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Marketing in Higher Education: The Effects on the College Choice Experience of First-Generation Latinx Students

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First-Generation Latinx Students

by

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Abstract

The Latinx population in the United States has drastically increased over the last twenty years. During the same period, the number of first-generation Latinx students enrolling in higher education post-recession has also increased by as much as 1.5 million students. The expansion of the Latinx student population in Oregon has mirrored the national trend by exponentially increasing over the last 10 years. As the population of first-generation Latinx students grows, it becomes essential to explore the issues and barriers Latinx students face in making their college choices. Previous researchers have found that selecting the right institution is important to increase the chances of satisfaction, retention, and completion of a college degree (Guilbault, 2016). At a time when institutions of higher education are facing financial challenges stemming from low student enrollment rates coupled with decreases in federal and state funding, many colleges and universities are forced to find new strategies to stay financially afloat. These strategies include marketing to build their unique brands and the college experience.

Few studies exist on how marketing affects the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students at state universities in the Pacific Northwest. Using social and culture capital frameworks as a guide, this basic qualitative research study employed qualitative interviews to explore the college choice experience of a group of 12 first-generation Latinx students at the University of Northwest Pacific (pseudonym) to gain an understanding of how marketing may have affected their experiences and the challenges they faced in navigating the college choice process. The study helped identify three

themes: (1) Building a college-bound identity and self-resilience, (2) Accessing social and cultural capital, and (3) Marketing and its effects on students. The findings showed that family had a significant role in building the participants' college-bound identity. Additionally, the study illustrated how social and cultural capital positively impacted participants with individualized assistance and mentors (e.g., counselors, teachers, friends). Lastly, the findings highlighted the challenges and barriers first-generation Latinx students face as they progress through their college choice stages and how marketing affected their selection of the University of Northwest Pacific (UNP). This study also discussed the findings' implications and future research direction.

Dedication

Thank you to my family for all their support through this journey, from the little smiles to the biggest hugs. Thank you for everything.

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Thank you to everyone who helped me in this journey. I am immensely grateful to the students who shared their stories and made such an immense contribution. This could not have been possible without their help. I am forever grateful for allowing me to tell their stories.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Research on why fewer first-generation Latinx students are enrolling in college compared to other ethnic and racial groups remains a topic priority for college admission and recruitment departments across the United States at a time when job requirements for college-educated adults continue to grow. While the Latinx population has increased by 103 percent since 2000, the same cannot be said of the number of Latinx students enrolling in four-year institutions (Bureau, 2017). In fact, while the student population of Latinx college in the U.S. has grown significantly from 8.8 million to 17.9 million over the past two decades (Bureau, 2017), the number of Latinx students attending four-year colleges still lags behind non-Latinx students (Ma & Baum, 2016; Mora, 2022). Moreover, the number of Latinx adults who have less than an associate degree in Oregon is more than 60 percent (Cox, 2021).

According to recent matriculating data, 19 percent of the national incoming class of freshmen were first-generation college students, only a two percent increase compared to 2015 (Eagan et al., 2017; Stolzenberg et al., 2020). Of the incoming 2019 first-generation class, 34 percent of all first-generation college students identified as Latinx (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). While small gains are encouraging, the overall percentage of first-generation students entering college has hovered at or below 20 percent over the last ten years (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). For the 2019 incoming freshmen class, the percentage of incoming first-generation students has continued to be 19 percent (Stolzenberg et al., 2020). These recruitment numbers fall far short of the enrollment

goals colleges and universities strive to achieve. Furthermore, even with increases in first-generation college student enrollment, Latinx students still lag behind all other racial and ethnic groups in completing a four-year college degree (Mora, 2022).

Although, in recent years, the U.S. has actively worked to adapt programs to meet the needs of increasingly diverse student populations, many first-generation Latinx students continue to face challenges accessing and successfully navigating four-year colleges and universities (Gonzalez, 2015).

As an admission officer at a four-year college in the Pacific Northwest, I am cognizant of college outreach and recruitment strategies moving away from the emphasis on *informing* students in favor of *selling* their particular college to increase enrollment. Indeed, marketing, as opposed to traditional academic counseling, has become one of the most common tools used for college recruitment, but it does not help first-generation students (Wright, 2014). The purpose of this study is to identify culturally specific marketing and outreach practices that would improve the recruitment of Latinx first-generation college students and their college choice experience at four-year public universities.

Statement of the Problem

College information has become more accessible than ever, reaching a broader demographic of prospective students. As the reach of the internet continues to grow, the ability to reach potential students via marketing has greatly expanded. Technology, such as enrollment management systems, assists college recruitment and admissions staff with activities such as communication, relationship building, and tracking prospective students

(Slate by Technolutions, n.d.). Indeed, enrollment management systems are important

tools colleges use to tailor marketing messages for different audiences. To date, however,

few research studies have explored the impact of marketing on the college choice of

Latinx first-generation college students (Dache-Gerbino, Judy, & Sapp, 2018; Howell,

2019; Hanover Research, 2016). Thus, a number of important questions remain. For

example, is easier access to college marketing materials creating informed applicants?

The study provided some insight into this question.

Marketing and recruitment go hand in hand in higher education. Recruitment is

the act of bringing in new students, and marketing helps communicate the brand and

brings awareness to prospective students (Hartman, 2019). Marketing strategies targeted

towards particular student demographics continue to evolve, connecting with students

using various platforms (e.g., social media, email, video streaming) and devices

(smartphones, computers, tablets, etc.) in addition to the traditional high school college

and career centers, school visits from college recruiters, and college fairs. However, the

nature of college recruitment has increasingly skewed towards marketing to increase

enrollment (Guilbault, 2016).

As the population of the U.S. continues to diversify, college marketing and

admissions departments have attempted to adapt and change to better suit the needs of

prospective students (Pippert, Essenburg, & Matchett, 2013). One of these changes

involves providing marketing materials that appeal to a racially and ethnically diverse

population of prospective college students (Pippert et al., 2013). At the same time, higher

education institutions are re-thinking outreach to first-generation college students by

drawing on studies examining their college choice experiences and factors that influence their choices.

For example, Holland's 2020 study of 29 first-generation students and 22 school counseling staff at two high schools examined how these students made their college choices. The study found that students often use three types of frames to evaluate their college list – incidental, limited, and personal fit. The study highlighted how different students and counselors thought about the process and made assumptions. In some cases, counselors assumed students knew what they were looking for and were assessing the fit, costs, and benefits of attending specific colleges. However, students with limited knowledge and who did not know how to differentiate college characteristics needed more assistance and made selections based on their limited understanding. Holland (2020) concluded that cultural knowledge and social networks significantly impacted how students in this study evaluated their options.

Studies assessing the higher education knowledge of high school students have revealed a lack of knowledge among these students that may impact their college choice (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). Chlup et al. (2018) define college knowledge as understanding what colleges are looking for in the admission process and knowing how, when, and where to apply. The college choice process may be mistaken for simply selecting a school. Instead, it encompasses a complete process of the student's experience. Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) college choice model defines the college choice process as the student's journey from predisposition (student deciding to attend college), followed by research on different college options (accessing and reading marketing and admission

materials), narrowing down their college choices (based on school and social factors),

and ultimately, making the selection of the school at which to apply and enroll (Iloh,

2018).

This process of selecting the best college fit is difficult for all students; however,

it is especially difficult for those with little or no higher education information, such as

first-generation college students. In comparison to continuing-generation students who

have a parent or parents who successfully attended and completed college, oftentimes

first-generation students' parents lack knowledge of higher education to guide their

children's process of selecting, sorting, and understanding materials and making well-

informed choices (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliott, & Pierce, 2012; Giancola, Munz, &

Trares, 2008; Penrose, 2002).

This is especially true of Latinx first-generation college students who lack

important dominant social and cultural capital needed to research and choose the right

university and program of study to meet their needs. Limitations to prospective students'

ability to sort and understand key factors such as college admission requirements,

program rankings, and financial aid information put certain students at a disadvantage.

Barriers stemming from inadequate financial and academic support due to their parents'

education levels, low English level language proficiency, and limited knowledge of

college (Swail, Cabrera, & Lee, 2004) impact prospective student's ability to effectively

sort through college outreach marketing materials and glean information critical to

making well-informed choices. These forms of knowledge can be categorized as social

and cultural capital – knowledge about higher education and/or having people with

knowledge that can assist. Those who do not possess social or cultural capital may be swayed to apply or not apply to specific institutions because of misunderstanding (Hoxby & Turner, 2015).

Research from Walleri and Moss (1995) indicated that the overload of marketing materials to prospective students was already becoming an issue over a quarter of a century ago. The issue of information overload appears to be increasing in severity; prospective college students today experience a barrage of information from colleges in the form of print brochures, online ads, billboards, magazines, and more. In the words of one associate Vice President for enrollment management at a public institution of higher education, "marketing to students never stops" (Selingo, 2017).

This problem of information overload, along with the use of unfamiliar terminology (e.g., credit hours and minimum GPA) in recruitment materials, can be overwhelming and lead to misunderstandings (Johnson & Chapman, 1979; Lee & Lee, 2004). Misunderstandings have been found to greatly affect students' college selection criteria and, ultimately, their decisions. For example, Hoxby and Turner (2015) found cases wherein misunderstandings contributed to students' decisions not to attend specific state institutions based on their lack of clarity regarding the difference between state and private institutions and how each institution may or may not support their educational advancement in their chosen majors.

Hoxby and Turner (2015) also found that students who had misconceptions about a college were inclined to make their own assumptions, such as believing that only "liberals" attend liberal arts colleges. These misconceptions ultimately lead students to

eliminate such schools. In addition, they found that students who had been prepared for the college admission process and given additional support regarding pricing, outcomes, and college fit made different choices in their school selections than those who did not receive these supports (Hoxby & Turner, 2015).

These previous studies were able to examine first-generation students to explore how their knowledge affected their experiences. However, no studies have explicitly examined first-generation Latinx students' college choices and marketing. Other studies have looked at parts of the college choice process, or have only explored certain populations. For example, Howell (2019) conducted a phenomenological study that involved twenty-three 18-year-old high school students that examined how college social media marketing affected these students' college choices. Howell (2019) found that students use social media as a research tool for specific schools on their college lists. However, colleges had minimal effects the further the high school student was in their college choice process.

Other studies, like Dache-Gerbino et al.'s (2018) study, examined high school Latinas in an urban setting to understand their college choice and factors that influence the choice of proprietary (for-profit) colleges. The study found that proprietary colleges heavily market their schools in the local area, even if students cannot afford the school. Frequent visits to the high schools led students to believe that vocational programs at these colleges were superior to liberal arts-focused colleges. These marketing messages appeared to have strongly influenced local students to select proprietary colleges. The downside to these selections was that the students were less likely to complete their

degrees because of tuition costs. Furthermore, these choices made these students more likely to default on their loans, further impacting their chances for economic advancement (Dache-Gerbino et al., 2018). These studies all helped to inform colleges on how they market and recruit students; however, they are not specific to the college choice process and how marketing affects the experiences of first-generation Latinx students.

As an admission counselor, I have witnessed firsthand how first-generation Latinx students struggle through the college choice and admissions process. Students I support have often expressed being overwhelmed by the process. Students report that the amount of college information they were exposed to online, through printed materials, and from counselors causes feelings of confusion and frustration. Many of the students I have met with expressed that they had an especially hard time understanding which factors to consider and prioritize when selecting or applying to the institution best suited to help them reach their goals.

For example, several years ago, I worked with a student who elected to attend a private university because the school offered her the most financial aid. In our discussion, she mentioned that she wanted to attend nursing school following the completion of her undergraduate degree. Unfortunately, the institution she attended did not offer the necessary prerequisite courses to make her eligible to apply for nursing school. Consequently, after she finished her bachelor's degree, she would need to dedicate additional time and money to complete the prerequisites of the nursing program. This meant that this student would take additional time to obtain a nursing degree and have limited access to funding opportunities because taking undergraduate prerequisites after

completing a baccalaureate degree would exclude her from federal grant eligibility. These were clear barriers that fell squarely in this student's blind spot, which the recruitment and admissions staff failed to tell her about when she selected the private school.

In other instances, I met with students interested in applying for professional programs who falsely assumed that the minimum grade point average (GPA) they earned in high school or community college would be adequate to gain admission. After all, everything they read online and in printed materials and what they heard in information sessions stated the same minimum GPA requirements. I found it necessary to discuss the difference between a minimum GPA and a competitive GPA with these students. Despite the impression provided by marketing materials, gaining admission depends on having a competitive GPA. In other words, I would tell them that if there are 300 applicants for a limited number of slots in the program, the 100 students selected for interviews would need to have a GPA significantly above the minimum GPA.

My experiences with students, such as the two just mentioned, guided my work with our admission team. Understanding the limitations of marketing campaigns to provide critical, timely information influenced important changes to the recruitment and marketing materials provided by the institution I worked in, including language describing minimum versus competitive GPA requirements.

However, over time, I realized that even with these changes, many students often still did not understand these types of important distinctions. Reading brief descriptions online or in printed brochures left by college recruiters was insufficient to address students' blind spots. In effect, students' lack of college knowledge needed to grasp the

intricacies of the process impeded their competitiveness to access college and career

pathways.

Background of the Problem

   Examining college enrollment trends, changing student demographics, and the

college choice processes can provide insight into how and why college marketing has

evolved in these challenging times. Like many recruitment tools, marketing exists and is

impacted by many factors. It is important to understand the background of the problem

and why colleges have relied more heavily on marketing as a tool by discussing the

problem in a historical, social, economic, and political context. I begin by providing

historical context.

The Historical Context

   According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), from 2000 to

2016, college enrollment increased from 13.2 million in 2000 to 16.9 million in 2016.

Even though that may seem like an improvement, the enrollment trend has not been

linear. In fact, the global economic downturn from the 2008 financial crisis (Havemann,

2009) coincided with a spike in the student enrollment trend that peaked at 18.1 million

students enrolling in college in 2012 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Since 2012, the enrollment numbers have been decreasing. As the U.S. economy

recuperated, colleges started seeing a downturn in student enrollment. From 2010 to

2016, student enrollment dropped by seven percent, and this has been further falling to a

total of 15.4 million in fall 2021 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; National

Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

During the period of economic rebound, new workforce opportunities emerged that competed with the choice to attend college. At the same time, rising costs coupled with decreasing Federal and State funding for colleges drove up college tuition rates. Typically, as tuition costs rise, college enrollment declines (Heller, 1997; Leslie & Brinkman, 1987). With decreasing enrollment numbers, colleges sought to attract students through more aggressive marketing aimed at increasing enrollment figures (Gibbs, 2018).

One strategy that four-year colleges have used to address declining enrollment is to understand students' college choice factors and behavior to develop effective marketing and recruitment strategies (Sia, 2011). Research on students' college choice behavior has shown that students select colleges for a number of reasons. Iloh (2018) stated that scholarly inquiries have historically shown that "the college choice process has been framed by multiple perspectives, most notably [by] sociological and economic" models (p. 227).

Through the lens of an economic model, researchers have found students to be logical thinkers who usually go through a "rational cost-benefit analysis" in deciding whether the value of the education and the quality of the education are a good match (Cremonini, Westerheijden, & Enders, 2008, p. 375). Economic models consider major factors that influence a student's college choice, such as the cost of tuition, cost of living, and salary after graduation (Cremonini et al., 2008). Students weigh all these college factors while comparing these factors to those associated with the alternatives of not attending college (Cremonini et al., 2008; Manski & Wise, 1983).

In contrast, sociological models view the college choice process through external and internal factors that influence the student's decision (Alwin & Otto, 1977). These factors include the family background, the community from which the student comes from, high school academics, motivation, and college aspiration (Boyle, 1966). The sociological model considers the school's characteristics (e.g., urban setting), as well as the individual's circumstances (e.g., how the student sees themselves, did they attend a high school with resources, did they have college prep courses).

Then there are some models that combine economic and sociological frameworks to provide insight into factors that influence students' college choices (Chapman, 1981; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987; Jackson, 1982). These models have informed the work of admissions, recruitment, and marketing personnel. For example, college marketing strategies must consider students' behaviors in order to reach them successfully. Litten (1982) stated that the marketing challenges presented by "imminent and long-term demographic and economic conditions lead [institutions] to believe that a better understanding of the college-selection process will help them manage an institution's involvement in these processes more effectively" (p. 383).

As colleges learn to understand students' behaviors, their messaging becomes more sophisticated (e.g., "most innovative institution in the northwest"). This messaging intentionally drives its targets by careful presentation. If one of the marketing objectives is to help build the university's brand, then institutions, by default, create very specific messaging to reach intended audiences, thus potentially omitting other populations.

The Social Context

In response to recent enrollment trends, higher education institutions have introduced new marketing strategies to boost student enrollment. Colleges in Oregon, including the University where this study took place, are suffering from declining enrollment. However, as the number of high school graduates in the state continues to increase, enrollment figures are increasing for some institutions.

The four-year cohort graduation rate for the 2006 high school graduation class was 52.5 percent, but over the last ten years, the rate increased to 74.6 percent (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.). Furthermore, the State of Oregon reported that from 2016 to 2018, the number of Oregon high school diplomas awarded to four-year cohorts increased from 33,260 in 2016 to 34,647 in 2018. Specifically, Oregon Department of Education data shows that there has been an improvement in the number of Latinx graduates, increasing from 6,219 in 2016 to 7,027 in 2018. However, graduating from high school is only one step toward qualifying for college admission.

Across the nation, and in Oregon in particular, the percentage of students continuing into college remains low, with little improvement in the college enrollment rate. In 2016, 69.8 percent of U.S. high school students enrolled in higher education (Digest of Education Statistics, 2017). In Oregon, over the same time period, the percentage of students enrolling in college (two-year or four-year institutions) was below the 69.8 percent national average. From 2011 to 2014, the rate of enrollment in Oregon high school students stayed between 59 percent and 62 percent (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, n.d.-b).

Over the years, the data from Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) show that the number of Latinx students attending college has fluctuated and has been hovering slightly above or below the 60 percent range. The most recent HECC reports show that in 2016, the percentage of Oregon public high school graduates attending college was 59.4 percent, while Oregon Latinx students were enrolling at a rate of 53 percent. Still, more recent education attainment numbers still show that the Oregon Latinx population still has one of the lowest percentages of bachelor's degree attaining adults at only 16.2 percent (Cox, 2021).

The low college enrollment rate highlights significant disparities between Latinx and other ethnic groups in the state of Oregon. For example, 16.2 percent of all Latinx adults age 25 or older have completed a bachelor's degree compared to 35.7 percent of White adults in Oregon (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, n.d.-a; Cox, 2021). The disproportionately low rates of college enrollment and completion among Latinx Oregonians raises concerns, especially in a society needing a more diverse, well-trained workforce with skill sets that will require some form of higher education (Saxena, 2014).

As enrollment numbers continue to drop in universities overall while the size of the traditionally college-age Latinx population in the country and state continues to increase, colleges must find new strategies to recruit this group of diverse students. From the financial perspective of colleges, Latinx students are a fast-growing population segment that could reverse declining enrollment trends.

However, it is clear that some of the most common marketing strategies universities employ in an attempt to attract potential incoming freshmen's attention are

mismatched to the target audiences. For example, Cremonini et al. (2008) discussed how

colleges have become a commodity for which rankings are used as a tool to inform

consumers of the merits of the *product*. However, research conducted by Hearne (2006)

has long since demonstrated that for the majority of students, a school's ranking is not a

major factor for students selecting which college to apply to or attend. Interestingly, these

findings have not discouraged institutions from continually touting their rankings as a

major marketing message.

One reason that college rankings lack the power to attract students is the lack of

clear selection criteria provided by the organizations that do the ranking. For instance,

amongst UNP's in-state recruitment materials, one brochure highlights how US News

and World Report ranks the school as one of the top ten most innovative schools in the

nation (Appendix A). There is no explanation in the brochure as to what criteria are used

to rank institutions as "innovative," nor a satisfactory description of what programs or

departments within the school merited the designation.

The University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) website highlights its four-year

guarantee scholarship, which can cover a student's education for four years, to draw

students' attention (Appendix B). Once an individual follows the links provided, there are

webpages to read through to understand the requirements a student must meet to qualify

for the guarantee. Knowing what to look for would require a student to have college

knowledge and understand what requirements must be met to qualify for the program.

For example, one such qualification is that students must select their intended

major. Selection of a major may put first-generation Latinx students at a disadvantage if

they do not have the college knowledge to understand what major is required for their

intended field (e.g., nursing). Another example that can cause confusion is how UNP lists

its majors, minors, and concentrations available to students (Appendix C). One of the

items highlighted in the brochure that may confuse students is "pre-nursing." Pre-nursing

is often referred to as a pre-track – meaning someone does not receive a nursing degree at

UNP. If a student reviews the UNP website, they will find that UNP does not have a

nursing program, which means a student cannot receive a degree in nursing. Still, the

words "UNP does not offer a nursing degree or major" are not clearly written on the

UNP's recruitment web pages. This specific information is buried on another webpage in

the second paragraph of the *nursing* webpage. The first paragraph explains what nurses

do and the opportunities in the field, thus potentially misleading students to believe that

the university offers a nursing program. This is an example of how marketing assumes

that first-generation Latinx students will know how to navigate the system. Without the

ability and knowledge to understand the information provided throughout the various

brochures and websites, students may be misled and confused as they go through the

college choice process.

Despite mismatches in marketing pitches and confusing informational materials,

overall enrollment numbers have been declining while the percentage of ethnic and racial

minorities enrolling at UNP has been increasing. In the Fall of 2017, more than 40

percent of UNP's incoming class were ethnic and racial minorities. Additionally, of the

increasing percentage of freshmen ethnic and racial minorities enrolling at UNP, the

largest growth is amongst freshmen Latinx students.

Between the Fall of 2014 and the Fall of 2017, UNP increased the number of

incoming Latinx freshmen students from 268 to 365 individuals. The Fall 2018 incoming

freshmen class had the largest percentage of Latinx students: 22.5 percent. However, the

UNP enrollment data does not identify the proportion of incoming Latinx students who

are first-generation college students. Enrollment is affected by numerous reasons;

however, the economic effects are felt by all institutions as enrollment drops.

The Economic Context

The need to increase enrollment puts pressure on institutions, affecting how

institutions design their marketing and recruitment strategies to sell the college

experience. This can be problematic because not all students come in with the same set of

knowledge to assess all the college jargon (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). Compounding the

issues of declining enrollment, higher education institutions face increasing economic

pressures, such as state divestment and declining enrollment, that lead them to emphasize

marketing as a recruiting tool. In the U.S., the number of students enrolling in colleges

has gone up and down from 13.2 to 18.1 to 15.4 million students in the last 21 years

(National Center for Education Statistics, 2018; National Center for Education Statistics,

2023) even as funding for students and colleges at all levels continues to decrease. As the

number of people needing funding increases and federal and state funding decreases,

there will be a breaking point for both students and institutions.

Long (2014) explained that because of the downturn in the economy in 2008, the

number of families qualifying for the Pell Grant increased significantly. From the

academic year 2007-08 to 2008-09, the number of students qualifying for the Pell Grant

increased by approximately 786,000 individuals (Chitty, 2009). Pell Grant expenses grew

exponentially (as illustrated in Table 1), from $15.9 billion in the 2007-08 academic year

to $37.0 billion in the 2010-11 academic year (College Board, 2012).

Table 1: Pell Grant Expenses

Academic Year	Pell Grant Expenses
2007-08	$15.9B
2010-11	$37B

According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), funding for

postsecondary education (e.g., Federal Pell Grants, Work-Study, Perkins Loans, etc.) has

decreased over the last five years, with 2018 hitting the lowest allocation for the

education budget within a five-year period. As stated in the President's 2020 fiscal year

budget, the request for the U.S. Department of Education was a "$7.1 billion reduction

below the fiscal year 2019 appropriation" (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). The

request also included the "cancellation of $2 billion of unobligated balances in the Pell

Grant program," meaning the remaining balance would not be carried over and would be

lost (p. 4). As the national education budget is reduced, state institutions suffer.

