to use surveys and arrange meetings for focus groups or interviews.

### Conclusion

To date, the reason that the program has been successful is because the program uses a tried and proven system. Although this system contains some formulaic elements, it is primarily individualistic and approaches the student holistically. With the cohort model, the advising and mentoring of the students goes beyond what the scope of what an academic program would deal with; rather, the program invests in the lives of each student so much that the program is an extension of a way of life for the students and the staff. For the majority of the students who started the program since high school, the program represents something very special: HOPE represents an intervention by fate. For the students who were admitted to the program, HOPE offered a chance to help them complete their dream of a college degree. Students like Carlos, Eva, and Fernanda all had to wait to get into the program, and if this program was not as effective or worth the effort, none of the three would have persevered over two years for their turn to happen. It

did not matter to them that they did not get the full experience as the Zapata High School students received. More importantly, because of how the students' lives were touched and their lives impacted, the three students longed to get in and are so grateful for their admission to the program.

If allegedly college is the dream that many of the students and the families hope and sacrifice for the opportunity for a better future, then the HOPE program is like a fairy sprinkling the pixie dust that helps them believe that they can be successful in high school and they can obtain a college degree. It cannot be understated that for nearly all of the participants, as well as for me, HOPE has afforded us the opportunity to gain more than just a college degree. I feel that HOPE did more than help me receive my degree; HOPE provided me with a fishing line, but also taught me how to fish, as an ancient Chinese proverb suggests is so vital. I am no longer simply waiting for someone to provide me with a fish to survive. HOPE has given me the confidence that I can now venture out in my own fishing boat, brave the waters of the world, and help to teach others how to fish! What our country needs is to help our students to fish, because there are too many hungry mouths that are struggling to survive. The Latino population is growing tremendously, and given my youthful age, it is up to people like me to help them to teach them, to guide them, and to mentor them so they can contribute profitably to the general society and be economic and social assets not drains..

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APPENDIX A

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON HUMAN SUBJECTS CONCENT


**U N I V E R S I T Y of H O U S T O N**

COMMITTEES FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS

April 11, 2011

 Mr. Cesar Augusto Alvarez  
 c/o Dr. Allen R. Warner  
 Curriculum and Instruction

Dear Mr. Alvarez:

The University of Houston Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1) reviewed your research proposal entitled "Creating Dreams and Making them Come True. An Evaluation of a Program to Increase the Achievement of University Degrees among Latino Students" on April 1, 2011, according to institutional guidelines.

At that time, your project was granted approval contingent upon your agreement to modify your proposal protocol as stipulated by the Committee. The changes you have made adequately respond to those contingencies made by the Committee, and your project has been approved. However reapplication will be required:

1. Annually
2. Prior to any change in the approved protocol
3. Upon development of the unexpected problems or unusual complications

Thus, if you will be still collecting data under this project on **March 1, 2012** you must reapply to this Committee for approval before this date if you wish to prevent an interruption of your data collection procedures.

If you have any questions, please contact Alicia Vargas at (713) 743-9215.

Sincerely yours,

for  
 Dr. Scott B. Stevenson, Chair  
 Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (1)

PLEASE NOTE: (1) All subjects must receive a copy of the informed consent document. If you are using a consent document that requires subject signatures, remember that signed copies must be retained for a minimum of 3 years, or 5 years for externally supported projects. Signed consents from student projects will be retained by the faculty sponsor. Faculty are responsible for retaining signed consents for their own projects; however, if the faculty leaves the university, access must be possible for UH in the event of an agency audit. (2) Research investigators will promptly report to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects and others.

Protocol Number: 11337-01

Full Review \_\_\_\_\_

 Expedited Review  X

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT LETTERS

March 28, 2011

Potential Research Participant;

My name is Cesar A. Alvarez and I am an Educational Doctorate student in the College of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am currently working with Professor Allen Warner on my thesis. I am studying the student's perspective of a Recruitment, Retention and Graduation Program for Latinos Students and am recruiting participants. This research will hopefully lead to a better understanding of how the program works and how it can be improved for the current students, moreover to look at the feasibility of replicating this model across other departments at the University of Houston.

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in one of three Focus Group Sessions. The Sessions will be conducted in the Center for Mexican American library. The session should take approximately one hour of your time.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Committees for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). However, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you are interested in participating, please fill out one of the bottom of this letter with your information and I will be in touch with you. Alternatively, you can also submit this letter to Ms. Rebecca Trevino in the Center for Mexican American Studies.

