

Chapter 6

Evaluating Latina Retention: The Positive Factors Affecting Latina Retention in Rural Colleges, Viewed From Chicana Feminist Theory

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ABSTRACT

Latinas are undereducated in rural community colleges. This chapter identifies the positive factors enhancing the college experience for Latinas in rural community colleges. To assess the college going experiences of Latinas attending a rural community college, and note if these experiences conform to or negate Chicana Feminist Theory, one rural community college in Oregon randomly selected 10 Latinas between the ages of 18 and 35 who took at least two terms of credit-bearing classes. Data was analyzed from interview recordings, and responses were transcribed based on a narrative analysis transcription protocol. The major findings were developed relying upon the theoretical framework of Chicana Feminist Theory. Significant themes emerging from this study related to positive factors that enhance retention including social integration and motivational factors to attend a rural community college. The retention of Latinas must embrace change and build on positive changes in the academy such as serving students' needs expressed in intentional opportunities for academic and social engagement and better access to financial and childcare resources.

EVALUATING LATINA RURAL COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

Introduction

This study explores challenges, and particularly positive factors leading to Latina retention in remote-rural communities and identified key recommendations that are essential in order for Latinas to be successful in remote-rural community colleges. Ten Latina undergraduates who finished at least two terms of three

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credit-bearing class in a rural community college were the subjects of this qualitative study. The term *Latina* in this study refers to a female of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race. The participants named in this study are females regardless of how they self-identify ethnically who have ancestry from either of these countries.

Mexican-Americans are the largest Latin American subgroup (65%) in the United States and they are the least likely to attend college (Education Testing Service, 2007; *Excelencia*, 2016; Iturbide, Raffaelli & Gustavo, 2009). According to the 2010 census data, of the 16-24-year-old Latinos born in Mexico and migrated to the United States, 38.8% dropped out of high school (Munsch, 2011; National Center Education Statistics, 2010). According to the National Council of La Raza, an umbrella organization for Hispanic groups, only 10% of U.S. born Latina women complete four or more years of college, as compared with 13.9% of Black women and 22.3% of White women (National Council of La Raza, 2014). Among the nation's Latinas, rural Latinas are the least likely to attend college (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy & Dean, 2005; *Excelencia*, 2015; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012; NCES, 2014).

In order to increase the retention and success rates of Latina rural community college students, community colleges in rural areas must make it possible for more Latinas to attend in order to have a positive higher education experience (Demi, Coleman-Jensen & Synder, 2010; Maltzan, 2006). Academicians need to understand what factors lead to retention for Latinas in rural community colleges. This paper explores the positive factors that lead to Latina success and suggest recommendations to build upon successful outcomes that will foster Latina retention.

POSITIVE FACTORS IN LATINA RETENTION

Coping Strategies

Coping strategies are essential if Latinas are going to have successful college-going experiences. Coping strategies involved in the themes, social integration and motivational factors to attend rural community colleges was found to be positive influencing factors that led to retention for Latina students. Latinas find many ways to cope with the challenges in attending rural community colleges. One way they cope is through positive support structures. Scholars found that faculty encouragement play a strong positive role toward retention (Gandara, 1982; Gloria & Castellanos 2012). Faculty support can offset the challenges Latinas face especially as they encounter many forms of discrimination. Scholars found another coping strategy for Latina college students involved support from family and peers (Arredondo, 2003; Blackwell, 2011; Cotera, 1977; Garcia, 1997; Pedroza, 2010).

The participant interviews in this present study confirmed coping strategies were an essential element toward retention for Latina students who attend rural community colleges. This information is valuable as it is instrumental in informing policy, pedagogy and various administrative decisions. The coping strategies for Latina rural community college students involved levels of social integration and motivations to attend college. The findings from this present research led to the significance of recommending solutions useful for student service personnel, policy makers, faculty and administrative services.

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