Oregon's budget, like the federal budget, has many competing priorities. Amongst

those priorities, Oregon's leaders expressly set goals including getting to "the root causes

of poverty and addiction, [as well as] reduc[ing] [the] state's greenhouse gas emissions"

(Chief Financial Office of Oregon, 2019, p. 4). In addition, Oregon confronted the rising

cost of "housing, health care, childcare, and higher education," all of which outpace the ability of individuals to cover the costs (p. 5). With so many challenges, policymakers had to make tough decisions to propose policies that help the state as they seek to "improve the lives" of those residing in Oregon (p. 5).

The economic state over the previous years has put pressure on institutions of higher education and their enrollment managers. Although the U.S. college enrollment numbers have increased between 2001 and 2017, the enrollment fluctuations have not been a linear increase. Instead, the college enrollment rate peaked in 2012, followed by college enrollment decreases that occurred concurrently with declines in the U.S. unemployment rate (Schmidt, 2018). College enrollment declines reflect the choice of individuals to continue in the labor market instead of enrolling in college (Schmidt, 2018).

The U.S. and the world would severely be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. By early 2020, the first cases of COVID-19 began to appear in the United States (CDC, 2023). From the first cases in February 2020 to the travel bans on March 13th, by March 15th, states had begun shutting down public school systems (CDC, 2023). UNP joined the national trend, as did many colleges in moving to virtual education. This affected people's lives in so many ways; it was estimated that 5.1 million women left the workforce because of childcare and school systems closing. The pandemic forced everyone to rethink their lives and education. During this time, the world, countries, and states had many competing priorities and issues to resolve due to the pandemic, including the education sector.

The nation's 2020-2021 economic struggles resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic affected state budgets. However, Oregon saw an increase in public university support, which was much needed. Without state support, a decrease in funding would affect a number of low-income college students who could attend college. This is important as Oregon has the Oregon Opportunity Grant that supports approximately 30,000 students who qualify for the need-based grant (OSAC, n.d.) The grant helps students attend college as they work towards completing their undergraduate degree. Still, the 2019 legislature prioritized K-12 funding by increasing their budget, while higher education support stayed the same as in 2017-2019 (Pate, 2019). With a limited increase in aid for Oregon's higher education public institutions, there were plans for institutions to increase tuition to address deficits (Pate, 2019). The reduced state financial support and the increase in tuition added pressure to boost college enrollment. Universities won a reprieve from this downward trend in the 2021-2023 biennial budget, receiving an additional eight percent over the previous biennium (HECC, 2021). Even with the increase in budget, colleges across the state are still facing challenges and, in response, are increasing tuition once more from two-to-seven percent (Baumhardt, 2022).

Williams Jr. and Omar (2014) noted that colleges are feeling the competitive pressure that results in a continual need to increase their revenue by increasing tuition rates and enrollment (Long, 2014). All of these factors prompt colleges to use tools such as marketing to reach prospective college students. The need to increase enrollment, in turn, affects how institutions design their recruitment strategies to sell the college experience.

The Political Context

As discussed, economic pressures affect how budgets are formed and influence policy. In 2011, Oregon lawmakers passed Senate Bill 253, the state's aspirational 40-40-20 plan, in an effort to boost the state's degree attainment (ORS 350.014). The plan aims for the following outcomes: "40% of Oregonians will complete a four-year degree, 40% of Oregonians will complete a 2-year degree or certificate, and 20% will earn a high school diploma or the equivalent" by 2025 (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, n.d.-c).

The 40-40-20 plan comprises several initiatives, including Oregon Promise, which helps students who recently graduated from high school or received their GED with assistance in tuition costs when attending an Oregon community college (Oregon Promise, n.d.). Oregon Promise has increased the number of high school students attending college and has increased federal aid coming into Oregon, which has improved affordability (Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission, 2018).

As the state of Oregon continues its initiatives to improve college access, UNP has also created ways to increase access, one of which is the process of co-admission. Co-admission allows students to co-enroll in both a community college and the University of Northwest Pacific using Oregon Promise grants. This is particularly advantageous for Latinx students who, prior to the COVID pandemic, were more likely to attend community colleges than four-year institutions, with more than half of U.S. Latinx college students enrolled in community college (Gramlich, 2017). However, more efforts may be needed at the community college level, as community colleges during the

pandemic and even after Fall of 2021 saw a drop in Latinx students enrolling in

community colleges (Mora, 2022).

Although access has become a priority for the Oregon Higher Education

Coordinating Commission (HECC), overall enrollment numbers for the University of

Northwest Pacific (UNP) decreased from 2012-2020. With dipping numbers, UNP and

other institutions face the pressure to sustain their costs. Additional pressure comes in the

form of needing to assist in meeting the 40-40-20 goal. With mounting pressure to

increase enrollment amid competition from other state and private schools, marketing and

admission officers are under pressure to find ways to gain the attention of prospective

students (Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Marketing done well can be an effective tool, but

current trends lead to centering around the beauty of the student experience rather than

providing appropriate information.

Significance of the Study

Competitiveness in college marketing continues to increase for all colleges across

the country as they hope to draw prospective students' attention (Kotler, 2005; Lauer,

2006). Colleges have in time needed to remain competitive to ensure they can increase

student enrollment. This means colleges have needed to change their tactics to ensure

they can sell their product to as many consumers as possible (Johnson, Jubenville, &

Goss, 2009). The effects of pushing out marketing materials to targeted populations are

not new, as it helps schools build their brand amongst their audience (Kotler & Kelley,

2011). However, if the target audience is students with college-prepared parents, then

schools are effective in attracting that audience, as this audience is able to connect and

understand the content. However, when these same materials are sent to all students, and a large section of the audience are first-generation students, then issues can arise. These issues can include students not understanding the materials and, in turn, self-selecting themselves out of college options, thereby reducing their college choices (Hoxby & Turner, 2015).

Research on the first-generation Latinx student experience is important because this is the fastest-growing college-age cohort. From 1999 to 2016, the proportion of Latinx high school graduates aged 18 to 24 who enroll in college increased from 32 to 47 percent. When compared to other minority groups, Latinx students have seen one of the most rapid growth nationally; however, they still lag behind in terms of college completion (Gramlich, 2017). The growth has not equated to a higher rate of four-year college attendance or degree completion.

Other studies conducted over the past twenty-plus years (e.g., Engle & Tinto, 2008; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998) support findings that first-generation students are more likely than continuing-generation students to attend a two-year institution instead of a four-year institution. This trend continues today as data from the Pew Research Institution has shown that Latinx high school graduates are electing to attend community college at a higher rate than four-year institutions (Gramlich, 2017). This is a cause for concern in Oregon because students who transfer from Oregon community colleges to four-year institutions have lower graduation rates than those who enter a four-year institution directly following high school graduation (Cox, 2018). This is of concern for students accepted to both four-year and two-year programs and select a two-year

institution based on assumptions, as this could decrease their odds of completing their degree.

Some of the reasons for selecting a community college over a four-year institution are cost, open enrollment, and geography (Gramlich, 2017). Prior research indicated that students often select schools that undermatch their academic capabilities because of a lack of information about financial aid (Furquim, Glasener, Oster, McCall, & DesJardins, 2017; Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013). Smith et al. (2013) define academic undermatching as a "student's academic credentials permit them access to a college or university that is more selective than the postsecondary alternative they actually choose" (p. 247). Recognizing the challenges first-generation Latinx students face, which can include undermatching, transitioning from a two-year to a four-year institution, or financial aid availability, becomes important as the attrition rate for first-generation students is higher than continuing-generation students (Ishitani, 2006; Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017).

Checkoway (2018) acknowledged that first-generation students may be affected even when they begin the college search process because if that experience is negative, this impacts their entire college search, application, and enrollment experience. Underprepared students report experiencing higher levels of anxiety when they interact with college representatives and recruiters; anxiety levels that affect them psychologically and academically (DeAngelo & Franke, 2016; Howell & Pender, 2016; J. Smith et al., 2013).

Compared to continuing-generation college students, first-generation students are less likely to attend college, even when they are accepted to the college of their choice (Eagan et al., 2017). Hoxby and Turner's (2015) study concluded that many first-generation students are unaware of the differences between various higher education institutions and make their own, sometimes inaccurate, interpretations of the information provided in the recruitment marketing materials.

Some students in this study expressed confusion because they did not comprehend the difference among institutions (e.g., liberal arts, state, flagship, private). In fact, students in their study could not differentiate a flagship university from any other type of school. This is one example of how the lack of relevant knowledge or understanding adversely affects a student's college selection decision. Students with knowledge about flagship schools will be more inclined to apply, while students with limited to no knowledge limit their options by opting out of such schools.

In addition to not having knowledge about higher education, the lack of academic support may also create barriers when navigating the college admission process (York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Even when a parent who lacks college knowledge wants to help, gaps in their knowledge of the higher education landscape may limit the assistance they can provide their children. Therefore, it is crucial for college counselors, college recruiters, and high school teachers to recognize that a parent's level of education is an influencing factor in the student's thought process. Without external support, parents' lack of higher education experience may limit students' ability to find the best college fit for their needs (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004).

Lastly, increasing the number of first-generation students gaining entry into four-year institutions is important because of the growing demand for more college-prepared individuals. A report from the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce indicated that there is a need for a more educated workforce, emphasizing that attending college is an important step to ensure economic upward mobility (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010).

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported 10 years ago that job openings in occupations that require a college degree would grow by 14 percent by 2022 (Richards & Terkanian, 2013). Thus, a four-year college degree may lead to upward mobility. However, marketing strategies that fail to fully inform and prepare Latinx first-generation college applicants have inequitable impacts on this population. Such failures have both individual and societal long-term implications. Baum, Ma, and Payea (2013) found that the poverty rate among those with a bachelor's degree (five percent) was almost three times lower when compared to those with only a high school diploma (14 percent). In addition to income and employment benefits from attending college, other benefits from higher education include access to health insurance and pension benefits, as well as better health, and greater civic involvement (Baum et al., 2013).

All students should be able to make the most informed decision when selecting their college. Marketing selling their college instead of meeting students where they are can cause mismatched information. This can lead students to possibly attend an undermatched institution based on their limited knowledge. Studies have shown the impact a four-year degree has on a person's personal and professional outlook. As such, it

is important to better understand how first-generation Latinx students are affected by UNP's marketing in their college choice process.

Research Question

Based on the literature I read, prior studies have focused on high school-aged first-generation students, Latinx students, or marketing and college choice as separate topics. Focusing on the perceptions of a small group of first-generation Latinx students experience at a four-year institution located in the Pacific Northwest region of the U.S., this basic qualitative research study identifies important considerations for how to better serve first-generation Latinx students and create equitable college marketing and recruitment practices. This basic qualitative research study used a qualitative approach to explore how the University of Northwest Pacific's marketing affects the college choice process of Latinx first-generation college students.

This study was guided by the research questions below:

1. How do first-generation Latinx students overcome adversity when working through the college choice process?

2. How do first-generation Latinx students admitted to UNP leverage their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice process?

3. How is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing?

The study explored the students' college choice process to better understand how marketing affected their experiences and how a student selects a four-year institution.

Specifically, this study focused on the experiences of 12 first-generation Latinx students who decided to apply to and attend the University of Northwest Pacific (UNP).

Definition of Terms

The study will be using the following terms and concepts throughout the paper.

Adversity. Adversity in this study is defined as negative life events or challenges that people experience in their lifetime that can cause undue stress (Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010; Croft, Dunn, & Quaisbach, 2014; Johnson, 2019). These life events can include various forms of negative experiences that can be considered common experiences or severe experiences (Croft et al., 2014). Common experiences can include events like discrimination because of someone's ethnic/racial background and/or financial hardship, and on the severe end, injuries, illness, or family death (Croft et al., 2014). The types of adversity the participants in the study spoke about fell in the common experiences. Participants spoke about family issues that impacted their mindset and factored in how they weighed their college decisions. It also included how participants immigration status put undue stress in their lives and impacted their college decisions. All the participants faced various forms of adversity which helps highlight how students worked to overcome these challenges.

College Choice Experience. When referencing the college choice experience, I will be referring to how first-generation Latinx students experience researching, applying, and visiting colleges, gaining information about the college through peers, evaluating college, and making their college selection. This includes the predisposition, the search, and the choice stages of the college choice model.

First-generation college students. According to Engle and Tinto (2008), a *first-generation college student* is someone whose parents did not earn a bachelor's degree. First-generation college students come from diverse social and cultural backgrounds (Engle & Tinto, 2008). Additionally, many first-generation college students share challenges in common, such as delayed entry to college after completing high school, limited college choices by staying closer to home, living off campus, and working full-time while attending school part-time (Engle & Tinto, 2008).

Engle and Tinto's (2008) definition also falls in line with the University of Northwest Pacific's TRiO program definition of a first-generation college student. Anyone not identified as a first-generation student will be classified as a 'continuing-generation' student. TRiO is not an acronym, but instead refers to the three original programs created by the federal government: Upward Bound, Talent Search, and Student Support Service (TRiO Student Support Services. n.d.).

Latinx. Terminology like Hispanic, Latino, Latina, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, and others will also be used per the referenced literature. Although other terms exist, such as Hispanic, the term Hispanic was not used because it has had and continues to be a problematic term for newer generations and advocacy groups (Villanueva Alarcón et al., 2022). Additionally, the terms Chicano, Chicana, and Chicanx can be too narrow, often referring to individuals of Mexican descent (Nostrand, 1973). This study wanted to encompass a wider audience of individuals. Latinx will also be used to describe the Hispanic/Latino/Latina populations. The term *Latinx* is a relatively new term when compared to Latino or Hispanic (Vidal-Ortiz & Martínez, 2018). The term Hispanic first

originated in the 1980s by the U.S. government to describe people from Spanish-speaking

countries that included those located in North, Central, and South America (Delgado-

Romero, Manlove, Manlove, & Hernandez, 2007). The U.S. later adopted Latino to

encompass a wider community that included non-Spanish speaking countries (e.g.,

Caribbean islands, Brazil, Belize, people of mixed race) (Salinas Jr. & Lozano, 2017).

However, as Salinas Jr. and Lozano (2017) explained, since 2014, the term Latinx began

to appear online through various social media platforms, and by 2016, there was a spike

in usage.

Salinas Jr. and Lozano (2017) also mentioned that Latinx has become a more

inclusive term when compared to other terms like Latinos. The term has been referred to

as a more inclusive term for the LGBTQ community and folks who are gender non-

conforming by removing the gender-oriented terms Latino and Latina. In keeping with

this objective of being inclusive, the term Latinx will be used throughout the paper in

relation to the literature and to provide space to the individuals who identify as Latinx.

Although Latiné is a newer term now being used in place of Latinx (Villanueva Alarcón

et al., 2022), the term Latiné was not used by any of the participants during the study; as

such, I have elected to keep the term Latinx.

Marketing. The American Marketing Association (n.d.) defines marketing as

"the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering,

and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at

large." Marketing can be seen as another method of communication in which an

organization seeks to communicate with its clients, partners, and society.

Wright (2014) explained that marketing in higher education has become 'profit-focused', much like businesses, in order for schools to increase revenue. With the use of marketing, institutions can reach a wide audience through different forms of communication that include social media, phones, websites, blogs, targeted ads, billboards, and brochures (Kuzma & Wright, 2013). Marketing is a means by which organizations inform and educate customers by describing the product and its value (Hartman, 2019; Mansoor, 2019). Marketing communication combines sales and education to inform its target customers. Through marketing, higher education institutions can help students learn about their school, as well as help them understand the reasons why their institution might be the best choice. Marketing can also serve as a form of support in recruitment. Recruitment is the act of attracting students to the institution, while marketing helps to build communication to attract those students.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the statement of the problem was introduced by providing an overview of the current issues and trends affecting college marketing and first-generation Latinx students. The chapter proceeded to discuss the background of the problem in a historical, social, economic, and political context – by discussing the increased Latinx population, decreased enrollment rates, pressures faced by colleges, and lack of progression in Latinx students' four-year college enrollment.

The chapter also discussed the significance of the study and introduced the research questions that guided the study. This basic qualitative research study sought to explore how UNP's marketing strategies affected the college choice process of a group of

first-generation Latinx students through qualitative interviews that can help inform best

practices in admissions and recruitment at four-year institutions.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

In the first part of chapter two, I review sociologists' contributions to the literature on social and cultural capital—two frameworks that guide this study. I divide the second part of chapter two into three sections. In part two-section one, I review the research on college choice models. In section two, I focus on three common factors that influence college choice: parents, peers, and high school counselors. In section three, I discuss the student-as-consumer model that includes branding, segmentation, and college recruitment tools.

Theoretical Framework

Social capital. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the sum of resources that are connected to a network that an individual has access to (institutionalized and non-institutionalized). Additionally, Smith (2007) refers to social capital as "an intangible form of capital that refers to having access to privileged channels of information and resources via social relationships" (p.37). These two definitions of social capital explain how advantageous social networks are to the academic success of continuing-generation students. If a parent went to college, then there is a good chance they would have friends, family members, or co-workers who attended college as well. With the network in mind, if one person does not have certain information in terms of admission, college selection, or even financial aid, they can rely on another person within their networks to assist with the unknown. Although continuing-generation students have access to people with college knowledge, first-generation students may have a different experience as, most

often, they have limited college knowledge to tap into in their networks (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Because colleges reflect the cultural knowledge and experiences of middle to upper-income continuing-generation students, first-generation Latinx students have limited resources, skills, and knowledge to navigate the higher education system.

      Social and cultural capital lenses can help to provide context for understanding how advantages and disadvantages present themselves for first-generation Latinx students. Social capital is also framed in terms of having the right people in a person's social network (Wells, 2008). The right people are those who have friends, family, acquaintances, or others in their network that can assist them through the challenges they face. Social capital can also be referred to as "currency" in the sense that a person or family can increase their social capital through the people they know (Tornatzky, Cutler, & Lee, 2002). In terms of capital, the more currency you have, or people with knowledge, the more social capital you possess. The currency here is the knowledge the network possesses and how those in the network leverage it to their advantage.

      The lack of dominant social and cultural capital by first-generation Latinx students should be acknowledged, as both first- and continuing-generation students are influenced by family and friends when deciding to attend college (Choy, 2001). In this case, first-generation students often do not have the people (resources) to assist them with navigating the higher education landscape. Social capital often manifests itself in terms most often used today, 'it matters who you know,' as who you know can help someone gain certain advantages (e.g., jobs, access to schools, internships, etc.). Bloom (2008) expanded on the concept of social capital by stating that social capital, as well as cultural

capital, allows families and students who are not first-generation to use their social circles

to gain advantages. Having social capital gives students who are in the know the ability to

navigate the college choice process with more ease. First-generation students navigating

the higher education system can often face difficulties because there is a disconnect

between what knowledge a first-generation student possesses and the knowledge a

college assumes students should possess. In regards to academics, Conley (2005)

explained that there is often a disconnect between academic preparation in high school

and expectations in college that often affect student adjustments. The disconnect is hard

to mend if a student has parents who did not attend college. Beyond academic

preparation, there is also a disconnect with the admission process. For example,

continuing-generation students can rely on a parent who attended college to assist them

through the college choice process. Walpole (2003) also explained that individuals who

are from the same social class often have the same goals and aspirations in mind, so

people who attend college will most likely be in the same circles as those who attended

college. Social capital is a source of advantage, whereas disadvantage arises from having

limited context-relevant social capital.

     Tierney et al. (2005) argued that social capital is hard to obtain because those with

privilege and power are often intent on keeping their power. Coleman (1988) also

explains that social capital, like other forms of capital, can be referred to as a type of

currency that can make certain achievements possible. However, not all social capital is

equal, as Coleman (1988) explains that "a given form of social capital that is valuable in

facilitating certain actions may be useless or even harmful for others." (p. 98). Like

Tierney et al. (2005), Coleman (1988) helped to explain that those in power hold the dominant social capital, while those not in power find the need to adjust and learn how to gain the dominant social capital. This is illustrated in Bloom's (2008) interviews when talking to students who possess two forms of social capital. One family, a first-generation immigrant family, explained that they had long working hours and hardly had the opportunity to interact and make American friends. They created a tight family network with supportive people but did not have anyone who had been to college. In sharp contrast, a continuing-generation family explained that the student had received an interview for a college internship, and their mother had a friend who was head of the program. These examples show that both families have social capital (individuals who have knowledge within their networks). However, one family possesses the dominant capital because their family has parents, and friends, that can assist with the college navigation. They then know how, and who to connect with, so they can leverage their network and help navigate the higher education system. For the first-generation family, because of the lack of dominant social capital, they must find ways to maneuver the higher education system with little help.

Cultural capital. Bourdieu (2013) discussed cultural capital as a set of cultural knowledge and skills an individual develops through their environment, in school, and at home (Coleman, 1994). It can be thought of in terms of 'knowing the ins and outs' of a system (e.g., the U.S. education system). In this case, cultural capital does not develop for first-generation college students as it does for continuing-generation students because their parents do not possess a set of cultural knowledge they can pass down (Wells,

2008). First-generation students would have a harder time developing cultural capital at

home because their parents would not be able to teach their children about the system of

higher education or its importance. This lack of insider information can pose a challenge

for first-generation Latinx students as they navigate the system of higher education.

Bourdieu (1986) explains that there are three forms that cultural capital can

present itself in, which include:

- *"embodied state*, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body;
- in the *objectified state*, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.); and
- in the *institutionalized state*, a form of objectification which must be set apart because, as will be seen in the case of educational qualifications, it confers entirely original properties on the cultural capital which it is presumed to guarantee." (p. 17)

Cultural capital within education can be seen with continuing-generation students as they

inherit knowledge from their parents. Since the parents went to college, they can help

their children socialize and accept that college is the logical next step after high school

(embodied). It can also present itself in the resources the child had growing up, for

example, books, dictionaries, or instruments at home (objectified state). Lastly, there is

institutionalized cultural capital, where the parent understands that to find a 'good job,',

the child needs a degree. Thus, the child is socialized to embody this mindset. Walpole

(2003) also defines cultural capital as "specialized or insider knowledge which is not

taught in schools, such as knowledge of high culture" (p. 49). For students wanting to

gain access to higher education, this would mean they need to know about the higher

education system. This foundational knowledge is made up of knowing when to apply,

how to apply, what questions to ask, or even how applications are evaluated. This is

important as Walpole (2003) argues that educators value certain cultural capital that is

often held by people in power, which places people in power at an even greater advantage

– as their cultural capital is held in high regard. Mehta, Newbold, and O'rourke (2011)

help to explain how first-generation students do not receive cultural capital from one

generation to the next, because traditions and norms regarding higher education do not

get passed on to first-generation students because their family lacks the familiarity of

higher education. Students without the familiarity, or knowledge, lack the skills or know-

how to be competitive in order to gain access to higher education. Not only do they have

a harder time navigating the college search, but students sometimes do not recognize the

importance of a college education and the benefits of attending college and getting a four-

year degree.

Cultural and social capital lenses lend themselves to analyzing the issue of how

first-generation Latinx students' college choice experience is affected by marketing.

However, the lenses are not perfect, and thus, their limitations must also be discussed.

Yosso (2005) discussed how critical theory helps to examine cultural and social capital

and explore the question, whose culture has capital? This question analyzes how society

values certain capital over others, and whose capital holds value. Yosso (2005) argues

that people from marginalized groups do possess social and cultural capital. Yosso argues

that cultural capital does not capture the emotional and moral support families provide

their children when they apply to and attend college. In fact, Yosso argues that the

dominant cultural capital framework fails to account for the success of Latinx students because it does not factor in familial emotional and cultural support.

Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth incorporates the experiences of students of color. It takes a more holistic view of the forms of capital a student of color possesses. These forms of capital include Aspirational Capital, Linguistic Capital, Familial Capital, Social Capital, Navigational Capital, and Resistant Capital. Aspirational capital considers how students continue to hold on to hopes and dreams and overcome barriers even when faced with challenges and obstacles. Linguistic capital considers the "intellectual and social skills" that students gain from their experiences, and their development of those communication skills, even in various languages (p. 78). Familial capital references the family and the knowledge the student gains from their family, community, and culture. Social capital refers to the people around the students, those whom they connect with and have access to. Navigational capital takes into account the student's ability to navigate through social institutions (e.g., higher education) that were not originally meant for people of color. Lastly, there is Resistance capital, which considers the student's ability to stand against inequality and fight against it. All of these forms of capital are interwoven with family, community, and history, which helps to highlight the strength and capital students of color possess. Yosso argues that the dominant forms of capital often ignore these forms of capital.

Previous research has identified examples of how these forms of capital are in communities of color. Delgado-Gaitan (1992) explored how Mexican-American parents socialize their children to care about education. The parents help build resilience and

adaptation in their children. The children learned to value education because of how their

parents built that culture. However, the cultural capital possessed by marginalized groups

is not weighted the same, and as such, individuals are perceived to be lacking or missing

capital (Valenzuela, 1999).

Unlike Yosso's model, Bourdieu's social and cultural capital frameworks

examine the issue from the viewpoint of students 'not having cultural and social capital.'

Bourdieu's model helps to illustrate how colleges that possess the dominant capital

operationalize in this space with the notion that students are expected to have the

dominant capital. The framework allows for the research to examine how not having

certain dominant capital affects the students' experience. The framework recognizes that

certain cultural and social capital is needed to navigate the higher education system. This

is because the education system in place expects students to come with certain specific

capital, and because of the system, the issues affecting first-generation Latinx students

exist.

Review of Research

Part I: College Choice Models

The literature regarding the college choice models continues to grow as

researchers continue adding to the knowledge pool. Scholars agree that the Chapman

College Choice model (1981), the Jackson College Choice model (1982), the Hanson and

Litten College Choice model (1982), and the Hossler and Gallagher College Choice

model (1987) have made the most significant contributions to the literature on college

choice. These college choice models, named after the researchers, serve as frameworks

that have helped additional research to build upon, each providing a different frame of reference (e.g., individual factors vs institutional factors).

Chapman's College Choice Model

Chapman's (1981) model was one of the first college choice models to take into account the student's background, and how it played an integral part in their college choice process. The model explains that there are a set of factors that include the student, which includes the student's characteristics and external characteristics. The student characteristics takes into account (1) their high school performance, (2) their level of educational aspiration, (3) their socioeconomic status, and (4) their aptitude. Regarding the external factors, this included (1) the influence of significant persons; (2) the fixed characteristics of the institution; and (3) the institution's own efforts to communicate with prospective students.

Chapman's research examined how the internal and external factors influenced the student's decision. However, in his research what he found most surprising was that printed college materials did not have a significant impact. Chapman's research confirmed research by Chapman and Johnson (1979) who also indicated that printed material at the time had not impacted the student's decision when they considered an institution. Chapman (1981) stated that students in the study did not select a college based on what they read on printed materials.

Rather, they were more persuaded by things like cost, where their friends decided to go to school, and the availability of desired programs. Students reported that they read the printed materials primarily to confirm decisions they had already made (p.501).

Although insight was gained on how internal and external factors played a role in a student's college decision, Chapman's research did not differentiate first-generation versus continuing-generation students, or how the ethnic/racial backgrounds of a student affected choice. Additionally, with the development of new technology and tools, it would be hard to examine how current marketing (e.g., through the use of technology) affects current students in their choice process.

Jackson's College Choice Model

Building on Chapman's work, Jackson's (1982) model expanded on the idea of college choice. Jackson's model included 3 phases in the student's choice process. In phase 1, Preference, the student's family background (e.g., first-generation students), social context (e.g., the influence of peers), academic achievement (e.g., GPA), and aspiration all shaped the student's initial list of colleges selected. In Phase 2, Exclusion, students begin to eliminate schools from their list of colleges. This phase takes into consideration the school's cost, location, requirements, and offerings. The third and final phase, evaluation, is when students are faced with many options and begin to narrow down their colleges to choose from; if they decide to attend school, there is a rating scheme used to select their best option.

For the most part, Jackson's model ignores how students built their initial college list and what motivated them to continue (Litten, 1982). However, Jackson's research showed that one of the strongest factors found to influence a student's choice was their socioeconomic status. Jackson (1982) believed in being equitable with students in all aspects. He stated that "treating citizens equitably calls, for example, for aid programs

[to] support students according to their need, not the choice they would make in the absence of aid" (p.246). Jackson's sentiment to take into account a student's needs is an equitable perspective and is important as the population of students continues to diversify, and the need to reach the students requires more than a blanket approach.

Hanson and Litten College Choice Model

For colleges, their marketing strategies needed to be informed by students' behaviors because of the benefits gained from understanding their customers (Litten, 1982). Thus, gaining a deeper understanding of the choice process was of importance. Hanson and Litten (1982) wanted to expand on the work of Chapman (1981), which was deemed to come from an economic standpoint, and Jackson's (1982), which provided a public policy viewpoint. Hanson and Litten's (1982) model expanded by combining both models to include Jackson's student-based model and Chapman's institutional-based model (Vrontis, Thrassou, & Melanthiou, 2007). Hanson and Litten's model expanded the phases beyond just 3 stages in the college choice process. The model broke the stages as follows:

Stage 1: (1) Desire to attend college and (2) Decision to attend

Stage 2: (3) Investigation of institutions

Stage 3: (5) Admission, (6) Enrollment

The model took into account financial aid and its implications in the college choice process. The model also took into consideration external factors that influence a student's choice like race, gender, economic background, family education, as well as college characteristics. Hanson and Litten's research found that there were distinct differences

between students of color and white students as students of color started their search

later, took longer in the process, and made their decision later as well. Additionally, they

found that first-generation students relied heavily on high school counselors as their

parents could not assist them like parents of continuing-generation students. Lastly,

Litten (1982) posed that college choice models are left for institutions to decide whether

differentiating their recruitment strategies was an economic or philosophical matter.

From a philosophical perspective, an equitable approach would matter just as much as an

economic stance would.

Hossler and Gallagher College Choice Model

Lastly, there is Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) model, which is perhaps the most

used model by researchers today. They streamlined the college choice process into three

stages. These stages included the predisposition, search, and choice stages. During the

predisposition stage students are making the choice to attend college. During

predisposition, both internal (e.g., academic motivation) and external factors (e.g., family

and friends) influence the student's decision to attend college. Once a decision to attend

college has been reached, the students move to the second stage. In the search stage,

students are conducting the collection of information and carefully comparing the

characteristics of each institution they are considering. This takes into account the cost of

attendance, the institution's academic excellence, the student resources available, as well

as the values of the institution. Lastly, it is the choice stage, where the student has

decided to apply to the colleges of their choice and ultimately make the decision to attend

a particular institution. Much like the previous combined models, Hossler and Gallagher

continued to use a combined framework where individual factors were taken into consideration (e.g., academic preparation) as well as organizational factors (e.g., school characteristics). Hossler and Gallagher's college choice model is the most widely used and cited model in the literature (Bergerson, 2009; Freeman & Gao, 2011; Niu & Tienda, 2008; Stewart, 2017). Iloh (2018) adds that the model "has been commonly adopted as the dominant framework to understand college enrollment" (p.230).

Although Hossler and Gallagher's model provides the framework from which to work from, there is criticism of its limitations. Perna (2006) explains that the model still lacks valuable information on the process of non-traditional students, especially as the student population continues to diversify. Additionally, Ilho (2018) expands on this critique by pointing to how the model can exclude the experience of older than average students, those who attend multiple institutions, or students who may delay their entrance right out of high school.

Hamrick and Stage (2004) also express the need to take a deeper look and consideration on how race and ethnicity and the factors that play into the choice process. Evidence by Glick and White (2004) adds to this criticism as they point out that the college choice process for prospective college students varies due to their social and cultural background. In acknowledging the gap in the research, there is a need to explore the experience of first-generation Latinx students through the college choice model. Specifically, three external factors highlighted in the college choice research were parents, peers, and high school counselors, who have a significant influence on first-generation students and students of color. These three factors, parents, peers, and high

school counselors, will be explored in more detail to understand their impact on the first-generation Latinx student's college choice process.

Part II: Parental, Peer, and Counselor Influence

Parental Influence

There has been plenty of research that has shown that parental involvement has a significant effect on the student's aspiration and motivation to pursue higher education (Bryan & Simmons, 2009; Bui & Rush, 2016; Fann, McClafferty Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009; Gofen, 2009; Pascarella et al., 2004; Wartman & Savage, 2008). This can be especially important for first-generation students and students of color (Espino, 2016; Kao, 2004; M. J. Smith, 2008; Stuart, 2010). Among all racial and ethnic groups, research has shown that parental influence has the strongest influence on continuing education for Latinx and African American students (Qian & Blair, 1999). Recognizing the impact parental influence has on first-generation Latinx students is important because it can help highlight how the parents' experiences can potentially bias students' views on education and the ramifications that can come from those views (Auerbach, 2003). Even without having personal experience in higher education, evidence shows a higher percentage of first-generation students continue into higher education with parents who remain involved in their student's lives and instill the idea of higher education as meaningful (Wartman & Savage, 2008). Still, Fann et al. (2009) explain that the parents have limitations with how much they can help. This limitation is usually their knowledge of the higher education system in the United States and the complexities that come with applying to college. This was illustrated by Torrez (2004), whose survey indicated that 75

percent of Latinx parents wanted their students to pursue higher education, but admitted to not having financial and academic input.

The most apparent difference between first-generation and continuing-generation students is the fact that first-generation students have parents who did not complete college, while continuing-generation students have parents who have completed a degree. The distinctions between the parents are more complicated than going or not going to college, as these differences manifest themselves in several ways. For example, a longitudinal study was conducted that followed high school students for 10 years (2002-2012) to analyze the completion rate among first-generation and continuing-generation students (Lauff & Ingels, 2013). The difference between the student completion rates was remarkably noticeable, as 17 percent of the first-generation students completed their degree in 10 years, compared to 46 percent of continuing-generation students (Lauff & Ingels, 2013). This is important to note as the lower percentage of first-generation students completing their degree means that the odds of their children completing college are lower as well. It can become a cycle that affects parents and children every generation. Other ways that parental education can impact students are economically and linguistically. When comparing first-generation students to continuing-generation students, the percentage of first-generation students who come from a low-income family is higher, by more than two times the rate, than that of a continuing-generation household (Redford & Mulvaney Hoyer, 2017). Additionally, first-generation students are also more likely to be limited in their college options, with fewer first-generation students attending private nonprofit institutions than continuing-generation students (Redford & Mulvaney

Hoyer, 2017). Furthermore, the number of first-generation students who are native

English speakers is lower than continuing-generation students (Redford & Mulvaney

Hoyer, 2017; Pascarella, et. al, 2004). If the students come from a home where English is

not the native language, especially immigrant families, then the student faces language

and cultural barriers (Kanno & Varghese, 2010). First-generation students can overcome

these barriers, with support and persistence.

Dyce, Albold, and Long (2012) explained how parental involvement is important

to a student's aspiration to continue on to college. They referenced Hossler and

Gallagher's model of college choice (i.e., predisposition, search, and choice) when

discussing their findings. Dyce et al. (2012) explain that parental involvement is crucial

as predisposition occurs early in high school, and even before. With encouragement,

students begin to build aspirations for college education as early as middle school. If a

parent did not attend college, they may be unable to encourage their child to pursue

something they know little about. As students search for colleges and potential careers to

pursue, parental encouragement becomes an increasingly more important part of the

process (Dyce et al., 2012). Without a college education, the parents' knowledge of

certain professions, like medical professionals, education practitioners, or lawyers, can be

very limited. The final phase, choice, is where students make their decision on what to

pursue. If a parent has not attended college, they cannot help the student navigate the

choice process. However, the research also recognizes that through all three phases,

external influences also have an effect (e.g., parents' income) (Dyce et al., 2012). Dyce et

al. (2012) help examine how first-generation students are disadvantaged when navigating

the college search and admission process.

Parental Influence carries weight in other aspects of the student's choices.

Kuz'mina's (2014) research found that a student's choice of major was not as impacted

by the academic resources available to them but instead by the parents' "cultural and

educational level and values" (p. 54). Researchers have recognized parents' importance

and examined how parents can learn to assist their students. Fann et al. (2009) found that

their college workshops needed to address the concerns and needs of Latinx parents so

that the parents could better support their students. Through their research, they found

that the parents felt better equipped to support their students if they could learn more

about "(a) financial aid, (b) general information about the university and college system,

(c) the process of applying for college, (d) academic requirements for college admission,

and (e) tests required for college admission" (p. 384). The findings in their study were

supported by Zarate and Pachon (2006), who found that parents who did not themselves

go to college were less equipped to support their students when their student went

through the college process.

For first-generation students, it can be a multitude of factors that negatively affect

them in their college choice process. Additionally, their parent's limited knowledge of

their college choice process can be problematic. Pair the barriers students face with the

college recruitment practices and it can compound the barriers. Institutions can make

efforts to support students as they take the first step toward a bachelor's degree. Dyce et

al. (2012) research helped examine how parental confidence and support affected their

students' pursuit of higher education. Their survey results helped inform the parent

program they worked with; to better assist parents and students. However, because of the

quantitative method approach (surveys) that was used, the results were limited. Deeper,

richer qualitative data was not gathered to support quantitative results. A qualitative

approach, such as interviews, could have also provided additional information. This

would have provided richer information in understanding motivation and whether

motivation looked different for students and parents. Still, it is hard to ignore the

evidence in the literature pointing to how more parental involvement and influence

positively affect first-generation Latinx students pursuing higher education.

Peer Influence

Research has shown the influence peers can have on students as the student

prepares for college and begins their college search (Kim & Gasman, 2011). When using

the Hossler and Gallagher college choice model, the decision to apply to college can be

influenced by peers during the search stage (Kim & Gasman, 2011). During the search

stage, students begin to identify colleges to apply to; research has shown that peers have a

significant influence on students, as evidenced by how much the student's college list

widens or shrinks (Kim & Gasman, 2011). Having friends who are like-minded or have

the same aspirational goals can have significant effects on students as well. Alvarado and

López Turkey (2012) explain that it is important to take into consideration the social

capital among friends as friends are the ones that often support each other during their

college choice process. The support can be in the form of reminders of deadlines or

assistance with applications. Furthermore, Alvaro and López Turkey (2012) found that

having zero college-oriented friends versus those who had one or more showed a

significant likelihood of not applying to college. They also found that the larger the group

of college-bound friends a student had, the higher the likelihood of them applying to

college. However, they found that for Latinx students, having less college-oriented

friends did not have as much of a significant impact when compared to White students.

The researchers explain that familial influence may make the impact on Latinx students

less significant. For Latinx students, the family has a strong and prominent role in college

aspiration and attendance (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 1995).

Moreover, Manski (2000) discusses how social interactions with peers affect

students in various ways. Manski defines three types of social effects: endogenous

effects, contextual effects, and correlated effects. Fletcher (2015) expands on these three

effects and how peer-to-peer influence affects students during the college choice process.

For example, endogenous effects can occur if an individual is more likely to enroll in

college if their classmates enroll; while contextual effects can occur if an individual is

more likely to enroll in college if they are surrounded by classmates with highly educated

parents; or there is correlated effects, which are not social in nature but can occur if

individuals in the same school choose to enroll in college because they are geographically

close to a college (p.495).

Fletcher explains that by recognizing and understanding the type of effects peers

have on students, colleges can use the information to improve their recruitment practices.

Fletcher suggests that colleges take into consideration how friends affect student

recruitment. For example, if a college has an initiative to increase diversity, then it can

look for schools that might have the kind of demographics they are hoping to recruit. By understanding the endogenous effect, colleges can increase diversity by targeting the intended group. The side effect of this effort is that those students who choose to attend their institution can also influence their friend's behavior and increase the likelihood that the friend will attend as well. This is because the endogenous effect explains that students are more likely to enroll if their classmates are enrolling already. Additionally, supporting Alvaro and López Turkey's (2012) findings, Fletcher (2015) found that peers' decision to attend college also affects a student's decision to attend college.

With regard to attending a four-year institution, Sokatch (2006) found that peer influence to attend a four-year institution was strong among minority high school students. His research found that peers were strongly influenced by their friends' college wishes and plans. This influence was a "powerful and robust predictor of 4-year enrollment for low-income, urban and minority high school graduates" (p. 141). Sokatch (2006) stressed the implication of such findings by encouraging colleges to use research to better inform their recruitment of low-income, urban, and minority high school graduates. Sokatch's (2006) implications of minority students supported Tierney, Corwin, and Colyar's (2005) implications as well. Tierney et al. (2005) also discussed peer influence and its strength and suggested that colleges would be wise to develop programming where peer groups are seen and used as resources to improve recruitment of underrepresented groups of students. Recruitment of minority students is imperative as research has shown that there is unequal access to college resources, among different demographic groups (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). This is especially crucial as students

seek to "make an informed college choice decision" that will affect the rest of their lives

(Pérez & McDonough, 2008, p. 250). When Pérez and McDonough examined factors like

race, socio-economic status, gender, and college generational status, evidence showed

that these factors influenced the resources students had available to them, as well as the

effects it had on their college choice.

Peer influence can have an impact beyond the decision to attend or not attend

college. Kim (2004) also found that Latinx students who indicated their peers as being

most influential in their college selection were less likely to enroll at the college of their

choice if a peer selected another school. Person and Rosenbaum (2006) also supported

Kim's (2004) findings, noting that when comparing Latinx and non-Latinx students,

Latinx students identified family and friends as one of, or the most, influential reasons for

enrolling at an institution.

Person and Rosenbaum (2006) explain that family and community are important

to Latinx students and this can have a profound effect that can be illustrated using the

chain migration model. The chain migration model can help to explain how peer

influence can manifest during the college choice process, explaining that students might

> "(a) apply or select colleges where someone they know has preceded them, or (b)
>
> apply or choose a college along with someone they know, or (c) seek out contacts
>
> once at the college" (p. 254).

This chain of people is, or becomes, a social network a student can tap into. The network

of peers and friends a student has access to contributes to the types of social capital they

can share and use (Gibson, Gandara, & Koyama, 2004). In other words, if a student has

access to friends who have knowledge about higher education (social capital), then the student can benefit from the friend's social capital, which helps them learn and gain college knowledge. The opposite can also hold true, where a student who does not have access to peers or friends with knowledge about higher education may have limited resources and assistance, and ultimately also limited college choices (Pérez & McDonough, 2008).

Recognizing peers' influence on a student's college choice helps inform recruitment and marketing practices. This is especially true for students who might not possess as much dominant cultural and social capital. Pérez and McDonough (2008) found that creating well-informed students, families, and friends could be beneficial to students as they go through their college search process, stating that

> "if Latina/o families, students, and their friends were better versed in college knowledge perhaps this would increase their prospects for college choices and expand their thinking about options that are better suited for their needs" (p. 262).

In addition to parents and high school counselors, research has identified peers as having a significant impact on Latinx students' college choice (Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Peer influence is important to recognize for Latinx students because when comparing Latinx students to other ethnic and racial groups, Latinx students are still less likely to apply and enroll in four-year institutions if their peers do not (Solorzano, Villalpando, & Osguera, 2005). Recognizing that parents, peers, and counselors can significantly impact Latinx students during their college selection process becomes important for colleges to seek to improve their recruitment and marketing practices (Ceja, 2004).

High School Counselors

In addition to parental and peer impact, there are also high school counselors who can positively or negatively affect the student experience. First-generation Latinx students may not possess as much dominant cultural and social capital; as such, this can affect their experience - as they may lack "knowledge about college degrees, persistence, and retention resources" (Tello & Lonn, 2017, p. 350). This premise is supported by previous research that has also shown that first-generation students cannot build dominant social and cultural capital regarding the school system because first-generation parents cannot pass on their capital (Lundberg, Schreiner, Hovaguimian, & Slavin Miller, 2007; Ward et al., 2012). With a knowledge gap, high school counselors can support in making these connections for first-generation Latinx students as they work through the college choice process (Tello & Lonn, 2017).

Additionally, Simmons (2011) explains that vulnerable populations like first-generation Latinx high school students may not have the adequate social capital because they do not have the social network to navigate the complexities of higher education. Further, Simmons (2011) notes that this is worsened by underfunded schools, where students greatly outnumber counselors; with a national average of 460 high school students per high school counselor (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & DuPont, 2010). This can be detrimental to students as the American School Counselor Association (n.d.) recommends a ratio of 250 students per 1 counselor. Thus, students who may need to, or want to, visit counselors cannot. Instead, first-generation students who do not possess as much dominant social or cultural capital, and need the extra assistance, may not find it with a high school counselor. On the opposite side of the spectrum, Bryan, Holcomb-

McCoy, Moore-Thomas, and Day-Vines (2009) found that students in schools with additional resources and fewer students were more likely to visit and use the assistance of high school college counselors. One challenge for students when accessing the help of counselors is the counselor's limited knowledge. Simmons (2011) explains that "counselors normally do not receive intensive college counseling training nor do they benefit from specialized academic programs targeting college access" (p. 243). Without the proper training, or knowledge of specialized programs, a counselor can only be so helpful to students as they go through their college choice process. This is then worsened when students perceive counselors as unhelpful.

Vela-Gude et al. (2009) interviewed Latinx high school graduates about their high school experience with their counselors. Vela-Guee et al. (2009) found that the students perceived counselors to be inadequate (e.g., just handing them a brochure), lacked availability, and had low expectations for them (e.g., persuading students not to take AP courses). Low expectations for Latinx students and underrepresented students are not uncommon and can often serve as barriers to going to college (Martinez, 2003). The negative experiences Latinx students go through with a high school college counselor (e.g., lack of availability or inadequate training) can also be linked to under-resourced counselors. Without cultural competency training and having deficient resources to support each student adequately, counselors are unable to operate optimally. The situation also puts the students in a predicament where they have to navigate the process on their own. One student commented about their experience of entering higher education without sufficient information as follows:

> My counselor was never there, and I honestly believe that if she would have been
> there, if she would have given me that information about scholarships, about
> college opportunities, and all of these other opportunities that I could have gotten
> as a first-generation college student whose background is not all that academic,
> then I would have been able to, with, scholarships and everything, I think I would
> have been able to achieve a lot more than I eventually did. (Martinez, 2003,
> p.275)

In this case, the student needed additional help that would not be available at home or

within their social network. The student was left to navigate the process of searching,

applying, and selecting the right college on their own. This is not to place blame on the

counselor or the profession. As discussed earlier, there are evident issues (e.g., funding)

that are out of the control of high school counselors that affect their work and, ultimately,

the students. However, if a first-generation Latinx student cannot receive adequate

support and information at home or school, where should a student search for help?

Perhaps this space can also be assisted by higher education institutions, and the initiatives

they create to help first-generation Latinx students become well-informed consumers.

However, current trends of selling the college experience can pose challenges and

barriers. This is because once a student decides to attend college, they must initiate their

college research, and this is where the exposure to recruitment and marketing materials

comes into play.

Part III: Marketing as a Tool in Higher Education

This section will focus on the literature on college marketing. Specifically, how

marketing has evolved, and the changes in the models used by colleges. The section will

continue by discussing two marketing strategies (branding and segmentation) and the

three most common tools colleges use. Lastly, the section will also discuss literature

regarding culturally relevant marketing.

Marketing

Marketing to students is not new, however, access to students with the help of

technology has become easier than ever. Technology, in this case, often refers to the use

of the internet to gain access to students through their computers, smartphones, and other

devices. However, using the internet itself does not guarantee success for college

marketing, and in some instances, it can lead to overloading students with information.

With the development of technology, colleges are finding themselves hiring new staff to

help keep up with the growing changes (Hanover Research, 2014). With the mass amount

of data that schools have at their disposal, they have also had to integrate managing

systems. Colleges across the country are finding themselves using customer relationship

management (CRM) software. These tools help universities keep track of the students

from inquiry to matriculation. According to Salesforce (a CRM provider), a CRM is

defined as "a technology for managing all your company's relationships and interactions

with customers and potential customers" ("What is CRM?," n.d.). It is hard not to notice

that the software being used (customer relationship management) helps track the

'customer' – in this case, the student. By not labeling students as customers, colleges can

sometimes ignore the importance of making them well-informed customers. As noted by

Guilbault (2016), "considering that who is viewed as the customer influences policies and

practices, excluding the student from the role of customer has an impact on student

satisfaction and retention" (p. 137). The debate on whether students should be perceived

as customers and the effects of labeling students as 'customers' has been contentious in

higher education. Guilbault (2016) notes that educators in higher education have

especially challenged the debate on whether or not a student is perceived as a customer.

For this section, because of the models being discussed, students will also be referred to

as 'buyers' or 'customers' interchangeably.

Howard and Seth (1969) were among the first to present buyer behavior theories

through their model of consumer behavior. Their model was composed of three elements

that included motives, alternatives, and decision mediators. Motives in the model refer to

the reason a student seeks higher education. Once a student builds their list of colleges,

they will undoubtedly have alternatives (e.g., College A vs B vs C). Lastly, decision

mediators help with the selection of a school, and for students, their mediators can

include their parents and friends. Additional research about buyer behavior has

contributed to the modernization of the model, which includes additional details about a

'buyers' list and how they create their list of choices (Narayana & Makin, 1975). The

buyer list is often referred to as the evoked list, the list of schools a student narrows their

choices to, before making their ultimate decision. Understanding how students think and

behave has allowed colleges to leverage their messaging through their marketing efforts.

For example, Tavares and Cardoso (2013) found that students think of college as a means

for economic mobility, which is a factor that motivates their attendance; a college degree

can lead to a job. However, marketing has continuously needed to evolve, and so has the

consumer model.

In an updated consumer model, Court, Elzinga, Mulder, and Vetvik (2009) reported that consumers have changed their behavior over time and now seek additional information that influences how they conduct their research and how they buy. Court et al. (2009) have urged marketers to change their marketing trends in order to catch up to the consumer and their use of technology. Marketing is seen as a tool used to create touchpoints, or moments where marketing can influence consumers to pull them one way or another (Court et al., 2009).

The traditional consumer model was more of a funnel with five stages: Awareness, Familiarity, Consideration, Purchase, and Loyalty. At the top, awareness is the widest part of the funnel, with the funnel shrinking as consumers move from awareness to loyalty (Court et al., 2009). The model captured the consumer decision journey, where the consumer starts at the widest end of the traditional funnel by becoming aware of certain brands. Then, moving down the narrowing funnel to finally make the decision to buy a product and become loyal to the brand (Court et al., 2009). Court et al. (2009) added that the need to evolve the traditional consumer decision journey needs to shift from a one-way communication strategy to a two-way communication strategy. Where the marketers and consumers get to interact and constantly evolve to meet the customer demand.

Colleges can be effective with their marketing by understanding where to reach consumers and recognizing where to make the greatest impact. Court et al. (2009) summarize this strategy by stating that the chances to influence a consumer's behavior can be led by "reaching consumers in the right place at the right time with the right

message" (p. 2). The touchpoints consumers are exposed to through marketing help build their consideration set; the brands (colleges) that the consumer considers as options (Court et al., 2009). However, Court et al. (2009) argued that the linear consumer model does not fit current trends, and instead, the consumer journey model is a circular journey.

Their consumer journey research found that the number of advertisements consumers faced (e.g., commercials, ads, newspapers, billboards) often led them to narrow their consideration set and ended up with a smaller set than previously thought. Thus, the first change between the old model and the new journey model was brand consideration and how many brands someone first considers. The fact that the list is smaller (smaller set) makes it important for 'brands' (e.g., colleges) to make it into the initial set; as they can be up to three times as likely to be purchased (selected).

The second change in the new consumer journey is to empower consumers. Pushing marketing on consumers no longer works (Court et al., 2009). Instead, the new consumer journey model takes into account the fact that marketing is now consumer-driven. Consumer-driven advertising takes into account the fact that consumers get their information from word-of-mouth and internet information sites (e.g., google reviews, amazon reviews, U.S. News Weekly). Recognizing the power companies have over other consumers becomes important. Thus, customer satisfaction becomes important as customers with a positive experience will help sell to other consumers.

Lastly, the journey takes into account the understanding that there are two types of loyalists, active loyalists and lazy loyalists. Active loyalists are those who will actively tell others about the brand. A lazy loyalist chooses a brand out of convenience and can be

swayed to choose another at any time. By categorizing the customers (students), the colleges can begin to understand who to target and when. Court et al. (2009) state that the marketing department should change its tactics from pushing products onto customers and instead informing them, supporting them, and making their experience enjoyable so that the consumer can make their own decisions. This can ultimately lead to customer satisfaction, which can help generate more customers. The new consumer journey considers the idea that once a customer has made a selection, it does not automatically mean loyalty. Additionally, if a customer is not satisfied, they can reenter the cycle and restart their journey once more.

The consumer model helps to illustrate how sophisticated marketing can get when targeting and attracting customers. Although college students do not go through the exact same experience, their college search and choice experience do parallel traditional marketing. In the case of prospective students, colleges want to ensure prospective students are aware of their school, with the goal of having the student attend the institution. Once a student enrolls, the college wants to ensure they have a good college experience so the student does not have to leave by dropping out or transferring out. Once a student completes their degree, the student can also help attract other students by 'reviewing' the institution through word-of-mouth or through online websites like Niche, Reddit, and College Confidential, which are websites where individuals can provide their reviews of a school.

Additional research has also shown that a customer's (student's) background also influences their journey. In the college choice process, the student's background (e.g.,

ethnicity, sex, age, parent's college experience) affects their experience and, ultimately,

their selection. Specifically, Dawes and Brown's (2002) research highlighted how the

student's background influenced the number of institutions a student selected to apply to

(initial list). What they found supported research about the college choice process, where

first-generation students had a smaller list of colleges when compared to continuing-

generation students. In their research, Stephenson, Heckert, and Yerger (2016) also found

that one of the biggest factors influencing a student's behavior included family and

friends. In many cases, if the friend or family attended a specific school, this would also

have a major impact on the student's decision. The research helps to illustrate how

having dominant social and cultural capital (e.g., family and friends who attended

college) can assist with facets of the college choice process. This includes understanding

the college system, which can also be considered insider knowledge that can help make

informed decisions. An informed decision can include weighing the college's

opportunities – like major availability, price, size, location, and student support resources.

Marketing has become more aggressive over time and continues to highlight the

different aspects and strengths of the college experience (Klassen, 2001). To combat the

competition, colleges have had to develop different tools. One example of an admission

and recruitment tool is the viewbook. Viewbooks are increasingly popular as they

function as a tool to highlight anything from academics, social life, campus,

communities, and much more (Osei-Kofi, Torres, & Lui, 2013). The tool is typically used

to sell the college experience to prospective students and encourage them to attend the

school. Viewbooks are often in print and digital formats that are widely used by higher

education institutions (Primary Research Group, 2007). Osei-Kofi et al. (2013) also note

that the messaging shared through the materials can have a great impact because the

student can misinterpret the messaging that's guided by the marketer. In this case, those

with the dominant cultural and social capital can see and read beyond the message, and

imagery shared. Thus, students who do not possess that dominant cultural and social

capital are left to make their own assumptions. Marketing is key to drawing attention, and

the more a school is informed of a student's behavior the more they have to leverage.

One of the best tools to market an organization is the use of branding.

Branding

One of the most effective ways colleges communicate with students is by building

their brand. Branding is a form of marketing used to help an organization stand out

amongst the crowd. When building the brand, different components should all be unified,

which include admission materials, advertising, and public relations (Khanna, Jacob, &

Yadav, 2014). According to Aaker (2000), brand can be defined as a

> Distinguishing name and/or symbol (such as a logo, trademark, or package
> design) intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers,
> and to differentiate those goods or services from competitors who would attempt
> to provide products that appear to be identical (p. 7).

The importance of branding is crucial in any sector as it serves to capture the audience's

attention by ensuring one central message is delivered, with a significant image (e.g.,

logo), and ensuring people can connect with the brand (Anctil, 2008). This is especially

true for organizations that produce or sell the same commodity (e.g., education). Thus,

colleges ensure their institutional branding is well developed to allow for marketing to

differentiate them from others (Chapleo, 2010; Waeraas & Solbakk 2008). Moogan, Baron, and Bainbridge (2001) elaborated on the importance of standing out and having a recognizable brand by stating that colleges with strong brand recognition can be more successful in recruiting students. Stephenson et al. (2015) researched how branding affected the student college choice process, specifically when building their initial list of colleges. They found that branding was crucial for colleges, as recognition got them on the student's initial list of options. They also found that most schools had, on average, two schools that were their direct competition. In using Howard and Seth's buyer behavior model, one of the significant decision mediators were friends and family. More importantly, it was the friends and family who had attended the college.

How colleges communicate with students has changed over time, causing universities to adapt to a business model (Cooper, 2009). Marketing materials are used to garner attention from prospective students and parents, as well as disseminate information (Lewison & Hawes, 2007; Onsman, 2008). Still, colleges are finding themselves competing with one another for the best and brightest students. As the competition stiffens, colleges must move from mass marketing to target marketing (Lewison & Hawes, 2007). In addition, administrators have had to find ways to attract students, while also understanding the decision-making process of prospective students (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995).

To understand the prospective students (customers), colleges are imploring new strategies to gain new customer attention. Branding has become crucial for schools that wish to stand out and ensure they can attract students. In fact, just doing a simple Google

search of schools will provide numerous examples of schools using all at their disposal to make their mark. For example, some schools have their mascot represent everything about the school. One school used its 'cowboy' identity to draw students in, whether it was its marketing videos, website, or materials ("The University of Wyoming," n.d.). They encouraged people to become cowboys, explaining the reasons why they should become a cowboy and why the world needs more cowboys ("University of Wyoming," n.d.). This is an example of the strength branding can have if done correctly. However, because the messaging is superficial, it can leave out many important topics that students may wish to explore.

Segmentation

In marketing, the need to understand your student population is important. Not only to cater to their needs but also to understand how to identify specific groups of students – segments (Bock, Poole, & Joseph, 2014). Kotler and Keller (2011) expand on the idea of segmentation by explaining the important components of segments, where segments must:

"(1) Be easily identifiable and measurable;

(2) Be large and profitable enough to make it worthwhile to the organization;

(3) Be accessible with regard to communication and distribution;

(4) Be distinctively responsive to the organization's marketing efforts; and

(5) Meet the basic requirements for exchange (ready, willing, and able) and be sustainable over time" (p.121).

Segmentation allows colleges to identify a certain population of students (e.g., out-of-state students, international students, or children of alumni) who do not just meet the institution's requirements but can pay for school. The goal, of course, is not just to get the student to interact with the materials, but to illustrate that the school can meet their needs and expectations (Bock et al., 2014). Segmenting the student population can affect first-generation Latinx college students as they may not be prioritized as a targeted audience. Harrison-Walker (2010) refers to the strategy of segmentation as a process where colleges need to identify the right and wrong students (customers). According to Harrison-Walker (2010), the right customer can be someone who produces long-term profitability, while the wrong customers are those who are not profitable and require extra work. Under the method of segmentation, there is a possibility that first-generation students can be defined as the wrong customers as they have a higher attrition rate (no long-term profitability). A report by the National Center for Education Statistics (2018) found that 33 percent of first-generation college students left college without returning. The attrition rate would mean that first-generation college students could be viewed as unprofitable, especially in the long term. This is in comparison to continuing-generation students, where 14 percent of those students left without return. As Bock et al. (2014) explain, "right customers provide long-term revenue streams for the organization in the form of alumni gift-giving that can last for many years following graduation" (p. 202). Colleges thus hope to find the right customers who can provide the most revenue while they attend college, and even after graduation.

As the internet has advanced, colleges are finding themselves turning to every sort of channel to connect with students. Hartley and Morphew (2008) refer to current college marketing ploys as ads or billboards that are 'selling' an experience to the students and, in some ways, indicating that "this product will make you happy, meet your every need, help you succeed –even make you rich" (p. 688). Researchers who have reviewed college marketing materials have found that schools often highlight their strengths, which can include academics, athletics, diversity, co-curricular activities, and admission and financial aid information (Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Hite & Yearwood, 2001). In showing their strengths, colleges want to ensure that students know what they can expect and get from the school. Urciuoli (2003) expands on this idea by pointing out that college marketing materials usually "highlight qualities that a college claims for itself (excellence), claims to instill or select for in students (skills or leadership) or values in itself and its students (diversity)" (p. 385). In addition, Urciuoli (2003) elaborates that "terms like excellence, leadership, and skills resonate readily with the promise of corporate success" (p.385). All of this is to say that marketing is continuing to move to a selling standpoint, meaning that education has, in some ways, become a commodity where colleges are selling their product to the students (customers).

As discussed earlier, segmentation helps colleges be strategic as they look for populations that are easy to communicate with, are measurable, profitable, accessible, and produce long-term sustainability (Kotler & Keller, 2011). However, some of the unintended consequences that come from such segmentations can be marketing to communities with little to no dominant social and cultural capital; with the expectation

that they have the social and cultural capital to connect with and understand the materials. Through social and cultural capital lenses, it can be said that this model does not take into account the social and cultural capital wealth of marginalized communities. Instead, colleges begin to seek profitable students through their marketing tools. The implementation of these tools will be covered in the next section.

Tools of Implementation

There is research on the tools colleges use to market their brand to different segments of students. These tools can include rankings, viewbooks, and social media. Finding information via the internet is at a student's fingertips, as a multitude of devices from phones, tablets, and PCs can easily connect to the internet. However, the information is only useful if the student knows how to decipher the messages shared by colleges. Brennan, Brodnick, and Pinckley (2007) discuss the complexities of information being shared and how reliable the information can be. Their research reviewed the US News & World Report: College Rankings, and how rankings ranked quality education. Through their review, they found that there is no true objectivity in the US News & World Report: College Rankings. They found the accuracy of the academic quality of institutions and how schools were evaluated questionable (Brennan et al., 2007). Recognizing the subjectivity in the rankings is important because hundreds of schools participate in the survey and use their rankings as part of their recruitment. What is also important to understand is how the school gets its rankings changed over time, which is not often clear to the students. The US News & World Report: College Rankings report typically uses 15 variables for their school ranking model, while the institution

actually collects hundreds of variables to measure performance because it is needed in

their reports to government agencies (Brennan et al., 2007). Still, those 15 variables have

a big impact because the US News ranking carries significant weight in the eyes of the

institution, as the ranking is usually in marketing and recruitment materials. On the other

hand, research shows there is little evidence that suggests that the US News rankings

have any major effect on the student and parent's college choice process (Brennan et al.,

2007). This is supported by Hearne (2006), who reported that two-thirds of students

surveyed indicated that they did not use rankings at all as an information source in their

choice process. However, schools continually use rankings to boast their strengths.

Moreover, the number of entities that distribute rankings continues to increase, and so do

the types of rankings (e.g., business school rankings, medical school rankings, law school

rankings, psychology school rankings, etc.). Rankings are usually used in many spaces

(e.g., billboards, online ads, websites) to highlight the strength and quality of the

institution.

Another tool used by colleges are viewbooks. Viewbooks, in particular, are tools

colleges use to build an image of who they are. Viewbooks are one of the many ways

colleges get their messaging across. The creation of viewbooks is so important that there

is an industry specifically created for the production and publication of viewbooks

(Hartley & Morphew, 2008). Pippert et al. (2013) examined how colleges use their visual

representation of diversity on their recruitment materials (viewbooks) to draw and cater

to ethnic and racial minorities. For example, some schools may claim to be a 'diverse

campus,' 'open access institution,' or a 'research institute' which conveys specific

messaging to prospective students. Although good feelings can come from this type of

messaging (inclusivity), Pippert et al. (2013) warn of misrepresentation. Pippert et al.

(2013) found that among college viewbooks, there were numerous college viewbooks

that had inaccurate representation of ethnic and racial student diversity. In their research,

they found a significant number of schools had a majority white student body, but the

viewbooks displayed ethnic and racial minorities more frequently in their materials; in

their research, most schools had a student body of 70 percent white students (p. 278).

There is value to students seeing themselves at an institution, so schools hope to portray

this through their marketing materials. Hartley and Morphew (2008) also examine this

through a critical lens when they reviewed materials and noticed that although a school

may state that 'everyone belongs', they did not see obese students or students with

physical disabilities throughout the viewbooks. Hartley and Morphew (2008) believed

that it "is important to pay attention to what institutions of higher learning say to

prospective students" (p. 673).

     Additionally, students are becoming more vocal. Prospective students want more

relevant information about colleges. Students, teachers, and counselors from the states of

Oregon, Texas, Illinois, and Georgia found the materials shared by colleges to be too

'glossy and superficial' (Venezia, 2003). The students were instead interested in learning

more about what the school had to offer. One student stated that colleges should

> Get rid of the nice, beautiful pictures and give us the actual details—what specific
>
> departments have to offer, the curriculum, what classes you'd be taking, what

exactly you might be able to test out of…the job opportunities available after you

graduate from college (Venezia, 2003, p.39).

It is important to learn about messaging since students turn to these sources of

information to make important decisions. Beyond printed materials, colleges have also

turned to social media to reach students.

As early as 2011, Greenwood (2012) reported that 92 percent of colleges had been

using some social media format (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube). However,

Barnes and Mattson (2010) reported that four-year higher education institutions had

already been continually increasing their use of social media, with 100 percent of the

four-year institutions using social media. By 2016, a study by the Associated Press

Center for Public Affairs Research found that among teens, the top two platforms used

were Snapchat and Instagram (APNORC, n.d.). With 76 percent of teens using

Instagram, and 75 percent using Snapchat. Facebook and Twitter fell behind at 66 percent

and 47 percent, respectively. Of the four platforms, Snapchat and Instagram relied more

heavily on video and picture content (APNORC, n.d.). Recognizing each segment's use

of social media allows colleges to leverage who they connect with, especially with the

younger generations.

Social media has become a prominent way of communicating for younger

generations (Wang & Wellman, 2010). Constant communication is a norm with over 90

percent of students using social media (Williams, Crittenden, Keo, & McCarty, 2012).

For the new generation, it provides a space where colleges would like to reach and

connect with them. Coker (2015) examined how Facebook affected first-generation

students through their college choice process using Hossler and Gallagher's model. In her research, she found that most students expressed little interest in or interaction with colleges. Students indicated that the colleges would reach out to them via direct messaging to talk about their programs and scholarships. However, students also indicated that they did not interact with the schools. Reasons for the lack of interaction ranged, but a common theme was that by the time colleges would connect with them, most of the students already made up their minds on where they were going. Thus, schools were encouraged to start their connections earlier.

Additionally, with higher education being considered a market, the way colleges communicate with students continues to change, with the use of social media continually being at the forefront (Rutter, Roper, & Lettice, 2016). Moreover, different social media platforms can offer students, parents, and others the opportunity to learn and share their opinions on specific institutions. Social media platforms have become powerful tools that prospective students and parents use to express their satisfaction, concerns, dissatisfactions, and overall opinions. Le, Dobele, and Robinson (2019) refer to this form of communication among people as the new "word-of-mouth," which allows prospective students to get their information from other students (p. 19). Additionally, Le et al. (2019) explained that it is in the best interest of an institution to understand and possibly control areas where word-of-mouth occurs. However, institutions should also place importance on how the student engages and uses social media as well. Understanding how students engage with different platforms would allow institutions to effectively use social media to serve the different segments of recruitment (Turner, 2017). In referencing

the different social media platforms, Turner (2017) quotes Ashley Dobson, a

communication manager, who explains that every platform serves a different purpose for

each type of audience. As mentioned before, among the social media giants, the platforms

that are used the most included Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Snapchat. With

Facebook being used more heavily by parents, while Twitter was used far less by both

parents and students (Turner, 2017). However, Turner (2017) does caution institutions

that the student's social media behavior is fluid and not fixed; thus, using various

platforms and forms of communication (e.g., blogs, videos, posts, etc.) will need to be

tapped into.

Although social media is being used by many institutions across the U.S., how

students engage and use social media depends on where they are in the college choice

process. For example, Turner (2017) indicates that social media is helpful in influencing

a student's college choice, but not so useful with "increasing awareness" (p. 32).

Understanding the effects of social media and how each student population engages with

social media can help institutions be more effective with their marketing and recruitment.

Wohn, Ellison, Khan, and Gray's (2013) research also found that how social

media is used by first-generation students is significantly different from that of

continuing-generation students. First-generation students viewed using Facebook as an

opportunity to access resources and information about colleges by connecting to their

network of Facebook friends. This was not as prominent with continuing-generation

students who had college-educated parents at home to assist them with the college search,

application, and admission process. Still, first-generation students show persistence in

continuing to seek help. Another key finding in Wohn et al.'s (2013) study was the

emotional support first-generation students had through Facebook, feeling like they could

share their emotions through the site. This provided emotional support when they felt lost

or stressed. Recognizing that first-generation students do not possess as much dominant

social or cultural capital, colleges can begin using social media marketing to inform

students. Mangold and Faulds's (2009) research found that consumers (students) want

more information from social media. With the need for more information, social media

has become an effective tool for students to use when going through the decision-making

process (Patti & Chen, 2009). In addition to informing students through their decision-

making process, higher education institutions' use of social media should be used

responsibly and ethically.

Sandlin and Peña (2014) explain the importance of authentic and accurate

portrayals by institutions, explaining that

> "what is perceived to be authentic in marketing materials by students in the
> college search process is critical because the material presented in social media
> outlets can shape student expectations about institutional practices, campus life,
> and culture" (p. 334).

Understanding the impact on what college information is shared and how it is shared with

students is important, as it helps prospective students make informed decisions. Thus, it

becomes imperative that students make informed decisions, as their decisions can have a

lasting impact. Selecting an institution that allows the student to thrive and succeed is

important as it allows the student to persist - increasing the likelihood of staying in

college and completing their degree (Helland, Stallings, & Braxton, 2002). Helland et al.

(2002) support Braxton's (2001) research, indicating that universities should portray their characteristics authentically and accurately when communicating with prospective students through their marketing and recruitment media.

Social media research helps institutions learn about timing and how to approach their recruitment within specific times and spaces. Additionally, other research is inclined to challenge 'how' the messaging is shared matters just as much as 'what' is shared. Perhaps taking culture into account can help change the marketing paradigm.

Culture in Marketing

Although culture has been examined in fields like psychology, economics, and business, the concept of culture within college marketing has not been deeply examined (Cremonini et al., 2008). Cremonini et al. (2008) argue that a college education has become a marketable commodity, and with it, the relationship of both the college and the student has evolved. There are now expectations from students on what they wish to gain from the college. Moreover, the evolving relationship has caused schools to produce newer tools for customers (students) to access. One of these tools that Cremonini et al. (2008) refer to is the college report cards, better known as college rankings. The tool intends to create informed consumers by distributing information that students can use when weighing their options (e.g., class profile, college majors, graduation rates, etc.). However, Cremonini et al. (2008) contend that although this information is available to all, how the information affects or influences people from different communities has not been evaluated.

Cremonini et al. (2008) discuss the idea of "culturally sensitive materials" and the impact culture can have on the behavior of the individuals receiving the marketing materials. Polyorat and Alden (2005) explored the concept of culture and the potential effects that marketing has on people's behavior. For example, they pose the question of whether the same marketing strategies in the U.S. would work in other international markets. Cremonini et al. provide examples of how marketing to different cultures affects audiences. In one example, they discuss how Western marketing tends to focus on individualism and competitiveness, while other international marketing tends to focus on status symbols or collectivism. Cremonini et al. also state that "information presented in advertisements should be 'tailored' to its cultural audience, if it is to be effective" (p. 381). This would mean that marketing tools should consider the different audiences exposed to it. As students hope to find the right college that is the perfect fit, the tools they use to make such decisions should be equitable.

Cremonini et al. (2008) also question what makes the "perfect fit," contending that for some students, it is not about the GPA, test scores, or alumni. Instead, the student may be from a culture where higher placement is put on how the individual can make future contributions to the community. Thus, the factors influencing their college choice process does not place heavy emphasis on exit salaries. Through the lens of culturally sensitive marketing, it can be argued that rankings do not place enough importance on factors outside the norm (i.e., potential income, test scores, GPA).

As the college student population continues to diversify, it can be argued that marketing must take into account culture to ensure all audiences are being reached.

Nora's (2004) research examined how the decision process changes for students as they progress to the point when they select the institution of their choice. In her research, she concluded that most students going through the selection process find themselves, in the end, making a shift from a logical choice to an emotional choice. Research in the last 30 years, like Williams (1984), has found that students who fit into their institution of choice and were satisfied with their selection showed higher levels of persistence. Additionally, more research found that students who were satisfied with their college choice had a higher probability of completing their degree (Ray, 1992). More recent studies have shown that navigating the college search process can be extremely difficult for first-generation students of color. However, the same research has also found that students finding the right school (e.g., support systems in place) can help students succeed (Palmer & Gasman, 2008; Hilton & Bonner, 2018). As Cremonini et al. (2008) point out, it can be most beneficial for students to be able to relate, connect, and make sense of the marketing and recruitment materials, as the college they select will undoubtedly have significant consequences for their future.

Summary

This chapter explored how students navigate the higher education system and the process leading up to the selection of an institution (Chapman, 1981; Jackson, 1982; Hanson & Litten, 1982; Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The literature helped examine how the college choice process can be more complex for first-generation students in comparison to continuing-generation students. Recognizing that the complexity for first-generation students can be compounded because of their parents' background and

educational level. One barrier is the limited knowledge students have about higher education and the limited support they could receive from their parents to pursue, navigate, and apply to higher education institutions (Dyce et al., 2012; Lauff & Ingels, 2013). As for peer influence, peers can also have an impact on the student's intention to attend college. As well as have an impact on the college they select, and the type of social capital held within the network that can help to successfully navigate the college choice process (Alvaro & López Turkey, 2012; Sokatch, 2006; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Additional research also showed how high school college counselors can have a significant impact on the student's experience, where they can help students through their challenges, or become additional barriers (Tello & Lonn, 2017; Simmons, 2011; Martinez, 2003; Vela-Gude et al., 2009).

The challenges that first-generation students face are not just situated at home and at school, but research has shown how higher education's views have shifted into seeing students as customers, and the education they offer as a commodity (Coccari & Javalgi, 1995; Cooper, 2009; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). The shift of education as a commodity can be seen in how schools now focus on marketing and branding. Through branding, schools begin to operate like businesses, ensuring that everything from colors to mascots to phrases and logos are uniform when marketing to and recruiting students (Khanna, Jacob, & Yadav, 2014; Aaker, 2000). Additionally, colleges are not just marketing and recruiting to the masses but have also incorporated segmentation strategies to ensure they recruit the ideal students (Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Part of this effort includes the use of different tools to reach out to as many students as possible, which include rankings,

viewbooks, and social media (Brennan et al., 2007; Cooker, 2012; Pippert et al., 2013;

Hartley & Morphew, 2008; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2004). Lastly, the chapter

discussed how little research there is on creating culturally sensitive marketing materials

to ensure the information being shared is equitable, and can connect with diverse

audiences (Cremonini et al., 2008; Polyorat & Alden, 2005).

   With a breadth of literature about the college choice process there is still very

little on how marketing affects the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx

students. Thus, this research would like to focus on their experience by exploring the

problem through both social and cultural capital lenses that help shed light on the status

quo and how it can affect marginalized groups (Dugan, 2017; Horkheimer, 1982;

McLaren, 2003; Tyson, 2006). The study will be guided by cultural and social capital

frameworks when examining the issues of marketing and recruitment on the first-

generation Latinx student experience.

Chapter 3: Methods

This study was a basic qualitative study that helped to explore the college choice process of first-generation Latinx students at the University of Northwest Pacific (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A basic qualitative research is typically applied to fields like education and serves as a basic interpretive study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This type of study was chosen to help learn "(1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 24). Most basic qualitative studies collect data through interviews, observations, or document analysis. This basic qualitative study collected data through interviews where the data was "analyzed inductively to analyze the research question"(p. 42).

The use of qualitative interviews informed the following research questions:

1. How do first-generation Latinx students overcome adversity when working through the college choice process?

2. How do first-generation Latinx students admitted to UNP leverage their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice process?

3. How is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing?

In exploring the experiences of students who selected UNP (a four-year institution of higher education) the findings can help identify factors that contribute to creating equitable recruitment and marketing practices to assist first-generation Latinx students as they enter the search stage in the college choice process. The purpose of this study is to identify culturally specific marketing and outreach

practices that would improve the recruitment of Latinx first-generation college students and their college choice experience at four-year public universities. The goal of this study is to help improve access for first-generation Latinx students to four-year institutions of higher education by improving culturally appropriate marketing practices.

Research Methods

This dissertation study involved qualitative interviews conducted to explore how, if at all, recruitment and marketing approaches affected a group of first-generation Latinx students' experiences. Conducting qualitative interviews provides opportunities to provide detailed descriptions of an event or process (Weiss, 1995). The motivation for this choice of methods was to learn directly from a group of first-generation Latinx college experiences to gain insights into how marketing can affect a student's choice to enroll in a four-year institution and how marketing approaches influence their choice of schools. Qualitative interviews were used to generate thick and rich descriptions of what the college choice experience was like for the study participants.

Weiss (1995) described qualitative interviews as an appropriate tool for gaining insight into an individual's perspective and looking for patterns that may emerge between various perspectives. In other words, a study using qualitative interviews does not simply involve exploring a single individual's description of events but can allow for integrating multiple perspectives (Weiss, 1995). Here, exploring various students' perspectives allowed for developing insights into the first-generation Latinx student experience that no single student could provide.

Seidman (2013) explained that interviews allow researchers to spend time connecting and communicating with participants. This allows researchers to learn from the participants' experiences and the meaning they make from those experiences. The researcher ultimately makes connections from those shared experiences and helps create a shared structure. Indeed, using interviews as a research method allowed for the collection of detailed descriptions of students' experiences, providing the opportunity for dialectical coding to look for emerging patterns (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A qualitative approach was best suited for this research, as each experience can vary from individual to individual, and gaining a deeper and richer understanding of those experiences allowed the study to learn from the unique and common barriers that arose. Through qualitative interviews, more was learned about people's experiences and the challenges they faced in their lives (Weiss, 1995). Additionally, interviews allowed the researcher to gain insight into the student's perceptions and their interpretations of said perceptions. With regards to events, interviews can be an effective method to understand how a person perceives certain events in their lives and the effects, thoughts, and feelings that came from them.

Again, the study involved interviewing first-generation Latinx college students currently enrolled at the University of Northwest Pacific. Using a qualitative approach to explore this group of students' thinking process provided opportunities to examine variables that influenced their perceptions and decision-making processes within a particular context (Maxwell, 2013).

Setting

The site of this research is a four-year public institution of higher education. Here, the institution will be referred to as the University of Northwest Pacific (UNP). Please note that *UNP* is a pseudonym; the university's name was changed to protect the school's identity, the university's marketing and recruitment department, and the study participants.

This urban institution is located in one of the largest cities in the Pacific Northwest of the United States within a downtown area. It is the largest four-year public institution in the state, with more than 27,000 enrolled students with more than 200 degree options. UNP offers students the opportunity for engagement and involvement with 150 student clubs, and 10 cultural centers. Of all the public four-year institutions in the state, UNP has the most diverse student body, with 33 percent of the student body identifying as an ethnic and racial minority. The institution is known as a *commuter school*, with more than half of the student body using mass transportation to commute to and from campus.

Participants

The population of students who participated in the study were first-generation Latinx undergraduate college students at the University of Northwest Pacific. This dissertation study involved the purposeful selection of 12 first-generation Latinx college freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and senior-level undergraduate students actively enrolled and attending UNP. Six of the participants were students who had matriculated directly from high school to UNP, and six were college community transfer students.

The diversity of participants involved students who self-identified as male and female, in-state and out-of-state students, and students with different immigration statuses. All participants were recruited for interviews with the help of UNP staff and faculty using various email lists. These lists included students who accessed resource offices and/or academic departments.

The perceptions of the selected sample of participants are not representative of the total population of students at UNP. Rather, this study involved the purposeful selection of first-generation self-identified Hispanic/Latin@/Latinx undergraduates attending UNP to "discover, understand, or gain insight" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 96) to inform the research question, of how do first-generation Latinx students overcome adversity when working through the college choice process?

I selected the full range of freshmen to senior-level undergraduate participants to ensure the involvement of students with diverse experiences who had spent at least one to three years at the institution, presumably building some social and cultural capital. This was useful for reflecting on interview questions designed to inform the second research question: How do first-generation Latinx students admitted to UNP leverage their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice process?

Lastly, recall that the third research question was "How is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by the University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing?" I purposely selected this particular group of 12 undergraduate students because each person had recently experienced the college choice process and, therefore, would be more likely to accurately remember their perceptions

throughout their decision-making process in comparison to UNP alumni who experienced their college choice process more than five years prior to the beginning of this study.

I chose to involve 12 participants in the study based on Hennink, Kaiser, and Marconi's (2017) recommendation that 16-24 interviews are sufficient to develop a thick, rich description with sufficient complexity to achieve data saturation. Their guidelines for participants were dependent on whether the study aims to capture themes, develop codes, questionnaires (e.g., smaller sample), or develop conceptual codes, code meaning, or understand a complex phenomenon or experience. For studies hoping to understand the participants' experiences, in this case, the college choice experience, a range of 16-24 interviews was suggested, stating that "16-24 can develop a richly textured understanding of those issues" (Hennick et al., 2017, p. 607).

The study had aimed for 16 participants, however, there was difficulty recruiting participants during the height of the COVID pandemic. After recruiting over 20 weeks 12 participants who fit the desired demographics were selected for the study.

Procedures

Participant recruitment. I contacted UNP staff and faculty working with several campus programs that serve first-generation Latinx students, and they helped recruit students who fit the desired demographics. One such program is the Guide, Persist, Succeed (GPS) program (n.d.) that serves low-income, first-generation college students from diverse, multicultural backgrounds. Another program called Gaining Awareness & Networking for Academic Success (GANAS) supports freshmen Latinx students transitioning to UNP, including first-generation college students. Additionally, the TRiO-

Student Support Services program that serves low-income, first-generation, and disabled

students helped with recruitment. I also requested the assistance of faculty and student-

run organizations (e.g., MEChA, SHPE, SACNAS) that support Latinx students at UNP

to help with recruiting participants.

The first step for recruitment included reaching out to the UNP program staff, to

ask if they could send out an email to the students in their programs (see Appendix D). I

would then follow up with students who expressed interest. I also worked with student

leaders in student organizations who were also helpful in recruitment. The first initial

contact was with a student leader/officer to explain the study. If allowed, the invitation

email (Appendix D) was sent to the leaders/officers, who would then be able to send it to

those on their mailing lists. In addition to a purposeful sample, a snowballing approach

was used to find additional participants within the programs and organizations (Merriam

& Tisdell, 2016).

Informed consent. An informed consent document was distributed and discussed

with all participants before any research was conducted (please see Appendix E). The

informed consent form described the research goals, risks and rights of the participants,

benefits for the participant, confidentiality of the information, and how the information

will be used.

As the recruitment emails were sent out to potential participants, the participants

did not receive the consent form until they had expressed interest in taking part in the

study. Additionally, the consent form was discussed verbally with all participants before

they agreed to participate in any interviews.

Interviews. The study used qualitative interviews to research the college choice process experience of first-generation Latinx college students and the effects UNP's marketing had on their experience. To explore the student experience, one-on-one interviews were used to help explore how students make meaning of their experience and understand how certain barriers may be more persistent than others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, the interview also included UNP marketing materials that were used, if needed, when discussing marketing materials (Appendix A, B, & C). Lastly, the interviews were held in both English and Spanish, allowing the participants to express themselves in whichever language they felt comfortable.

The interviews were semi-structured with open-ended questions. This allowed for additional probing that provided depth as we explored complex issues (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This helped gather rich data through the interviews, which allowed the researcher to help tell the respondent's (student's) story. Thus, it must be acknowledged that this piece of research was a partnership between the interviewer and the respondent (Weiss, 1995, p.65).

For the one-on-one interviews, the students were offered the choice to participate by completing the interview in person, by phone, or online video. These options were provided with the understanding that some individuals who wanted to take part in the research would not be on campus very frequently. Since UNP is known as a commuter school, having accessible interviews allowed for greater participation (Manning, n.d.; Theen, 2016).

Once a student agreed to participate, I sent them the informed consent form to review prior to meeting for the interview. After the student selected a time and date that worked for an in-person interview, a private room on the UNP campus was reserved. The library on campus had study rooms available throughout the year that provided the space needed for the interview. However, during this time, the pandemic caused by COVID-19 restricted in-person interviews, and as such, all interviews were shifted to phone and online appointments.

The interview process, which was conducted over video via Zoom, was very similar to that of in-person interviews. The student was recruited and once they had expressed interest, I sent the participant the informed consent form via email to review prior to meeting for the interview. I followed up via phone or email to review the study and consent form before the interview (Appendix E*)*. Once the student agreed to the interview, a date and time was selected. Once on the Zoom call, I would cover the purpose of the study and consent form once more. Then, a pseudonym was agreed upon to use throughout the study, and with the participant's permission, the recording of the interview began. During the interview, notes were made to replace every person's name, every pre-college name, and college and university names. All were changed to a pseudonym.

The internet has opened up new possibilities for research wherein data can be collected from "emails, blogs, discussion groups, skype, text, tweets, and various forms of social media" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 115). Indeed, interviewing students via online video interviews is a relatively new method that provides a number of benefits for

students and advantages to the researcher. For example, a significant strength of this interview method is the geographic inclusivity of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). However, James and Bushner have warned against other uses of virtual interviewing that can include asynchronous methods, like emails, making it difficult to build rapport (Sang, 2013). This can be attributed to the interviewer not being able to read the body language to gauge the conversation and comfort level of the student throughout an asynchronous conversation.

Thus, this research involved synchronous one-on-one video interviews to collect as much data from a student as possible. This approach enabled real-time verbal responses paired with access to seeing body language, an element of communication useful for more accurately gauging the conversation throughout each interview. The use of video technology allowed the participants to interview from the comfort of their home, or another familiar environment of their choice, a benefit that not only provided geographical inclusivity but may have resulted in more open, authentic participant responses.

Through the study, the hope was to provide students the ability to express themselves freely, so the interview questions focused on the student's experiences and behavior, feelings, knowledge, ideal, and even demographic questions. This contributed to a higher degree of accurate understanding during the data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 118).

Examples of questions related to students' experiences and behaviors are "How did you begin your college research?" and "What made you select this school?"

Additional probing questions included " When did you begin your college search?",

"How did you start your search?", and "How did you navigate the process?" These open-

ended questions helped students discuss their college choice process without steering the

conversation in a predetermined direction.

In addition, I asked questions related to their perceptions of the University

recruitment materials, such as, "Ideally, what kind of information would be helpful on the

materials and website?" These types of questions contributed to gaining a better

understanding of what was helpful and what could be redesigned to improve student

recruitment. These questions were important to ask because, from a social and cultural

capital lens, a key goal of the study was to understand how current approaches are

working with or against students.

Technology

For the interviews, two pieces of hardware and three types of software were used

to record, collect, store, and analyze the data collected. For the hardware, a password-

protected computer and smartphone were used. The computer was used to conduct video

interviews online, and the smartphone was used to record and transcribe the interviews.

Once the video interview was recorded, the audio data was downloaded to a password-

protected computer. From there, the recordings were transcribed using the Google

Recorder application, and the documents were uploaded to Dedoose. Here, I will describe

each piece of software and how and why they were used in greater detail.

Zoom. Zoom allows for video interviews, meetings, and conferences to be

recorded (Zoom, n.d.-b). The software also allowed for the participants to consent to the

recording of the interview (Zoom, n.d.-a). The interviews were recorded and then stored

in Zoom's cloud storage that can be accessed from any device connected to the internet.

An additional layer of security for Zoom is that it can encrypt the online interviews

between the interviewee and interviewer. The interview files were stored, downloaded,

and then deleted from the computer once the audio was transcribed.

Google Recorder. Google Recorder is an application that allows for the creation

of documents through voice dictation and recordings. Interviews were conducted online

(i.e., Zoom), and then audio was downloaded. The audio file was fed to the Google

Recorder application software, where it was transcribed (Google, n.d.). Once the software

created the transcription document, I was able to review and edit the document to ensure

accuracy. The software was installed on a mobile device that was password protected to

add a layer of security.

Dedoose. Dedoose is a web-based application that allows researchers to track,

maintain, and analyze data collected using either qualitative or quantitative methods

(Dedoose, 2022). Dedoose was used to input and store data in the form of audio,

transcripts, or video formats. Furthermore, since all interviews were transcribed into text

format, all data was uploaded to Dedoose in Word, text, or PDF format. The software

also helps to ensure the confidentiality of the participants as it allows for unique

identifiers to be created. Dedoose also allowed for the analysis of the data, as it helped

with sorting themes and assisted with developing coding/rating systems (Dedoose, 2022).

Once themes and codes were developed, I applied codes to help examine the data.

Additionally, the software also helped with keeping track of multiple forms of data, such

as tables and charts. Additional tools were also used to help with creating coding tables to highlight any key qualitative concepts that arose from the data.

Dedoose is also secure due to its fully encrypted data transmission, file storage, and backups. In addition to the software's encryption, a password-protected Personal Computer (PC) was also used to access Dedoose. Additionally, because Dedoose is a web-based application, it allows access to data from anywhere that has an internet connection so that no data would have been lost had the computer been compromised.

Data Collection

Again, the interviews were conducted via online video technology (i.e., Zoom). The first set of interviews were conducted from April to September 2020. The second set of interviews were held from January 2021 to February 2021. Interviews were recorded, stored, and later deleted from the Zoom cloud. However, all transcriptions were stored in Dedoose. Because Dedoose is a web-based program, it would ensure that files were not accidentally erased because of a faulty computer. To ensure the security of the data, the smartphone that helped transcribe the interviews was also password protected. All files were then transferred immediately to Dedoose to avoid security breaches.

Role of the Researcher

As a researcher, my interest in this study comes from my work in college recruitment and admissions. My experiences with recruitment and admission allowed me to work with numerous students, including first-generation Latinx students. Much of my work has involved working with first-generation students who would have otherwise had

difficulty understanding the online and printed materials and other information shared by colleges.

For instance, one of the institutions I worked for would state that the minimum GPA to apply was 3.0. When the students would meet with me, they assumed that a 3.0, or close to it, would suffice and get them admitted. However, I would explain that a GPA of 3.6 or higher was needed to be *competitive* with other applicants. I would then explain how the GPA could either help or hinder their chances for college admissions. It was during these conversations about common misconceptions or misunderstandings that I began to review our marketing, recruitment, and admissions materials and noticed ways that our materials could be creating barriers.

As a first-generation Latino who went through similar struggles, I can attest to the challenges these students face. I was fortunate enough to have counselors who helped me with the application process when I began applying for colleges. However, I recall being given flyers and brochures and reviewing websites that I could not make sense of – asking myself, can I apply to medical school directly? Without truly understanding the academic path needed to become a physician. Without counselors, I was lost and would not have been able to navigate the admission, selection, and enrollment stages.

These experiences are why I believe my identity, my own college choice experience as a student, and my work in admission and recruitment contribute to a high degree of credibility in pursuing this line of research. That said, I acknowledge that my position and experiences may also contribute to subjectivity in the way I frame questions, respond to students, and how I interpret the students' meaning.

One strategy I utilized to counter my potential bias is the process of *bracketing* (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Bracketing helps to identify biases and judgments held by the investigator. This involves writing preconceptions down and acknowledging them prior to developing interview questions and conducting interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This reflective process helped me to identify what biases existed before the study. It ensured that I was not simply looking for confirming evidence for my preconceptions or twisting findings to fit a biased narrative.

In addition, another strategy I used to ensure credibility involved member checking (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once data analysis and interpretation were complete, I provided the data to each participant and allowed the student to verify the accuracy of the findings. If the student disagreed with the interpretation, then the student was allowed to correct them. This process ensured that their true meaning was accurately interpreted and presented.

On the other hand, if a student validated the findings this ensured that the data interpretation was unbiased and valid. Using various strategies to control bias allowed the data to speak for itself. Ensuring that the students' voices came through in the research, not just the researcher's, protected the credibility of the findings.

Data Analysis

The approach used in this study involved open coding. The goal of data coding involves finding and connecting larger overarching patterns and then themes within data sets (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Detecting themes can help make sense of the data, which can lead to deeper understandings that inform research questions and, ultimately, practice

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). That said, I took Seidman's (2013) warning that researchers approach data coding with an open mind to allow themes to naturally emerge from the interviews.

Weiss (1995) explained that the analysis process can be broken down into four parts: data coding, sorting, local integration, and inclusive integration. In gathering the data, coding can be a mechanism used to decipher the themes emerging from the interviews. Codes can help connect the findings since people express themselves in various ways (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Here, the interview analysis began with the process of pulling and coding (labeling). I analyzed each interview transcript one by one before looking for themes across the collection of interviews. I followed the advice of Seidman (2013), who encouraged researchers to apply a winnowing process wherein the reader begins by analyzing all data they deem to be important and begins to exclude material later. Seidman (2013) pointed out that it is important to predefined criteria for the process of winnowing data because if data is excluded early in the analysis process without clear criteria it is difficult to add data back in later in an unbiased manner. Thus, I resisted the temptation to "lock in" (Seidman, 2013) categories and instead allowed categories to remain fluid to ensure that as I coded additional data from the remaining interviews, I could either add to already established categories or shift the categories as they emerged.

Keeping code labels tentative as one works through the findings is important as additional data can change categories and themes (Seidman, 2013). Here, the processes of constructing categories coding began by organizing excerpts and passages (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2013). I started by summarizing chunks of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Next, codes were used to group together common experiences while remaining open-minded to emerging experiences (e.g., the experience was difficult, was confusing, did not understand what was stated). Following the sorting of the categories, data was then analyzed to begin clustering emerging data sets and naming categories, such as "selection factors," or "support system," where the common themes can be identified (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By connecting the categories through patterns emerging in the data, themes can be created. Themes help to tie the shared experiences together, where the researcher is able to find common threads and patterns shared by the participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the last stages of the Weiss (1995) process, local integration and inclusive integration appear, where the researcher interprets and connects the experiences to begin to create a framework.

Conclusion

The University of Northwest Pacific is known as an *access institution*. Their work to increase access (e.g., four-year promise) is important as the need to serve the ever-growing Latinx population increases (State of Oregon, 2018). Thus, the study aimed to learn from the college choice process of first-generation Latinx students and understand how UNP's recruitment and marketing materials affect their experiences. With the use of qualitative interviews as a mechanism to understand the student experience, the study can help uncover how the marketing affected their experience and how they navigated the process. The following chapter will provide the findings and analysis that can help

identify factors contributing to equitable marketing and recruitment practices at UNP, and

similar four-year institutions.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

Gaining admission into a four-year university is not a simple task for Latinx first-generation college students. This statement is especially true for first-generation and traditionally underrepresented students. The college choice process can create a daunting experience for first-generation students. The competitive recruitment strategies of colleges compound the challenges that first-generation Latinx students face. As colleges think about how to continue increasing their recruitment numbers, another aspect of marketing that can also be weighed is how their recruitment and marketing affects the student experience. First-generation Latinx students are one of the fastest-growing populations in the U.S., and colleges have taken notice as they assess their recruitment plans (Gamboa, 2021).

There is an abundance of research on the challenges that first-generation Latinx students face during the college selection and admission process (Stewart, 1990; Nunez et al., 1998; Penrose, 2002; Pascarella, 2004; Swail et al., 2004; Perna, 2006). However, the gaps that exist in the research pertain to the experience of first-generation Latinx students and how marketing and recruitment affect their college choice experience. Thus, the purpose of this research was to analyze and understand how the University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing affected the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students. To explore the students' experiences, the following questions guided the research:

1. How do first-generation Latinx students overcome adversity when working through the college choice process?

2. How do first-generation Latinx students admitted to UNP leverage their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice process?

3. How is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing?

I explored these questions using interviews to better understand the participants' college choice experiences. To help provide context for the study I will first discuss some unforeseen challenges that came up.

The COVID-19 Impact

As the study was approved and set to begin, the world was affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19). The COVID-19 virus and situation continued to evolve, and the country and states had to take the necessary steps to keep communities safe. By mid-March 2020, the university had set new guidelines that prevented in-person meetings. The university shifted from in-person classes to online classes. The shift to all online classes included midterms and finals as well. In addition, the new guidelines meant that all in-person events and gatherings were either canceled or moved online. All of these changes, unfortunately, not only affected everyone's lives but also affected how I recruited participants for the study and conducted the study.

The shift to all virtual also meant the student services offered on campus would move virtually as well. This included programs that support first-generation and

underrepresented minority students. This is important to note because these programs

hosted in-person events and meetings and had their own spaces for students to gather.

With all students, staff, and faculty no longer allowed to gather in groups, it was difficult

to recruit. I had originally planned to attend several program events that were being

planned for the Spring term. I believed that consistency and continued presence would

allow me to connect with students. Part of this belief was that I had participated in the

same programs as an undergraduate student. However, this strategy to recruit participants

was gone. Instead, only introductory emails were sent out through the program directors.

This impacted my ability to connect with potential student participants directly.

Another impact of COVID-19 was my ability to attend student organization

meetings and classes. Student organizations that support and engage Latinx communities

typically held their weekly in-person meetings in the afternoons. However, because in-

person meetings were no longer viable, student organizations no longer hosted meetings

or moved to more spread-out online meetings. Faculty were also asked to change how

their classes were delivered from in-person to online. This meant that faculty would send

out emails on my behalf, and I was not able to meet the students in person.

Understandably, protecting everyone from COVID-19 took priority, and as such,

everyone had to adjust to the abrupt changes.

Over the course of 20 weeks, from April 2020 to September 2020, I recruited

through emails, as this was one of the few ways I could connect with student participants.

I was fortunate enough to set up Zoom meetings with student organizations, program

directors, advisors, and professors to discuss the study. Everyone was supportive and did

their best to assist me in my recruitment. However, after several weeks of recruitment, the study did not meet the intended 16 participants and instead landed on 12.

Participants

The participants in the study were freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior undergraduate students who were attending the University of Northwest Pacific (UNP). These were students who matriculated to UNP right after completing high school, as well as students who transferred from a community college. The group's diversity included students who self-identified as male and female, in-state and out-of-state students and students with different immigration statuses. Everyone was recruited for interviews with the help of student leaders, university staff, and faculty, who helped by using different email lists at UNP. These lists included students who accessed resource offices and/or academic departments. A total of 15 emails were sent out over several email lists over 20 weeks. The various mailing lists include anywhere from 50-150 students per list. I never sent the email directly. Instead, students, faculty, or staff served as the point persons sending out the emails. The smaller mailing lists were for student organizations. In contrast, the larger lists were for student services programs and class rosters. After all mailings were completed, follow-up reminder emails were sent out within four weeks after the first one. Each email list was emailed at different times. After 20 weeks, 15 students responded to the invitations, but only 12 participated in the study.

Table 2 includes additional details about each person. It shows that 11 of the 12 participants came from an urban high school, and only one participant came from a rural

town. The group shared some distinctions and common experiences from their

upbringing.

Table 2: Participants

Name	Year	Transfer	Gender	Type of High School Attended	Parental education: Highest level completed (Mother / Father)
Stephanie*	Sophomore	No	Female	Public Urban	High School / Some Middle School
Sonia*	Senior	No	Female	Public Urban	Middle School / Middle School
Moises*	Senior	No	Male	Public Urban	Middle School / Some Elementary
Melissa**	Junior	Yes	Female	Public Urban	High School / Elementary
Leo	Senior	No	Male	Public Rural	Some college / Some Middle School
Jessica*	Junior	Yes	Female	Public Urban	High School / N/A
Elizabeth	Junior	Yes	Female	Public Urban	Some Elementary / Some Elementary
Edgar	Junior	Yes	Male	Public Urban	Some Elementary / N/A
Daisy	Freshman	No	Female	Public Urban	Middle School / Middle School
Carlos	Senior	Yes	Male	Public Urban	Middle School / High School
Berenice*	Junior	Yes	Female	Public Urban	High School / High School
Aria**	Senior	No	Female	Public Urban	Middle School / Some High School
					*= Pre-college program **=Mentor

One of the common traits of the group was their parents' value for education, which helped influence the participant's desire to pursue higher education. In the study, participants would reference their parents as sources of motivation. Everyone spoke about the hardship their parents had experienced. Additionally, 11 of the 12 mentioned having parents from Latin America who immigrated to the U.S. Of the 12, nine shared their parents' work, all indicating that their parents worked in manual labor jobs. These jobs included janitorial services, construction, house cleaning, cannery work, truck driving, and other various manual labor jobs. A few of the participants' parents were able to build their own businesses. However, these businesses were created when their student was older or off to college. When their participants' parents talked about their desire for their children to have a better life, they would often reference the type of jobs they had. The parents' desire for their children to pursue higher education was often in relation to the ability to have some upward social mobility (e.g., higher-paying jobs, better work conditions, and better economic opportunities).

One of the major distinctions among the group was between those who had partners/spouses and those who did not. As well as some who had children and those who did not. All of the older participants who referenced "their own" family usually talked about their children and spouses. They would talk about not wanting to uproot their children and/or partner, so their college choices became limited. This was different for those who did not have partners or children. Participants without spouses and children applied to more colleges, both in-state and out-of-state. Additionally, none of the students who matriculated from high school to UNP had children, while several of the transfers

did. Another distinction among the group was the fact that the participants who shared

that they were undocumented all attended community college before matriculating to

UNP. The group brought different experiences and perspectives that helped enrich the

research. Furthermore, although each student had a unique experience, the study also

helped to highlight their commonalities as first-generation Latinx students. Below, I will

introduce all the participants and their backgrounds in order of when they entered the

study from first to last.

Stephanie (non-transfer). Stephanie is a Latinx female student going into her

junior year at UNP. Stephanie applied and matriculated to UNP directly from high school

and is from the metro area. Home for her is within a 30-minute driving radius. Her

parents received their education in Mexico, where her father completed the 7th grade, and

her mother completed high school. Her mother continued on to beauty school but did not

work in the field once she immigrated to the U.S. Stephanie is the oldest child in her

family and the first to go on to college. College was instilled in her from a young age.

Her mom was the biggest supporter in wanting Stephanie to pursue college.

Stephanie, while in high school, took part in the University Dreams (pseudonym) pre-

college program. While in the program she had mentorship and guidance that aided her in

her search stage of the college choice journey. Through her search, she visited multiple

colleges and applied to six colleges, two private in-state, three public in-state, and one

out-of-state college. She found UNP through a mentor, as she had initially not given

much thought to UNP. It was not until her mentor encouraged her to look into UNP that

she applied. Stephanie ended up selecting UNP as it had the lowest out-of-pocket cost,

and it was close to home. While at UNP, Stephanie has participated in support programs that aim to assist first-generation students of color. She has also gotten involved with student organizations and serves as a student leader in one of the organizations.

Sonia (non-transfer). Sonia is a Latinx female student in her fifth year, senior year, at UNP. Sonia applied and matriculated to UNP directly from high school and is from the metro area; home for her is within a 30-minute driving radius. Her parents received their education in Mexico, where both her father and mother completed some middle school education (7th or 8th grade). Her parents immigrated to the U.S. and are now business owners. Sonia helps her family and their family business with some of the financing. She references her family as the reason she continued to college and pursued business. She is the oldest child and the first to go to college. With a younger brother who was undergoing the college admission process at the time of the interview.

Sonia took part in TRiO while in high school, a pre-college program that helps first-generation students with college preparation. She had an advisor she would visit who helped her in her college search process. When it came to learning about UNP, Sonia mentioned having counselors in middle school and high school who introduced her to UNP. Her older cousins were also motivators for her to continue on to college and UNP. As Sonia decided on the schools she wanted to apply to, she only had two state schools in mind. As she recalls, she ranked the other school higher on her list than UNP. However, being close to home and cost factored heavily when she decided to only apply to UNP. She was not too concerned about admission as she had a strong academic background and felt confident, she would be admitted.

Moises (non-transfer). Moises is a Latinx male student in his fourth year, senior year, at UNP. Moises applied and matriculated to UNP directly from high school. Moises's hometown is within a one-hour drive from UNP. From what he could recall, his father attended elementary school, but he was not sure which grade his father completed. His mother was also able to attend school and attend up to the completion of middle school. Although neither attended college, both his parents encouraged him to continue with his education. More specifically, his father wanted him to better himself through education by attending college. It was not until the end of middle school and early high school that he began thinking about college.

While in high school, Moises, had the opportunity to participate in the AVID program. The AVID program helps students with career readiness and college preparation. In his case, he was able to take part in AVID courses while in high school to better prepare himself for the college search process. The program allowed Moises to attend college visits and provided the ability to tour college campuses. Although he had the opportunity to attend multiple college visits, he ultimately applied to four schools: one private and three state schools. UNP was not in his top three schools of choice, but he selected UNP because of cost. Proximity also played a role in his selection of schools, as all four colleges were within one hour from home.

Melissa (transfer). Melissa is a Latinx female student who is going into her first year at UNP. She is a transfer student who is in her junior year after completing one year at a local community college. Melissa's home is about a 30-minute drive from campus, so she was able to stay close to home. Regarding her parental education, her father

completed his elementary education while her mother completed her high school education. Her parents immigrated to the U.S. with her when she was five years old. She remembers her parents always supporting and motivating her to attend college. So, as she grew up, she knew she wanted to attend college.

As she was growing up and going through her education, she remembers learning about three different state schools about 30 minutes and 1.5 hours away. However, as she got serious about her education in high school, she turned her attention to a local community college and UNP. Although she did not take part in a pre-college program, she had a staff member at her high school who stepped in as a mentor and worked with her through her search for colleges. Cost and proximity to family were primary factors in her selection to attend her community college first. After the completion of her associates, she wanted to remain close to home and reduce out-of-pocket costs which UNP checked off.

Leo (non-transfer). Leo is a Latinx male student who is going into his fourth year at UNP. He applied to UNP directly out of high school. Leo's hometown was about three hours away, so he felt he had to completely leave home. His mother attended some community college, but because of family and work commitments, she had to leave college. He does not know much about his biological father, but he thinks his step-father completed some elementary or middle school education. Leo's aunts served as family members who helped him think about college as they had completed their college education.

Leo remembers learning about UNP in his junior year in high school but did not consider it a contender early on. He was initially hoping to leave home to attend college

out-of-state, however, the cost was a major concern. He had considered three different out-of-state colleges and four in-state colleges. However, due to cost and his interest in majoring in business, he ended up applying to three state colleges - all 3-5 hours away from home. He had minimal help in his college search from high school counselors and his aunts but completed the research on his own. He decided to attend UNP as it had a business program and it was the most cost effective.

Jessica (transfer). Jessica is a Latinx student who is going into her third year at UNP. She applied to UNP directly from high school. Jessica grew up 40 minutes away from UNP and learned about the college in high school. Jessica's mother finished high school in Mexico but did not continue on to college. From a young age, she remembers her family supporting her to continue with her education. She had extended family, including older cousins, who also supported her desire to go to college.

As noted earlier, Jessica first heard about UNP in high school. She remembered going to the career center and learning more about UNP through some brochures. While in high school, she had two school counselors who helped all students understand their college choices. In addition, she was also part of a pre-college program that helped young women learn about career options and college. During the search process, she narrowed down her college options to in-state options. She ended up applying to four or five different colleges. Even though she had various options, UNP offered on-the-spot admissions. She decided to attend UNP as it was close to home, and at the time, she felt as though she needed to stay close to home. UNP was also an affordable option with a social work program.

Elizabeth (transfer). Elizabeth is a Latinx student who is going into her second year at UNP as a transfer student - at senior standings. Elizabeth first attended a local community, about 15 minutes from UNP, before transferring. She also knew she wanted to attend college, and her family always supported her at home. Both her mother and father received a third-grade education in Mexico. However, her mother immigrated to the US with her and her siblings, while her father stayed behind. Still, her ambition to continue her education did not falter and she decided to first attend the local community college.

Elizabeth was undocumented when she graduated high school and decided to attend a community college because her options were limited. While attending her community college, she worked at the same time. Her family grew with the addition of her child, and she found herself completing two associate degrees 10 years later. Once her residency status changed, she saw UNP as a possibility and decided to continue with her education. For her, staying close to home and cost became a factor in her selection to transfer to UNP.

Edgar (transfer). Edgar is a Latinx student who is going into his second year at UNP as a transfer student - senior standing. Edgar grew up in a single-parent home with his mother, who completed her third-grade education in Mexico. Edgar grew up about 30 minutes from UNP in a smaller rural town. Growing up, Edgar had heard about UNP in high school, but he did not see himself at a four-year college as he was undocumented and did not really see a university as a realistic goal. Edgar mentioned that he also thought that universities were only for rich people. He often kept his goals to himself,

believing he could only attend a community college. He believed that students of color

were the students who attended local community colleges and not universities. Although

he had emotional support from his mother, he did not receive college prep support at

school.

When Edgar started at the local community college, he entered with a scholarship.

However, after his immigration status came into question, he decided to leave school to

avoid unwanted attention. He attempted to return to school two more times while

working full-time but was not successful. It was not until he received protected status

through the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) Act that he felt as though

attending a university was a reality. Once he felt that attending UNP was a possibility, he

decided to apply. He was able to secure external funding that opened doors for him.

Ultimately, he thought it made sense to attend UNP because it was in close proximity to

his home and family.

Daisy (non-transfer). Daisy is a Latinx student who is going into her second year

at UNP after completing her first year. She applied directly to UNP from high school.

Her parents always supported her in continuing to college and entrusted her with making

the best decisions for herself. Daisy's parents immigrated from Mexico, where they

attended some high school, but neither her mother nor father completed their studies.

Daisy stated she knew she was going to college since she was young but did not have

help when it came to applying. Her extended family also chimed in where they could, but

from what she remembers, she had to go through the admission process on her own.

Daisy recalls visiting UNP for a conference in middle school and that was her first exposure to the college. During her middle school years and into high school, she heard from teachers who attended the school that UNP was a good school. It would not be until she was in high school that she would begin actively researching the nearby colleges. She had some help from high school counselors, but not enough to help her feel informed. She had private and public institutions in mind when it came to her choices of colleges. Ultimately, she did not think she had the merit to apply to private colleges, so she opted to stick to public colleges. Ultimately, the financial help and proximity to her family played major roles in her selection of UNP.

Carlos (transfer). Carlos is a Latinx student who is going into his senior year at UNP after transferring from a community college. Carlos grew up about 30 minutes from UNP, where his father raised him. His mother lives in Mexico, where she completed her middle school education. His father completed his high school education in Mexico. He grew up with his parents, who expected him to attend college. His older sister stayed in Mexico while he lived in the U.S. While in Mexico, his older sister completed her bachelor's degree and is planning on continuing with her education to obtain her master's. He referenced his sister as a motivator, along with his parents, for making college an expectation.

Carlos explained that it was not until high school that he first heard of UNP. Specifically, it was put at the forefront at a university conference. Although college was his goal, he stated that his grades in high school were not strong, so he decided to attend a community college. He wanted to mature and find what he wanted to study. It was

through a pre-college program at the community college that he found support in his

transition. Once he found his major, business, he did his own research and identified two

state schools. Ultimately, UNP was more appealing because it was situated in a larger

city, had a business program, and allowed him to transfer all his credits.

     Berenice (transfer). Berenice is a Latinx student who completed her first term at

UNP and will be at junior standings as a transfer student. Berenice grew up about 30

minutes from UNP. Bernice's mother completed her high education in Nicaragua, while

her father completed his high school education in the U.S. Berenice attended school in

the U.S. until the eighth grade, age 13. After that, she went to live in Nicaragua with her

grandmother. While in Nicaragua, she was discouraged from continuing her education

due to cultural beliefs about women not needing an education. However, at the age of 15,

Berenice returned to the U.S. Once here, she realized that education was required to make

a living. She tried night school but did not continue as it would take seven years to

complete. Instead, she found a General Educational Development (GED) program at a

local community college to complete the high school equivalency.

     While in the GED program, she took a break from school due to her family

growing and additional responsibilities. However, she persisted and completed her GED

and was then encouraged to continue with her education. She decided to stay at the

community college to continue with her college education. She went through several

majors until she found accounting that allowed her to complete in a reasonable amount of

time and transfer to a university. Berenice participated in the TRiO program that helped

first-generation students at the community college. With their help, and while referring to

the transfer guide, she came upon UNP. She found that UNP would not require her to move her family and allowed her to transfer her credits.

Aria (non-transfer). Aria is a Latinx student who is entering her senior year after she enrolled at UNP directly from high school. Aria grew up in a southwestern state of the U.S. before deciding to attend UNP. Aria's mother completed some middle school, and her father some high school in Mexico. Aria also grew up with three older sisters and credits her older sister as the person who introduced her to the idea of college and, specifically, UNP. While in sixth grade, she was able to attend her sister's UNP orientation, which served as a catalyst for her wanting to attend UNP.

As Aria got into high school and in her senior year, her school would provide a class period where students would research colleges. Aria would use this time to research UNP, and whenever she had questions, she would turn to her sister. She indicated that when it came to researching her major, she took it upon herself to learn more. However, she would rely on her sister when it came to admissions, financial aid, and other general questions. Since UNP was out of state it did take her mother some convincing to get her on board with the idea of Aria attending college out of state. However, because her sister had already attended UNP it made it a bit easier. She ended up applying to UNP and a local state university. She stated that she applied to the local state school only because of her mother, however, she had her heart set on UNP ever since she could remember. She ultimately decided to attend UNP as this was her dream school.

Data Analysis

Using Weiss's (1995) issue-focused analysis method, the study focused on learning more about marketing and recruitment and how it may have affected the experiences of first-generation Latinx students. Learning from the participants' college choice experience can help identify factors that contribute to inequitable marketing and recruitment practices at UNP. Using the Hossler and Gallagher (1987) college choice model to organize the findings allowed for data to be sorted through the various stages of the model that included the predisposition, the search, and the choice stages of the college choice model.

The model also accommodates the inclusion of college selection factors that influenced the participants as they searched, applied, and selected UNP. Three themes emerged from the interviews (1) Building a college-bound identity and self-resilience, (2) Accessing social and cultural capital, and (3) Marketing and its effects on students. The sections that follow will discuss the students' experiences that helped to build the themes.

The first theme, building a college-bound identity and self-resilience, helped highlight how parents and family members were critical in the predisposition stage of the college choice model. Additionally, the theme helped to highlight how parents could not support the students through the search and choice stages, leading the students to take it upon themselves to navigate the search and choice stages by themselves. This often resulted in challenges where they showed resiliency to overcome these challenges. This helped to address the first research question: How do first-generation Latinx students overcome adversity when working through the college choice process?

The second theme in the study was how individualized support, or the lack of it, helped or hindered the participants' college choice journey. The theme, accessing social and cultural capital, helped to answer question two: How do first-generation Latinx students admitted to UNP leverage their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice process? This theme helped illustrate how having mentorship that provided social and cultural capital helped students navigate the search stage.

Theme three, marketing and its effects on students, helped answer question three: How is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing? This theme helped to identify which forms of marketing students were exposed to and how their college selection factors played a role in the search and choice stages.

1. Building a College-bound Identity and Self-resilience

One of the three themes that emerged from the interviews was how the participants' parents and families helped them build their college-bound identity, which, in turn, helped them become self-resilient. College-bound identity, in this case, refers to a student's perception, or vision, in which they see themselves as attending college in the future (Markus & Nurius, 1986; Elliot, Choi, Destin, & Kim, 2011). This is important because in the predisposition stage of the college choice process children begin to build dreams and begin to make decisions on whether or not they will be attending college (Elliot et al., 2011). Families played an instrumental role in the participants' college choice process, which was crucial during the predisposition stage. For most of the

participants, familial and parental influence started early, and, for some, as early as elementary.

Students spoke about their families and how they developed postsecondary education aspirations when they were young. In addition, when the participants could not find support from their parents, they sought resources (social and cultural capital) to overcome challenges. These resources included siblings, extended family members, pre-college programs, high school counselors, college counselors, co-workers, friends, and teachers. Students who did not have mentors did not experience the same level of support. Where some receive much more help in their search and choice stages.

In this section, I focus on how parental and familial support helped these college-bound participants. All 12 participants mentioned that their parents could not offer them college knowledge. Instead, the parents would encourage their children to be resilient and resourceful and look for help on their own. Typically, parents encouraged their children to seek the advice of mentors and school counselors as they would recognize their limitations.

a. Parental and Family Strength

Throughout the interviews, there were examples of parents being key contributors in their children valuing education and beginning to plant the seeds for college. One way parents aided their students was by helping them build a college-bound identity. By building a college-bound identity, the students also developed resilience skills that would allow them to strive to reach their academic goals. This support consisted of parents talking to their children about the importance of education early in the students'

childhood. The parents often expressed the lack of opportunities in their home countries and would speak about the consequences of not receiving a college education. These consequences often came up when the parents reminded their children of the hard manual labor jobs they had to work. Parents would also remind their children of the sacrifices they had made leaving their home country to provide the participants the opportunity to continue with their education.

The constant reminders of the importance of education allowed each person to internalize the value of pursuing higher education. They recognized the value of receiving a college degree and the doors a college degree would open for them. Social mobility became key in these families. When participants recalled how they decided that higher education was their next step, all 12 stated their parents were key in the decision. This internalized value toward education showed up during the interview in different ways. Examples included, participants like Stephanie stating they wanted to continue to college from an early age. Participants like Carlos even stated that college was an expectation for them and that they knew it was the next step after graduating high school. Stephanie's dad expected her to have a career if she attended college. She remembered thinking of college as her next step and explained, "I never saw myself doing anything else besides going to college after high school." Stephanie's parents had consistently told her that college was a way to a better life, and she could not see herself doing anything else other than continuing on to college. Any other choice would not have produced the same career outlook. Like Stephanie, Melissa was another participant who credited her parents as motivators. Melissa explained that the idea of attending college was something

ingrained in her by her parents. Melissa's parents were also very encouraging and would

express their want for her to go to college. However, even with encouragement, her

parents could not provide logistical help. She recalled going through much of the

application process by herself and having to rely on herself to stay on top of deadlines.

> It was kind of just like my own thing. Okay, I have to kind of do it and go through
> [the application process on my own]. My parents were always just more
> supportive because they were like, I don't know how to do this, so like how am I
> going to help you.

> Because Melissa's parents were not sure how to help, she sought the guidance of

her high school counselors. Her undocumented status could have discouraged her from

continuing on to college, but her parents had built a strong college-bound identity. She

recalled moving to the U.S. at the age of five and witnessing her parents' struggle.

Melissa recalled her parents telling her the following, "you should go to college and we

want you to go to college. You know, we're working hard, and you know, that's all we

ask of you, you know, finish your education." Melissa's parents had struggled to provide

her with the best opportunities; the way she felt was that all her parents asked of her was

to take advantage of the opportunities.

> Aria was another participant who also shared about her supportive parents. They

emphasized how education could provide her with economic benefits in the future. Aria's

father viewed education as a form of social mobility. Aria shared her discussion with her

father and his view on higher education, stating,

> My dad looked at [college] from the side of, just make sure whatever [you] end up
> doing… like, you're choosing a good field and you're going to make money. And

> be able to support yourself. So, my dad looked at it from more of a grown-up logistical side.

Aria's parents recognized the importance of an education. They wanted their daughter to obtain a college education to become financially secure and not have to face the same economic struggles they did. Aria's dad recognized that without a college education he was not able to have the type of career he wanted. He did not want the same for Aria and encouraged her to obtain her college degree and have a career.

In addition to her parents' support, Aria could also rely on her siblings. Her older sister, whom she had grown up with, was able to offer her the most help. She remembered first learning about college and UNP through her sister. Her experience sparked her desire to attend college, and more specifically, UNP.

> I think it's honestly my sister [who introduced me to college]. I was raised very closely with her and so I think I was in maybe sixth grade when she was attending college. And so, I remember going to her orientation with her, and it was a whole new, it's like a whole new world for me. And I was like, "this is so cool." I think since then I had the mindset, I want to go to UNP, like, "I want to go to college." At that time, I didn't know what for, but I was like, "I want to go."

Aria's experience with familial support was a common theme for many others in the study. Many found themselves supported at home, where their family instilled the idea that higher education was the next logical step after completing high school. Additionally, all participants found themselves motivated to continue beyond high school because of family members, like siblings. All participants found they had to have self-motivation to continue to college. This was because all 12 reflected on all the independent work they had to do to attend college. 11 of the 12 students recalled having a parent, teacher, sibling, or family member instilling the idea of college as a possibility.

This idea and value for higher education would ensure that they would continue no matter what.

b. Resilience

The participants' college-bound identity helped them become resilient and resourceful. This was most evident when presented with challenges, such as when their parents were unable to assist them with researching colleges. Although parents were a great resource in building the students' college-bound identity, the parents also recognized their own limitations. They also instilled in their children the idea of being resourceful. By being each person became self-sufficient and willing to look for help when needed. However, the parental limitations also posed challenges for the group. These challenges showed up in various ways. In the study, only two of the 12 participants benefited from active parental involvement in both the search and choice stages. However, the two participants also acknowledge that the type of help they received from their parents was very limited. The parents' limited engagement forced participants to rely on themselves and school staff for support. Additionally, the parents' limited knowledge of higher education became a challenge when it came to more hands-on help in assessing the colleges. The challenge of parental limitation came up for all 12 students.

These findings are supported by Valencia's (2018) research, which found that parents recognize the value of cultural and social capital available outside of the home, so they encourage their students to reach out to teachers, counselors, and other staff. The students in the study had parents who recognized the importance of having their children

reach out to staff that could support them. This meant the participants had to navigate and identify individuals who had the cultural and social capital that would support them. Because of the limited cultural and social capital the parents could share they were also not as actively involved with the search and choice stages.

Carlos shared his story about his family's support and challenges. Throughout his upbringing, his family encouraged him to pursue higher education. He mentioned that education was stressed as a path to a better future, so by the time he graduated high school, he expected himself to continue to college. Carlos stated that his family had the expectation that college would follow after high school.

The idea of college as the next logical step went from an aspiration to an expectation for the participants. Carlos was encouraged and expected to continue to college, however, he was not able to receive help in the search stages at home. Instead, he had to rely on his own college knowledge to guide him through the search and choice stages. Carlos had to navigate the transition from high school to community college and then from his community college to UNP. Even though he recalled zero involvement from his father through the application process, Carlos understood why. His father did not have the knowledge to provide him with advice during his college search process. When it came to engagement in the college choice process, Carlos did clarify that his dad still supported him and encouraged him. Carlos mentioned that beyond encouragement there was no logistical support.

Parental involvement for first-generation students is often limited. All participants mentioned a similar version of this experience. To clarify, none of the participants stated

their parents did not care, but all indicated how they needed to be self-sufficient. This is important to note, as previous research has found that a parent's lack of involvement in their child's school activities is not an indicator for not caring (Valencia, 2018), instead, parents of first-generation students are limited to the type of support they can offer.

For Carlos, he recalled his own process in continuing to UNP, stating he did much of the research on his own. It was important to him to do as much research on his college options as possible. This was because he was paying out of pocket. From Carlos's perspective, he could not afford to make mistakes that could cost him additional money. While at the community college, he found himself an on-campus job that allowed him to serve as a mentor. In this job, he was able to teach himself about the transfer process. As a mentor, he could assist other students with their college questions. In his job, he found that to be effective, he needed to understand what steps a student would need to take to be successful in gaining admission. Additionally, the job allowed him to connect with professional staff who could talk to him about college (social and cultural capital) and help build his college knowledge. This opportunity provided him insight into what he should look for when he transitioned to a four-year university.

Other students shared similar stories about their parent's limitations and the need for them to be self-sufficient and resilient. Melissa explained that her parents would not engage in the application process out of fear. She explained that her parents were not engaged in the application process or the transfer process. Because Melissa's parents had limited social and cultural capital to support her, they were reluctant to guide her throughout the application process. The lack of access to social and cultural capital at

home also caused other Latinx students to experience hardships. Sonia echoed Melissa's experience when Sonia explained that her parents were not involved at all throughout the process. This included no participation in searching for colleges or the application process. Instead, she had to navigate and assess schools on her own. Other students like Moises and Edgar faced challenges as well.

For Moises, his parents faced another layer of challenges because of their immigration status. He recalled his dad's distance during the college search when he recalled that his mother was involved where she could while his father was not involved in any of the process. His parents' limited involvement was not just because of their limited college knowledge, but also because of his parent's immigration status. Moises talked about this hurdle and how he took it upon himself to navigate the process, "my parents were undocumented, so they had, they had no hope in FAFSA or anything like that, and it was all just me and going out and seeking my own advice." Moises and many of the students had to be self-sufficient and tap into any resources they had available to them. This meant being able to advocate for themselves and seek aid at school with teachers or counselors.

Edgar was another student with additional challenges he had to face throughout high school. His immigration status had created doubt in him. He discussed how, at times, he did not envision himself attending higher education. He would hear his friends in high school talk about colleges, including UNP. However, he did not see himself at a four-year institution. His mother could not assist him through the search and choice stages either. Instead, he navigated the process by himself. In doing so, he decided to

attend a community college. However, his journey was short-lived, as he lost his

scholarship because of his immigration status. Questions regarding his immigration status

were being raised by staff and administration regarding his scholarship eligibility.

Through this ordeal, he decided to drop out of college to avoid drawing any attention

from the immigration enforcement agency. It would take Edgar several more years and a

change in his immigration status before he returned to college. After his immigration

status changed, he explained that he finally allowed himself to dream. He reapplied to his

community college, and once enrolled, he decided to continue into a four-year institution.

Through this journey, he would often still rely on himself. However, as he connected

with people on campus, he built his social and cultural capital. This allowed him to reach

out to his counselors. He explained how he relied on himself to continue with his

education,

> It was all, it was on me, honestly, you know, the counselor was definitely part of
> the conversation if I had questions, [but it was still] me having to do the research
> and reaching out and making that decision on my own.

All students displayed this persistence and ability to rely on themselves. Each faced

obstacles along the way, and even with limited parental engagement, they sought to make

college a reality.

All the participants in the study faced some type of adversity when planning to

attend college, or as they progressed through the search and application process.

However, they all had the motivation to continue. Many students, like Carlos, Edgar, and

Melissa, had the resilience to continue with their education, crediting their parents. Their

parents valued higher education and wanted them to pursue a "good" career. Parents were

instrumental in helping build the college-bound identity of the participants. However, their parents were limited in the type of support they could provide. Research has shown that the more college knowledge a parent and student have about higher education, the higher the likelihood the student will enroll in college (Kim & Schneider, 2005). Recognizing the impact that having college knowledge has, and the effect it can have on attending college makes these experiences important to highlight. These students, with the limited college knowledge they had, still managed to gain admission to UNP.

The participants in the study referenced their parents' sacrifices as internal motivators as well. Although the students had set their minds to attend college, they had to overcome additional challenges during the search and choice stages. These experiences tie into the community cultural wealth model, which recognizes family, aspiration, and navigation as forms of capital (Yosso, 2005). Familial capital recognizes how families can help build a culture in their students, in this case, a college-bound culture. This is integral because these students are already at a disadvantage as the colleges they wish to attend require access to a certain level of college knowledge (i.e., cultural and social capital). Thus, their families are key to turning these aspirations into reality. Still, the students did their best to navigate a new and complex system with the resources they had. All are rooted in family and their value of education.

Previous research supports parents building a college-bound identity, as research has shown how parental involvement can build persistence in students (Savitz-Romer & Bouffard, 2012; Paulsen, 1990). Additionally, the level of engagement parents have with their children's education has shown a positive correlation, whereas the higher levels of

parental engagement for Latinx and African American children have shown a higher likelihood of enrollment into a four-year institution (Perna, 2000). This was consistent with these participants as their parents and family encouragement helped them to continue into college. Even though the parents were unable to be actively involved in the search and choice stages of the college choice process, they were active in the participants' early childhood (predisposition).

2. Accessing Social and Cultural Capital

As the participants talked about their journeys in search for the right college, they all shared a similar feeling of being unprepared and, in some ways, feeling like they did not know everything they should have. Berenice, Moises, Daisy, and the rest of the participants explained that they were making their college decisions based on the information and resources they had available. Even though colleges provided access to information on their brochures and websites, the participants did not always know what to look for. As first-generation students, they were unsure of what to expect, which, for many, led to learning on their own. Stephanie explained this concept of "not knowing" when she stated "*uno que no sabe*" (someone who does not know) when she explained her initial college visits. Many participants echoed this statement when discussing their challenges of being new to the college search process. Each person faced many challenges in selecting the right college and had to leverage their social and cultural capital to make an informed decision.

During the interviews, everyone was able to reflect on their experiences. The participants reflected on these experiences differently, as some were upperclassmen and others were lower-classmen. Moises, Aria, Jessica, and the rest of the seniors and juniors, who had spent three to four years in college, seemed to have more awareness of the information they read and missed. They had gained more social and cultural capital through their connections in college, which helped identify some moments of realization. These relationships with other college students, staff, and faculty helped them build their social and cultural capital. Because of this knowledge (capital) gained, the participants could reflect on their experiences with a more critical perspective. For example, they were able to reflect on how they did not really understand the resources that were available to them, and they missed out on them.

The students discussed how the level of support they received from others (e.g., school staff and programs) made a difference in assessing colleges. Through their stories, differences began to appear between those who had support through their college choice journey and those who had limited support. Their stories help to highlight how not having the required social and cultural capital created challenging experiences for them when they did not have access to people and programs that could provide said social and cultural capital. The participants' experiences also helped to explore how those who gained greater social capital led to gaining greater cultural capital. The participants' experiences reveal how support at home and at school, or lack thereof, can create divergent experiences.

Although the participants had different types of support systems to learn about UNP and higher education, the participants who gained more college knowledge were those who had specific mentors, counselors, or pre-college programs that provided individualized attention. Participants with individualized guidance received a wealth of knowledge on how to assess their college options. In comparison, those who did not have a specific person or program to tap into had additional difficulties in their process. Still, even with the assistance, all participants experienced gaps of knowledge that could not be filled. To help gain a better understanding of how the participants leveraged their social and cultural capital, this section will discuss how students with and without support navigated the search and choice process with the capital they gained or possessed.

The participants in the study often explained how their parent's limited college knowledge led them to find help elsewhere. This experience of looking for help outside the home is common for first-generation students, as parents without college knowledge rely on schools for the student's college preparation (Robinson & Roksa, 2016). All the participants in the study recalled that their high school or community college was a constant place where they received college information. All participants explained how they became aware of different college options while in school. Their teachers, who were alumni of local colleges, would talk about their experiences and the benefits of attending their alma mater.

High school provided an environment where there were opportunities for participants to interact with colleges. These opportunities included participating in college fairs where they could interact with college representatives and college students.

Some opportunities also included taking part in college visits. While in school, the participants had opportunities to connect with counselors, teachers, and mentors who could provide helpful information. All these individuals provided guidance and knowledge about colleges, scholarships, programs, and other useful information. Through these networks of people, participants would gain the knowledge necessary to move through their search and choice stages.

In addition, all 6 of the participants who transferred also shared that as they transitioned to their community college they had additional networking opportunities. While at their community college, Berenice and Jessica spoke about programs they were involved in that supported first-generation students. These programs would provide them opportunities to interact with counselors, staff, and faculty who could serve as knowledge sharers. Additionally, some took part in courses that would bring university representatives to talk about their schools and what their schools could offer. The opportunities also allowed the participants to learn more about universities and the resources available.

Participants in the study further explain how teachers who spoke highly about their alma mater would spark their interest in them. Some also referenced teachers and counselors who decorated their classrooms with college paraphernalia. The posters, stickers, and other collegiate items exposed students to various colleges, much like branding does for a company. All these interactions with the teachers and counselors helped create an awareness of local public and private colleges. Even though all participants spoke about exposure to UNP and other colleges, it took dedicated

counselors, liaisons, teachers, or pre-college program staff who provided individualized

support to assist them in building the social and cultural capital required to assess

colleges. However, students like Leo, Elizabeth, Edgar, Daisy, and Carlos were without a

mentor or pre-college program. These participants helped to highlight how individualized

support helped build their social and cultural capital and how those without traversed the

journey with limited social and cultural capital.

Melissa. Melissa's parents supported her college aspirations. She recalled that

early in her childhood her parents instilled in her the importance of college. Although her

parents were instrumental in ensuring she valued education, she had to find help with

college planning outside of home. Melissa was fortunate that her high school had staff

that could assist her. Her high school had a community liaison with whom she could

reach out and make a connection. The liaison helped her with the college search and

helped coach her. The liaison not only helped her but also helped to serve the students

and families at the school. Melissa recalled the following,

> [The community liaison was] very passionate about the students that [attended the
> school] and helping them. Like [helping] the students and their families to first of
> all graduate high school. She started to kind of just push me towards leadership
> positions. She was like, okay, you know if you do this, you can go higher up, you
> know. Do what you like to do. With the purpose of continuing your education.

Having the community liaison as a mentor provided the support Melissa needed. The

liaison provided Melissa with the social and cultural capital needed to navigate the

college search, admission, and selection process. The help she received allowed her to

evaluate her options and understand how to assess certain criteria.

> I consider the community liaison my mentor, now [she is more] like a good friend. And she was definitely that one person who would stay after school with me and kind of helped me with those essays and helped me with the application process. Not just with UNP, but [with] any scholarship applications; any opportunity. She was like, "okay, we're gonna stay after school, [and] we're gonna do this."

The liaison provided her with college knowledge (cultural capital) that she could not get at home. Melissa did not just learn how to write a college essay, but also how to develop her leadership skills. Additionally, the liaison encouraged Melissa to build her social network and helped her understand the importance of connections and gaining meaningful leadership experiences. Her mentor's guidance helped her along the way and, in some ways, indirectly influenced her to stay close to home. Melissa believed that the experiences and connections she made in the city, because of her mentor, allowed her to see the type of civic engagement opportunities she could continue to have at UNP. The level of support and guidance she received at school, specifically through the community liaison, positively affected her experience. The liaison provided her with the knowledge and skills needed to navigate the search and choice stages successfully.

Moises. Moises attended a high school with a College Readiness Program (CRP). The program provided students with information about the higher education system and the college search process. While in the program, Moises recalled the support he received from his teacher, Ms. Gee. He explained:

> She helped everybody and she had so much love and compassion and so much patience and you really just want to see in a person right. She was amazing. She pushed all of her CRP students, all of us. She held us to great standards, to have great high expectations. She always made us comfortable, where we have a question, don't be afraid to ask to come ask me. If you don't ask your parents, if you have no other resources, use me. And she, she kept that door wide open.

> Looking back, you know CRP took us to [community colleges, state colleges, and private colleges]. You know, and at the time I remember just [thinking], 'oh you get free food at the end', you know? I looked at everything besides the actual meaning [of the trips]. And I look back at it now it's like okay, CRP [took] us to multiple different schools across [the state]...If it wasn't for CRP taking on my future, I would have never [visited] a single school.

Because of the opportunities to visit various schools and learn about the different institutions, he applied to most of the colleges he visited. Having someone who could coach him through the search process and the opportunity to see the institutions provided him with more cultural and social capital than he could have received at home. His experiences also enabled him to evaluate rankings, degree program options, and program costs.

Stephanie. While in high school, Stephanie learned about different colleges through the University Dreams pre-college program, which provided mentorship to first-generation students like her. The pre-college program provided her access to mentors who could provide her with the college knowledge she needed to navigate the search and choice process. It also helped her with considering UNP and selecting UNP. Stephanie explained her experience stating,

> I don't know what I would've done without University Dreams honestly. Huge shout out to my mentor. I still keep in touch with him to this day. He really helped me and pushed me to look for scholarships, if it wasn't for him nagging me I wouldn't have a four-year renewable scholarship that I have now.

Through the pre-college program, Stephanie had the opportunity to meet college students. She had the opportunity to visit colleges and learn about the different schools. These opportunities helped her evaluate and assess her options. Additionally, the program

provided students with grids that assisted them in evaluating all their college options.

Stephanie explained the following,

> Part of my experience [with University Dreams] was that before you apply to a
> school you do have to write down what kind of things do I like about the school,
> what's the budget, and you would have a grid with multiple schools of our choice
> and that grid we would use to compare.

The college knowledge (cultural capital) she gained while in the program helped her

secure a scholarship to pay for school. Stephanie credits them for her success in gaining

admission to and securing a scholarship at UNP. The program also allowed her to go on

campus visits and helped her review websites to better understand aspects of the college

search. It helped her understand what schools she could consider and apply to. She

explained that the program opened her eyes to different institutions, like UNP. In

Stephanie's case, she did not even consider UNP as an option until her University

Dreams mentor mentioned the institution. She explained the following,

> I didn't really look into schools that were actually [within] my reach and so I
> would only ever know about big schools and stuff like that. But I had originally
> been set, I set my mind to attend University of Manzanita. And I knew nothing
> about college, I didn't know that it was so expensive, and I didn't think about it.
> And I was in a program in high school called University Dreams where I had a
> mentor and he basically helped us whenever… and he was telling me about UNP.
> And so, I really only heard about it my senior year, and he was like, I still think
> that even though you have your heart set on University of Manzanita, a really
> expensive school, you should still at least go and tour UNP. So, I remember
> around the springtime I went and I took a tour with some other University Dreams
> classmates and it ended up seeming, like, kind of cool.

Without her mentor, Stephanie would not have seriously considered UNP. However,

through her connections in the pre-college program and her mentor, she was able to learn

more about different options. Having options was important as she wanted to stay close to home and reduce her out-of-pocket costs.

For Stephanie and Moises, who participated in a pre-college program, the support they received assisted them as they navigated and assessed all the choices ahead of them. They were able to factor in their own needs (e.g., distance from family, cost, degree programs), and most importantly, had individuals able to assist them along the way. Like other participants in the study, Stephanie reported facing many uncertainties throughout the college search process. At times, she felt as though she did not quite understand everything she needed.

However, just as important are the participants who did not receive as much guidance, and their struggles compared to those who did have mentors. The participants who did not have individualized attention mentioned that they had research institutions on their own and relied on the information on the college websites to guide them. Their experiences help to highlight how resourceful first-generation students were in order to continue their pursuit to college and gaining admission into UNP - even if they had limited assistance.

Daisy. Daisy was on the other end of the spectrum, where she often found herself with limited help at school. Daisy's parents were very supportive of her attending college. Like many other parents, her parents trusted the school to provide her with the help she would need to prepare for college. Daisy explained how her parents would rely on her and her counselors to guide her process.

> Well, the first person they mentioned was my counselor at the high school because we all had different counselors [assigned] by our last names. And so, they told me to go [see] them. And they were very helpful in trying to help me, you know. Look at which universities are close by because of their concerns of living on campus [compared to living] very far away.

Daisy elaborated on her experience and explained that although she did receive limited help from the high school counselors, she still felt there could have been additional support. She would have liked support with things like differentiating the schools and identifying possible scholarship opportunities. This lack of support left her to assess all her options with her limited college knowledge.

Daisy was one of the students who limited her options when applying to different schools. She did not receive advice on the advantages of applying to multiple schools and scholarships. She recalled the potential of applying to several scholarships,

> If I had more opportunities with scholarships, I feel like I could have gotten a better… I could have gotten a better experience at UNP because I was very limited on cash, and see what I could have done at the university [with more aid]. Because I wish… I wanted to live on campus but since it's expensive. I'm like, I could have done better.

Daisy reflected on her missed opportunities and how she did not know what and where to look for specific resources. She explained that when she looked at the University of Northwest Pacific, she thought this was the only school and did not try to look for other college options. In retrospect, Daisy would have liked to have expanded her search.

Unlike the students with support, Daisy did not have individualized attention from her counselors, mentors, or pre-college programs. Not having a dedicated individual who could provide her with the level of support she needed made her experience more challenging. Counselors can help level the playing field when assisting disadvantaged

students as counselors can share a wealth of knowledge about the college transition

(Klugman, 2012). Daisy's relationship with her counselor was much more of a

prescriptive relationship. Where she could come in and get some help and then leave.

Instead, she felt like she learned more about colleges on her own. Daisy expressed that

she had also hoped, and assumed, that college representatives would be able to fill some

gaps with information - however, that was not the case. Like Daisy, participants who did

not have access to dedicated people or programs had challenging times when evaluating

all their options. This was most revealing in Daisy's experience when she explained how

she wanted to study nursing but learned that nursing was not offered at UNP once she had

enrolled.

Edgar. Edgar also faced several challenges as he pursued higher education. One

of the most significant barriers for him was his immigration status and the effects it

would have on his future. Early on, he did not think he could start at a four-year college,

so it was not an immediate option. Had Edgar had the help to navigate the college search

and admissions process, he could have learned about four-year colleges and possible

financial aid available to him. Because of his status, Edgar also explained that he did not

want to bring unwanted attention to himself and his family. However, without the cultural

and social capital to help him analyze his options, he was not aware of the resources

available to him. Edgar recalled his experience, reflecting,

> I knew that a university was not an option. I mean, I assumed that it wasn't. I
> didn't really look into what resources may or may not have been out there back,
> you know, in those days. I made the assumption that [a 4-year college was] the
> kind of school that people with money go to, people who planned all along to go
> to schools. Those are the universities and colleges that they go to. My people go

to community college, you know, and we pursue maybe a very specific type of degree or certification just so that we can make it into the workforce with some sort of skill.

Edgar's immigration status and the limited help he received as he transitioned from high school to college posed barriers for him. His perception of who could attend a four-year institution and where people of color attended convinced Edgar that there were limitations that applied to him. He now recognizes that there may have been scholarship aid for him, but he was unaware of any back then. Edgar was not the only participant who was unaware of their options and assumed no resources were available to assist them in their search for colleges.

Leo. Participants like Leo also struggled to find the right information on time. For him, it was not finding out about specific scholarship programs like Bright Futures until it was too late. Leo explained that he did not know about the Latinx scholarship opportunity in high school, and because he was unaware of the program, he was unable to apply.

> One of the programs I wish I had been able to join when I was a freshman was, what's it called? Bright Futures. That was one of the programs I really wanted to be in but in order to be in the program you would have had to apply when you were in high school. Like your senior year in high school, so obviously I wasn't able to join, which I was really bummed out about.

Leo did not learn about the program until he joined UNP, which made it too late for him to apply. He felt as though he could have benefited from the program had he been able to join it his first year. Leo mentioned that he would have liked to have benefited from the mentorship offered through the scholarship program. These experiences help to illustrate how not knowing and not having people in their social network with college knowledge can hurt a person's ability to tap into the resources available to them. It could be argued

that simply providing access to information is not sufficient. Access to information

without the required social and cultural capital may not produce the best outcome.

Carlos. Participants like Carlos also missed out on academic opportunities, even

when transitioning from community college to UNP. Carlos was unaware of the honors

program available for business students at UNP. Instead, he learned about it once he

joined UNP, which he recalled and shared,

> I wish I did [know about] the school of business honors. And I didn't find out until
> I was already in school so I feel like if I had that outreach earlier on, when I was
> at [the community college], it would have been better to understand. Because
> most times when UNP people go over to let's say [the community college] it's
> very general, you know. Like, this is UNP. But UNP is not just UNP, like if
> you're gonna go to the school business you're going to have your own
> requirements. So, it's just very different, and it's just so hard for you to get a solid
> understanding from the recruiters at the little career fairs because there is just so
> much, and they can [only] tell you so much in that short amount of time.

Carlos did not place blame on UNP and instead believed it was on him to have to learn

about such programs. However, like the other participants in the study, it is hard for

someone to apply to a program they did not know existed. If the participants are unaware

of the resources, it becomes difficult to find them. The difficulties that first-generation

students face without college knowledge are not one-offs. Instead, research has shown it

is an institutional systemic issue for first-generation students (Engle et al., 2006).

Intuitions aim their mass messaging to continuing-generation students who often come

from middle- and upper-class families. The targeted recruitment leaves a gap between

who, how, and what colleges market, and how first-generation Latinx students work to

make sense of the messaging.

Recognizing how mentors and programs can lead to social and cultural capital helped highlight the importance of having the right people who can help leverage the college knowledge needed. How this manifested looked different for the participants; however, it became apparent that having people with college knowledge provided participants with the most advantages. Building capital with the help of the family, pre-college programs, and school staff helped students successfully continue with their college choice process.

Still, even with the help participants received, they felt unprepared. This feeling was confirmed as many participants spoke about their missed opportunities. These missed opportunities presented themselves as programs, scholarships, and other forms of resources they were unaware of. Once in college, they began to realize that they had missed all the resources they were too late to access.

It took them years of attending college and making connections to build their social capital. That social capital would help gain more cultural capital (college knowledge). This is important to acknowledge because previous research has also shown that students of color and first-generation students often have limited college knowledge (Ceja, 2006). With limited knowledge, first-generation students are unaware of what they need. The hidden or unknown resources that were available to participants did not become apparent until participants reached college. Tello and Lonn (2017) also reported that first-generation students often are unaware of the resources available to them, including resources that help with persistence and retention. Without the knowledge of

the programs, Sonia, Carlos, Leo, and Jessica mentioned not knowing about certain

programs or scholarships.

Jessica. Even though Jessica had taken part in a pre-college program while in

high school. She found herself unaware of programs designed to assist first-generation

students as she researched colleges. Once in college Jessica almost missed the

opportunity to participate in a beneficial program. It was friends in college who

connected her to resources like the cultural center and the TRIO federal program. Her

friends, who had knowledge of these resources, helped her become aware of the

opportunities to join. She recalled her experiences and expressed wishing she had known

more about these programs ahead of time.

> [I wished for] more information on the programs that there were in school. For
> example, I know there's [the cultural center at UNP]. But I wasn't aware of it until
> after I started UNP. And then one of my high school friends, she was like, hey I
> joined this club. Do you want to come?

Jessica explained that her friends were indeed crucial to building her awareness. She

expanded on this notion of friends opening new opportunities by explaining,

> I think that would be accurate [that my friends helped] because through another
> friend I found out about the TRIO program that was at UNP and that's how I
> applied for it. So yeah, I would say that's correct, if I didn't hear it from other
> friends, I would never have known about it.

Participants like Jessica helped highlight the issues and challenges first-generation

students face when they have limited college knowledge. If the participants are unaware

of specific college resources, applying to such resources is difficult. At times, Jessica

does reflect on whether she may have limited herself as well. She recalled thinking about

her decision to attend UNP,

> If I had the advice that I have now, and… I would have chosen to go to a different college because I'm between two. I would have decided maybe to go to community college first or go to University of Pacific State (UPS) because of their [rankings], and people getting employed right after they graduate for career paths. But yeah, I would have wished I had, like, more like more information about each school.

Although Jessica thinks about whether she made the best decision, she did her best with the limited college knowledge she had.

Sonia. Other participants also helped to highlight the challenges they faced when they did not have the social and cultural capital necessary to make a smooth transition. Students like these ultimately miss out on helpful experiences. Unlike Jessica, Sonia did not meet people who could assist her in her transition. Sonia was unaware of scholarship programs or federal programs that served first-generation students at UNP. Instead, she learned about some of the programs until her later years at UNP. By then, she felt she no longer needed all the help. Sonia explained the following, "I wish I would have known more. But the thing is, you have to keep talking to people, and people, and hoping that you meet the person that knows what's going on or where to go." Even though Sonia missed out on some opportunities, she does not place blame on the school as she recognizes the difficulty that could come with sharing too much information, stating,

> I don't want to say oh put everything on the website because there's a lot on the website, you know. People are lazy. Honestly for me I'd rather someone tell me how to do it rather than have to read the instructions, first of all. I'm a hands-on learner and I have to see you do it.

Sonia explained that there are other ways to share important information with students beyond written communication. Still, what became apparent was the need for specific

information, such as resources for Latinx, first-generation students, and other

marginalized students.

Moises. Even as a participant in a pre-college program, Moises still felt as though

he was at a disadvantage compared to continuing-generation students. As a college

student who, after three years, had amassed cultural and social capital, he could now

express himself with a more critical perspective. He now can recognize how in some

ways, as a first-generation student, he came into this process at a disadvantage,

> I think the real sad thing is, especially for first-generation students, regardless of
> race and background. If you're the first-gen student, the first in your family to
> pursue higher education, they don't know these things. They don't know. You see,
> a lot of people, even my friends from [home] that don't attend, [or] that didn't
> attend college, or a higher education, they say "oh it cost too much," and it does.
> Or like, you're just spending time getting a piece of paper. In a way, yeah, you
> know.
>
> But someone whose parents did go through the [college] process, they're able to
> say, it costs [money] because of this law or because of this. Or, because they have
> this new building, they have to raise tuition fees. Like they're able to break down
> the numbers with more, more backstory rather than just like, "oh man that cost X
> amount of money." And then on top of that, it's the way you see it too. Like yes,
> you can see [your degree] as a piece of paper. But this piece of paper can
> ultimately help me land a nice career, not a job, a career. And it's just the way you
> see it and the way your environment goes up with it. And if you're first gen you
> don't have that environment. It's really sad.
>
> See everything I'm telling you is something I wouldn't have been able to explain
> as a senior in high school. But once you've gone through the system, and you
> [gain an] understanding, you're kind of like damn, people are kind of getting
> fucked over, but, excuse my language, but that's really what is happening. In a
> way.

Moises's quote encapsulates what first-generation students go through as they journey

through their college choice journey. Parents encouraged their children to attend college,

however, few parents could help them through the search process. The participants were

at a disadvantage without the right people around them to provide the required cultural and social capital. The participants who missed out on scholarships, support programs, mentorship programs, and even honors programs did so because they were unaware of their existence. Even after they navigated the website and brochures, they were still unaware of any missed opportunities. As mentioned, for some, it would take years to discover that there were programs that support first-generation and Latinx students like them.

Research has shown that the information colleges provide is sometimes inappropriate for all students and can further perpetuate misconceptions that first-generation students already hold (Zarate & Pachon, 2006). For students like Daisy, these situations can add additional time and money to their schooling. Having the right information is crucial as the cost of attending college in the U.S. continues to increase and continues to be a major concern for both students and their families (Fonseca, 2020; Zarate & Pachon, 2006; National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). The participants help to highlight the disadvantages first-generation students face. It also helped demonstrate how they leveraged the limited social and cultural capital they possessed to make the best decision.

3. Marketing and its Effects on Students

Through the college choice journey, participants recalled engaging with different forms of marketing and recruitment. Students reviewed college brochures and websites and talked to recruiters in their search for UNP's information. Daisy and Edgar are two examples that explain the necessity of conducting their own research beyond what was

initially presented to them. They tried to gather as much information as possible to make the most informed decision. Both considered various factors, including cost of attendance, distance from family, and degree programs offered at the college. The third theme discussed in this section is how UNP's marketing affected the participants. Marketing did not help to create informed students. To help explore this theme, this section will be broken into two different parts to better understand how marketing and the participants' selection factors all played a part in their search and choice stages. I will begin by highlighting how marketing presented itself (i.e., printed, online, and college representatives) and how the participants experienced these types of marketing. I will then transition to how their college selection factors were weighed and played a role in their selection of UNP. This will help to address the third research question on how marketing affected the college choice experience of the participants.

Marketing context. Marketing is essential for institutions as it helps reach many prospective students through different means—digital ads, flyers, posters, and billboards. By heavily investing in their marketing strategies, UNP and other colleges can help build awareness and interest in their schools. Although UNP's marketing was successful in presenting the school's strengths, its marketing did not necessarily work to inform the students of all their options.

It is important to note that all participants mentioned misconceptions they had about UNP. These misconceptions included the thought that there was no real difference between the UNP and other public institutions or that public state universities were less prestigious than private colleges. These misconceptions are important to note as one of

the functions of marketing is to help inform customers of the product and its value. Hartman's (2019) research supported this point, where marketing does entail this educational function, where organizations inform and educate customers. By creating informed customers, organizations can help them understand what the product offers and its value (Mansoor, 2019). From hearing the students' experiences, UNP's marketing could not address some of the misconceptions the participants held.

UNP's marketing and recruitment tactics to reach these participants included various strategies. These strategies included having recruiters visit schools at college fairs, as well as class visits and high school career center visits. These opportunities allowed recruiters to share information about UNP and answer questions in person. UNP also pushed to have printed ads in the city like the airport, on the side of buses, light rails, and commuter rails. There were also digital ads that included Google ads, and social media ads (e.g., Facebook, YouTube, Instagram). These strategies function as a method to create awareness of UNP.

In the study, the majority of participants were exposed to three forms of marketing. This included printed materials, the college website, and college representatives. During the interviews, participants were asked about their experiences engaging with the University of Northwest Pacific (UNP), and although several forms of marketing were brought up, such as phone calls, emails, social media, and click ads, the top three forms of marketing that consistently came up were printed materials, the college website, and college representatives.

During the interviews, participants mentioned seeing printed materials early in high school and community college. These UNP ads included flyers, posters, and billboards. However, half of the participants mentioned brochures as their first form of engagement, which was by far the highest form of printed materials they engaged with. Others had mentioned seeing billboards on the highway and ads on the side of buses and streetcars. From the participants' perspective, out of all the types of printed marketing materials, brochures were by far the best way to learn about UNP and other schools. The brochures provided information regarding tuition and the type of degree programs offered. Students like Jessica and Daisy pointed out that they were able to review information on the cost of living, scholarships, and rankings. However, no participant mentioned the brochure as the reason for applying to a school. Instead, brochures served as an instrument that helped begin their search for information.

Students like Jessica and Daisy remembered reading through materials and being able to retrieve basic information. Many of them had similar experiences, indicating that the brochure was the initial step to learning about a college. Jessica explained how she would have access to college brochures at her high school's career center. The brochures allowed her to learn about the costs associated with attending college.

> I saw a lot of [brochures] at the career center, they would give us brochures about [UNP]...I did find [them] useful up to a certain point, like at some level. Because, like tuition, they give us the average for tuition, but again, like each person's scenario is different.

For Daisy, reviewing the printed materials also provided her with the first step in her research on UNP. She recalled when she first received a brochure,

> I remember[ed] [UNP from a previous event] and I really wanted to check it out
> and see like, okay, what do they have? And like, the pamphlets were very
> informative, especially the... the thing that drew me in the most was the four years
> [scholarship]. Knowing that UNP tried to minimize the amount of debt you will
> come out of college with. And I was like, this is great, this is for me, this is what I
> really want.

Both participants highlighted how they found the information in the brochures helpful.

As they read through the materials, they were able to learn about the cost and possible

scholarships available. Daisy felt the brochure helped identify scholarships that could

help reduce her costs. However, as Jessica mentioned, the materials were limited by the

information they could provide. For example, Daisy's brochures did not explain how to

apply and what requirements she needed to meet for the scholarship. Instead, participants

would need to conduct their own research to learn more and apply. Daisy and Jessica's

experiences were common among the participants. The group also explained that the

brochures did not make them want to apply to a school, but they served their purpose as a

useful tool. They were easy to get a hold of at their high school college centers, college

fairs, as well as community college centers.

The next form of marketing was the college website. The website was used by all

12 students. Colleges are investing heavily in their website as more prospective students

rely on their websites for information. All participants mentioned using the University of

Northwest Pacific's (UNP) website to dig deeper into the school. Like many colleges,

UNP uses its website to engage with its audience and highlight its rankings, programs,

and other information that can be appealing to prospective students. However, the UNP

website produced mixed experiences. For example, only one participant found the

website easy to navigate. While others felt that although the information was available it

was hard for them to find what they wanted. In addition, for others, the information on

the website became difficult to understand because of the college-specific jargon. Edgar

and Berenice are two participants who help to highlight the two sides of the spectrum and

the types of experiences.

Edgar was focused on finding information on degree requirements. He was

diligent in his approach by ensuring his community college credits would transfer to

UNP. Edgar, in the interview, recalled having to navigate the website and finding it quite

useful and easy to use. Edgar explained his experience as positive, sharing,

> The UNP website was honestly, I think it's set up quite nicely, for being able to
> find information as quickly as possible. I was quite surprised it was really easy.
> Unlike the [state scholarship] website, it's very convoluted, it's very difficult to,
> you know, [to] work your way through their menus. The web pages that they had
> on UNP's website were quite different.

Edgar's experience with the website was unique, as no other participant indicated having

an easy experience navigating the website. Still, other participants like Berenice and

Carlos mentioned that the website was useful and that it contained a considerable amount

of information. For example, the information allowed participants who were transfer

students to review the transfer requirements to UNP, and if UNP would accept all their

credits. The website also allowed the participants to see the cost of attendance and

scholarship information. Still, Berenice stated that although useful, the website was not as

good at providing contextual information. In other words, the "why" was not always

provided. For example, the website listed prerequisites but did not explain why there

were prerequisites or how these prerequisites would play into degree requirements. To find the answer, this required additional clicks and searches.

Berenice's experience is an example of how missing context can make collecting information much more difficult. Although UNP has information on college degrees and courses offered, Berenice explained that there should be less college-specific jargon. She stated that the UNP should reconsider the way they present their information. "I personally feel like [UNP] should just not have a special name for [courses] because it's confusing, and not everyone is going to know what it means just by looking at the website." Berenice's biggest challenge was not finding the courses that would transfer and the courses she would need to complete for her degree requirements. As a transfer student, Berenice wanted to ensure she would not take any unnecessary courses that would add to her timeline or increase her cost of attendance. The experience of trying to find the correct information that aligned with the community college's information often caused some confusion for transfer students. The website was crucial for transfer students as it helped identify transfer courses and degree requirements.

Non-transfer students had similar experiences with finding the website helpful in finding college information. However, students like Daisy and Moises mostly wanted to learn more about the admissions requirements and scholarships. Their experiences mirrored that of the transfer students. Where Stephanie, Sonia, Moises, and Daisy found the website to have a wealth of information but found it hard to find specific information. Edgar and Carlos reported that they were satisfied with the information on the college website. The rest of the group discussed the website as convoluted and hard to navigate.

Lastly, nine of the participants indicated having experience with *college representatives*. Recognizing the role of a college representative helps to understand how they may interact with students. Their work involves generating leads, reading applications, admitting students, and ensuring a strong matriculating class. Their work includes attending recruitment events and meeting and communicating with prospective students. In this study, the participants typically met with recruiters at college fairs hosted at their high school, at a conference, or at a community college event. Carlos, Leo, and Moises reported that the information they obtained from college representatives was helpful in their college choice decisions. Their experiences played a role in whether they pursued a college or not.

Those who made connections and built relationships with a college representative ended up with more positive experiences. Moise's experience highlighted how having a relationship with the college representatives was beneficial. His connection with a representative changed his views on UNP, where he saw the recruiter as someone who was there to help him, not just recruit him.

> [The representative] helped a lot. I feel like she was the only recruiter that wasn't just trying to get a paycheck. Like, "oh I recruited one more." I remember she even told some of my friends who didn't go to [UNP], but did end up going to another college, "yeah my number is here if you want to talk logistics about school and what not."

Moises's experience allowed him to connect with the representative and the school at a deeper level. The representative was willing to help and support students even if they did not attend UNP. He explained that the connection was authentic to him and drew him to consider UNP as one of the final schools.

Recruiters would visit several of the schools around the state and would meet with the students in the study. Carlos was another participant who remembered his and his father's experience speaking with a bicultural and bilingual college representative at a high school event. Of the many staff he spoke to, the one that stood out to him was the bilingual representative because they could communicate with his father in Spanish. Experiences like the ones Moises and Carlos had with the representatives had a positive impact when they considered an institution. However, it is also important to note that other students had different experiences. There were also those who had limited to no interactions with staff. Daisy and Leo are two examples who spoke about this. Both spoke about their experiences by highlighting how the help they had assumed they would receive never came or how staff came across as rude by making them feel as if they should know the information.

Although no one indicated UNP's brochures, website, or representatives drawing their attention to UNP, there were indications that the work UNP had put into their brochures and website did have some underlying effect. The biggest example of this was with the UNP scholarship program. The six participants who applied directly to UNP mentioned how the UNP's "4 years guarantee" scholarship program appeared on brochures, billboards, and the website. During the interviews, participants who transferred did not reference this particular scholarship as much as the non-transfer. This makes sense as transfer students' eligibility would look different. Moreover, even those that could have applied, like Berenice, Edgar, and Elizabeth, all took breaks before

continuing with their education. Because of where they were in their lives, this might not have had as much of an impact.

The scholarship program helped students pay for tuition and fees for up to 15 undergraduate credits per term for up to four years. However, the scholarship program does not cover the complete cost of attendance, which includes costs related to housing (i.e., room and board), personal expenses, transportation expenses, and costs related to courses such as books and supplies or the matriculation fee. Still, with tuition being the major expense, the scholarship provided a financial advantage over other colleges.

When participants reflected on their engagement with the various forms of marketing materials and representatives, they mentioned it was one-directional. Their engagement consisted of students reading the information and reaching out to the school when they had questions – if they even reached out. Many shared that they did not have college representatives reach out to them. Instead, all had to conduct their own research. Additionally, there was no mention of any resources online or in print that could help them better understand the information being provided. There were no diagrams, definitions, or tutorial videos mentioned that could help them better understand the information they read. Instead, everyone repeated the same experience stating that they relied on themselves - their own college knowledge - without much outside help.

What became a common experience was that UNP came into their peripheral because of the people in their social circles. It was through word of mouth that participants became aware of UNP. Participants were first introduced to the institution by teachers, counselors, family, or friends who had attended the institution. They talked

about being exposed to UNP through on-campus events and meeting with college reps

(i.e., college fairs and college visits). Ten of the twelve mentioned that the place where

they were first exposed to UNP was at school - through teachers and counselors. Family

members like older siblings, older cousins, or aunts were also mentioned as individuals

who pointed them toward UNP. Although everyone's experiences varied, no participant

mentioned that their decision to select UNP was solely based on their experiences with

printed marketing materials, the website, or interactions with representatives.

Additionally, all discussed specific college factors they weighed when applying for and

selecting UNP.

College selection factors. First, discussing the forms of marketing the

participants engaged with helps to understand where they received information about

UNP. In addition, it is just as important to identify the type of information they were

searching. In other words, what factors did the students consider when reviewing said

marketing materials? College selection factors helped to highlight how the participants

assessed their options through the search and into the choice stage. In addition, the

findings help to highlight *how* the students learned about UNP and *what* they learned

about UNP. Each person was able to express how they prioritized specific factors when

considering and selecting an institution.

Everyone spoke about several factors that influenced their decisions. Throughout

the interviews there were 11 different factors that came up for the group. These factors

included cost of attendance, degree options, proximity to family, school atmosphere,

school ranking, personal restrictions, school transferability, participant immigration

status, participant academic background, and customer service. Each used these factors

when they evaluated their college options. Although there were various factors that came

up throughout the interviews, the three common factors that came up frequently were:

cost of attendance, proximity to family, and degree programs offered. Cost of attendance

was the most common, with all 12 participants indicating cost as a decision factor.

Proximity to family was the second most common factor, with ten indicating that being

close to family was important. Lastly, seven indicated that the type of degree program

available at the college played a factor in their decision-making process.

When it came to the *cost of attendance*, each person reviewed printed materials

and the college website, as well as talked to school representatives to assess their options.

Many of the participants highlighted cost being their number one or number two

consideration factor. Stephanie, Jessica, and Daisy were the most explicit, all stating that

cost was the most important factor when selecting UNP. Stephanie was one of the

participants who indicated cost being the most important. When making her decision

between UNP and another private institution she recalls cost being the major factor

explaining the following,

> Really… [it] came down to money and my proximity to the family. I didn't know
> about [the] scholarships that I was going to get at the time. I was applying, but I
> wasn't sure, so I was just like UNP is the cheapest and I'm eligible… I was going
> to be guaranteed four years for free.

Stephanie recalled the guarantee that UNP offered students with their scholarships, where

the institution would cover the tuition for four years. In Stephanie's case, her decision

was based on finances. She was not the only participant with cost as their number one

factor. For Daisy, she mentioned that her main focus at the time was also to reduce the

cost of attendance. Daisy stated, "[cost] was what I was mainly focused [on], [my] main

driver at the time." Everyone in the study indicated that cost was one of their primary

factors when selecting a school. To help reduce costs the participants also explained that

the scholarships they received helped reduce the cost of attendance at UNP. For Moises,

the scholarships he received helped make his decision easier. He shared,

> The reason why I chose UNP ultimately was because [of] two reasons. One, I had
> earned the [HOPE] scholarship for the first year [at UNP] with [Manny the
> scholarship director] and that's how I got connected with, literally everything at
> UNP, [it] started with [the HOPE scholarship program]... and also UNP offered
> the most financial aid, and was also the most, it was the cheapest out of [all the
> schools].

Moises's sentiment regarding cost reflected the group, which noted that the financial aid

package they received from UNP made it easier for them to make their decision. The

financial aid package helped reduce the cost of attending UNP, which brought down the

out-of-pocket expenses compared to other schools.

Although the transfer students eventually selected UNP, it is important to

recognize that they did not initially choose to enroll in UNP. