

Chapter 20

Evaluating Latina Retention: The Negative Factors Affecting Latina Retention in Rural Colleges and Key Recommendations for Their Retention

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores issues and challenges Latinas face 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 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.

EVALUATING LATINA RURAL COLLEGE EXPERIENCES

Introduction

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).

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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 detract from the college experience for Latinas in rural community colleges. This paper explores the barriers that detract from Latina success and suggest recommendations to bring change that will foster Latina retention.

BARRIERS PREVENTING LATINA RETENTION

White-Dominant Educational Narratives

Multiple barriers prevent the Hispanic/Latina population from attending rural community colleges. One of the barriers preventing the Latina population from attending rural community colleges arises from the White supremacy-hegemonic educational narratives used in American literature and history. These narratives place Latinas in a precarious position in American society (Bernal, Elenes, Godinez, & Villenas, 2006; Cantu, 2011). Gloria (1997), noted that these narratives essentially ignore Latino/a's as a part of American history. Latino/a's were, and still are, erased from popular American history by the major ideological narratives such as "Manifest Destiny", "Melting Pot", and the "Mexican Problem" (Arredondo, 2003; Bebout, 2011). For many Latino/as, their status is perceived as the perpetual foreigner, with no rights or limited rights to citizenship.

Racial and Gender Discrimination

Another major barrier preventing Latina's from attending rural community colleges is that some Latinas suffer discrimination based on their race and gender (Huber & Malagon, 2007; Maduena, 2012). Not only must they contend with discrimination based on their racial identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000), but they also struggle with discrimination within their own culture because there is a stigma of inferiority given to the female role: "Chicanas have been victimized of a double discrimination—sexism and racism" (De La Torre, 2009; Nieto, 1976, p. 12; Villegas, Lemanski & Valdéz, 2010). She is discriminated against within the majority culture where she is almost invisible because she embodies a Hispanic heritage and dark skin color, "Her identity is enmeshed by a continual evolutionary process of navigating two cultures (hers and the dominant one) and several realities, including the fact that her cultural inheritance is from both Indian and Spanish ancestors" (Bebout, 2011, p. 24).

Poverty

The third major barrier preventing rural Latina women from completing their courses at community colleges is the issue of poverty. This is especially true in rural areas. For example, many Pacific Northwest States have a higher percentage of rural ethnic minority students than urban areas and increasingly higher rural poverty rates for Latinas (ODE, 2014; Oregon Office of Economic Analysis, 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2014b). Consequently, college education attainment in rural areas of the nation is critical in order to break the cycle of poverty and to increase the economic well-being of low income workers, especially minorities (Huber & Malagon, 2007; NCES, 2003; Strange, Johnson, Showalter &

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