Thank you,

Cesar Augusto Alvarez

---

Name

Email

Phone Number

March 28, 2011

Dr. PUENTES;

My name is Cesar A. Alvarez and I am an Educational Doctorate student in the College of Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction. I am currently working with Professor Allen Warner on my thesis. I am studying the student's perspective of a Recruitment, Retention and Graduation Program for Latinos Students and am recruiting participants. This research will hopefully lead to a better understanding of how the program works and how it can be improved for the current students, moreover to look at the feasibility of replicating this model across other departments at the DREAM-MAKER UNIVERSITY.

If you volunteer as a participant in this study, you will be asked to participate in an individual interview sessions. The sessions will be conducted in your office within the CHELP. Each of the two sessions should take approximately one and a half hour of your time.

I would like to assure you that this study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Committees for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). However, the final decision about participation is yours.

If you are interested in participating, please inform me so I can get with your secretary to schedule the two sessions.

Thank you,

Cesar Augusto Alvarez

**College of Education  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of Houston**

***PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR  
RESEARCH IN AN EVALUATION OF A RECRUITMENT,  
RETENTION, AND GRADUATION PROGRAM FOR LATINO  
STUDENTS***

We are looking for volunteers to take part in a study of  
*A students' evaluation of a recruitment, retention, and graduation  
program for Latino students*

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: participate in a  
focus group interview session; the participant's identity will be  
anonymous.

Your participation would involve 1 session,  
each of which is approximately (60) minutes.

This result of the study is designed to contribute and support the future  
direction of the program.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study,  
please contact:  
*Cesar Alvarez*  
College of Education  
at  
832.878.5727 cell phone  
Email: *cesar@uh.edu*

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Sample Focus Group Questions

### High School Experiences

1. Please describe the application process for admission to the Austin Academic Achievers' Program (AAAP)?
2. Was there anything that you were required in the AAAP to do which you felt benefited you in college? If so, please explain.
3. Was there anything in high school that you were required to do which you felt did not prepare you for college? If so, please explain.
4. During your senior year in high school, in which ways did the AAAP program support you?
5. How did the AAAP program help you personally make the transition from high school to college?

### UH Experience

6. Tell me about your experience when you applied and dealt with the admission and financial aid office where AAAP intervened and supported you?
7. Has your experience with the program changed much from high school to the university level?

### Personal Experience/ Reflection

8. Do you think a program similar to AAAP should be expanded to be college based? If so, in what way?
9. If you were not having been part of AAAP, how likely would you be here now?
10. How has the AAAP Program helped you achieve your academic goals?

### Sample Interview Questions for Dr. Puentes

1. Where did the AAAP concept come from?
2. Why start the program in high school?
3. What have been the greatest challenges?
4. What is the retention rate of students which stay in your program?
5. What makes AAAP such as successful program?
6. Do students share with you how this program has benefited their lives?
7. What research have you followed that has contributed to your design of the AAAP?
8. What do you hope AAP will contribute to the national literature of Hispanic retention and graduation efforts?
9. Do you envision AAAP expanding? If so, please explain.
10. How could you see the AAP concept expanding to other departments, colleges or universities?
11. Have other programs or colleges inquired on how to expand this concept to their?
12. What have been some of the great success stories of AAP?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**FOCUS GROUP**  
**UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON**  
**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH**

**PROJECT TITLE:**

**Creating Dreams and Making Them Come True: A Qualitative Examination of a Program to Increase the Achievement of University Degrees Among Latino Students**

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Cesar Augusto Alvarez from the College of Education at the University of Houston. This project is to satisfy the requirements for a doctoral thesis for the Executive Educational Doctorate. This project is being supervised by Dr. Allen Warner, Associate Professor, from the College of Education.

**NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question. If you wish not to participate, your decision will not affect my academic standing.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the project is to study the student's perspective of how the recruitment, retention and graduation program has contributed to their academic success in college. The study will last 2 months.

**PROCEDURES**

You will be one of approximately 20 subjects to be asked to participate in this project.

The research project is evaluating a program through the students' perspective that helps recruit, retain and graduate Latino students from high school through college. The focus group participants will have to come to the Center for Mexican American Studies (CMAS) lounge and fill out the informed consent form, if he/she wishes to participate, then he/she will choose one of three One-hour sessions to participate in the CMAS library. The participant will sit down as one of five participants in the focus group. The researcher will restate the purpose of the focus group and that the participant can still choose to participate and the participant can choose not to answer all questions. The Principal investigator will read the rights and protection statement and inform the participant that their identity will be kept anonymous. The principal investigator will ask the ten questions and allow for the participants to add comments. After the focus group questions have been asked, the principal investigator will state that the session has been completed and that the participants are no longer obligated to participate in any function. The participant will not be asked any follow up questions or further actions. The total time commitment no including pre-interview will be approximately one hour. *Sample questions to be asked:*

Do you think a program similar to Austin Academic Achievers Program (AAAP) should be expanded to be college based?

If you were not having been part of Austin Academic Achievers Program (AAAP), how likely would you be here now?

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. As a participant you agree to maintain the confidentiality of other participants in the focus group. Each subject's name will be paired with an identifier: "Student A, Ethnicity, Gender", by the principal investigator. This code identifier will appear on all written materials. The list pairing the subject's name to the assigned code identifier will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

### **RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

No foreseeable risks associated with this study.

### **BENEFITS**

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand the effectiveness of the Academic Achievers Program and potentially replicate similar programs.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

### **PUBLICATION STATEMENT**

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

### **AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO/VIDEO TAPES**

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio/video taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio/video tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- I agree to be audio/video taped during the interview.
  - I agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
  - I do not agree that the audio/ video tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations. I understand that this option excludes me from participation in this focus group.
- I do not agree to be audio taped during the interview. *I understand that this option excludes me from participation in this focus group.*
- I do not agree to be video taped during the interview. *I understand that this option excludes me from participation in this focus group.*

### SUBJECT RIGHTS

1. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
2. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
3. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
4. Any benefits have been explained to me.
5. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact [Cesar A. Alvarez] at [713.743.5059]. I may also contact [Dr. Allen Warner], faculty sponsor, at [713.743.5059].
6. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
7. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
8. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and Dr. Allen Warner. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Study Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview for the Director  
UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON  
CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

**PROJECT TITLE:**

**Creating Dreams and Making Them Come True: A Qualitative Examination of a Program to Increase the Achievement of University Degrees Among Latino Students**

You are being invited to participate in a research project conducted by Cesar Augusto Alvarez from the College of Education at the University of Houston. This project is to satisfy the requirements for a doctoral thesis for the Executive Educational Doctorate. This project is being supervised by Dr. Allen Warner, Associate Professor, from the College of Education.

**NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

Your participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any question. If you wish not to participate, your decision will not affect my academic standing.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of the project is to study the student's perspective of how the recruitment, retention and graduation program has contributed to their academic success in college. The study will last 2 months.

**PROCEDURES**

You will be one of approximately 1 subject to be asked to participate in this project.

The research project is evaluating a program through the students' perspective that helps recruit, retain and graduate Latino students from high school through college. We will use the Program Director's office for the interview. The individual interview participant will have to fill out the informed consent form, if he wishes to participate, then he will choose when to conduct the interview, the two interview sessions are anticipated to last One and a half-hour. The researcher will restate the purpose of the interview and that the participant can still choose to participate and the participant can choose not to answer all questions. The Principal investigator will read the rights and protection statement and inform the participant that their identity will be kept anonymous. The principal investigator will ask the twelve questions and allow for the participants to add comments. After the focus group questions have been asked, the principal investigator will state that the session has been completed and that the participants are no longer obligated to participate in any function. The participant will not be asked any follow up questions or further actions other than the two interview sessions. The total time commitment no including pre-interview will be approximately three hours.

*Two sample questions to be asked:*

What do you hope the Academic Achievers Program will contribute to the national literature of Hispanic retention and graduation efforts?

How could you see the Academic Achievers Program concept expanding to other departments, colleges or universities?

**CONFIDENTIALITY.**

Every effort will be made to maintain the confidentiality of your participation in this project. The principal investigator will use a pseudonym for your name. The name "Dr. Puente" will appear on all written materials. Your name will be kept separate from all research materials and will be available only to the principal investigator to ensure that confidentiality is maintained. Confidentiality will be maintained within legal limits.

**RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

No foreseeable risks associated with this study.

**BENEFITS**

While you will not directly benefit from participation, your participation may help investigators better understand the effectiveness of the Academic Achievers Program and potentially replicate similar programs.

**ALTERNATIVES**

Participation in this project is voluntary and the only alternative to this project is non-participation.

**PUBLICATION STATEMENT**

The results of this study may be published in professional and/or scientific journals. It may also be used for educational purposes or for professional presentations. However, no individual subject will be identified.

**AGREEMENT FOR THE USE OF AUDIO**

If you consent to participate in this study, please indicate whether you agree to be audio taped during the study by checking the appropriate box below. If you agree, please also indicate whether the audio tapes can be used for publication/presentations.

- I agree to be audio during the interview.
  - I agree that the audio(s) can be used in publication/presentations.
  - I do not agree that the audio tape(s) can be used in publication/presentations. I understand that this option excludes me from participation in this interview.
- I do not agree to be audio taped during the interview. I understand that this option excludes me from participation in this interview.

### SUBJECT RIGHTS

9. I understand that informed consent is required of all persons participating in this project.
10. All procedures have been explained to me and all my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.
11. Any risks and/or discomforts have been explained to me.
12. Any benefits have been explained to me.
13. I understand that, if I have any questions, I may contact [*Cesar A. Alvarez*] at [713.743.5059]. I may also contact [Dr. Allen Warner], faculty sponsor, at [713.743.5059].
14. I have been told that I may refuse to participate or to stop my participation in this project at any time before or during the project. I may also refuse to answer any question.
15. ANY QUESTIONS REGARDING MY RIGHTS AS A RESEARCH SUBJECT MAY BE ADDRESSED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON COMMITTEE FOR THE PROTECTION OF HUMAN SUBJECTS (713-743-9204). ALL RESEARCH PROJECTS THAT ARE CARRIED OUT BY INVESTIGATORS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ARE GOVERNED BY REQUIREMENTS OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
16. All information that is obtained in connection with this project and that can be identified with me will remain confidential as far as possible within legal limits. Information gained from this study that can be identified with me may be released to no one other than the principal investigator and Dr. Allen Warner. The results may be published in scientific journals, professional publications, or educational presentations without identifying me by name.

I HAVE READ (OR HAVE HAD READ TO ME) THE CONTENTS OF THIS CONSENT FORM AND HAVE BEEN ENCOURAGED TO ASK QUESTIONS. I HAVE RECEIVED ANSWERS TO MY QUESTIONS. I GIVE MY CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY. I HAVE RECEIVED (OR WILL RECEIVE) A COPY OF THIS FORM FOR MY RECORDS AND FUTURE REFERENCE.

Study Subject (print name): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Study Subject: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

-----

I HAVE READ THIS FORM TO THE SUBJECT AND/OR THE SUBJECT HAS READ THIS FORM. AN EXPLANATION OF THE RESEARCH WAS GIVEN AND QUESTIONS FROM THE SUBJECT WERE SOLICITED AND ANSWERED TO THE SUBJECT'S SATISFACTION. IN MY JUDGMENT, THE SUBJECT HAS DEMONSTRATED COMPREHENSION OF THE INFORMATION.

Principal Investigator (print name and title): \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX E

WAIVER OF INFORMED CONCENT

## PART B: RESEARCH PROJECT REVIEW SUMMARY

**1. State the specific research hypotheses or questions to be addressed in this study.**

The cohort members will be asked three main research questions:

What did the HOPE Program do to plant that college seed and help you achieve that university goal?

Had you not been associated with the HOPE Program, would you today be on a university campus?

What has been the difference between you and your high school friends who are not in college?

What is going to be studied is the student's perspective of a graduation/ retention program and its effectiveness in the development and academic success in their higher education.

The second set of research questions will be asked of the program director:

How can the HOPE Program be replicated across different content areas or disciplines?

Is the HOPE Program more effective being a Latino or ethnic focus? Or can the HOPE program be just as effective if it was opened to all ethnic groups?

What is going to be studied is how using the students' perspectives of the program will facilitate the transferability to other similar programs.

**2. What is the importance/significance of the knowledge that may result?**

The program being studied is a successful program which has been in existence in different phases since 1988. Statistically the program has shown merit and value at the University of Houston in recruiting and graduating Latino students. What will be investigated will be how the student's perspective of the program can improve the program and possibly help replicate this program to other areas to help other Latino and non-Latino students progress from high school and graduate from college. This is a particular program for an underserved population which has the highest percentage of dropouts, the lowest percentage of students graduating from high school and even fewer completing college. Though the program has over 23 years of operation, the program has never been studied to this degree. Latinos within Texas and other southwest border states are becoming the majority population yet have the lowest academic achievements. There are several studies focusing on retention programs but very few focus on the effectiveness of the program

<p>based on the student's perspective on the value added to their academic success in college.          Latino success in college and professional degrees will be vital to the economic, political and social development and sustainability of the United States of America.</p>
--

3. **Proposed Start Date** (may not precede approval date): \_\_\_\_\_ OR

Upon CPHS Approval

4. **Subject Population** (check all that are appropriate)

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adults	<input type="checkbox"/> Elderly (65yrs and above)
<input type="checkbox"/> Cognitively or Psychologically Impaired	<input type="checkbox"/> Prisoners or Parolees
<input type="checkbox"/> Children or minors (<18 in Texas and most states)	<input type="checkbox"/> Institutional Residents
<input type="checkbox"/> Non-English speaking Students	<input type="checkbox"/> UH Faculty, Staff, or

- a. Expected maximum number of participants **16**

- b. Age of proposed subject(s) (check all that apply):

Infants (2yrs and under)

Children (3yrs–10yrs)     Adolescents (11yrs-14yrs)     Adolescents (15yrs-17yrs)

Adults (18yrs-64yrs)     Elderly Adults (65yrs and above)

- c. Inclusion/Exclusion:

Describe criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects in this study. Include justification, how it will be determined, and by whom.

## Inclusion Criteria:

I will interview the program director of the program.

I will use current students of the Academic Achievers Program, Exclusively the 2005-2011 Cohort for the focus group.

All participants are ethnic Latinos.

## Exclusion Criteria:

I will not use students which do not volunteer to participate.

I will not involve people who are not ethnic Latino.

I will not use students that are not part of the 2005-2011 cohort members in the program.

## Justification:

If an individual does not wish to participate, then he/ she will not be required to participate.

For the purpose of this study, every one of the cohort members and the director of the program are ethnic Latino.

The research is a study centering on the program's effectiveness as determined by the cohort perspective.

The program director has contributed from the design, operation and potentially expansion of the program.

## Determination:

Sample will be one of convenience (i.e., 15 people who agree to participate)

If the current program director elects to participate then he will be included in the study.

There are currently 15 students in the cohort of the program, only the members which wish to participate will be used in the study.

I have the list of the current cohort members and the name of the program director.

d. If this study proposes to *include* children, this inclusion must meet one of the following criterion for risk/benefit:

- (404) Minimal Risk
- (405) Greater than minimal risk, but holds prospect of direct benefit to subjects
- (406) Greater than minimal risk, no prospect of direct benefits to subjects, but likely to yield generalizable knowledge about the subject's disorder or condition.

Explain the justification for the selected category:

N/A

5. If the research involves any of the following, check all that are appropriate:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview                        | <input type="checkbox"/> Clinical Studies          |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Survey/Questionnaire             | <input type="checkbox"/> Behavioral Observation    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Study of Existing Data Specimens | <input type="checkbox"/> Study of Human Biological |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Deception                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver of Consent         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Venipuncture                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (specify)_____      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data Analyses Only                          |  |

6. Location(s) of Research Activities:

- UH campus  Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

Note: A letter of approval from sites other than the University of Houston must be included with the application. If it is not available, please explain:

N/A
-----

7. **Informed Consent of Subjects:** Your study protocol must clearly address one of the following areas:

**Informed Consent.** Signed informed consent is the default. A model consent is available on the CPHS website and should be used as a basis for developing your informed consent document. If applicable, the proposed consent must be included with the application. (<http://www.research.uh.edu/PCC/CPHS/Informed.html>) ATTACH COPY OF PROPOSED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**Cover Letter.** You may request a waiver of documented informed consent with Appendix A – Request for Waiver of Documentation of Consent. ATTACH COPY OF PROPOSED COVER LETTER AND APPENDIX A.

**No Informed Consent.** You may request a waiver of informed consent with Appendix B – Request for Waiver/Modification of Informed Consent. If applicable, a copy of the modified consent document is required. ATTACH APPENDIX B.

**NOTE: Studies including deception must qualify for waiver of consent.** A modified version of a consent document to be used in deceptive research studies as well as a debriefing form must be included with the application.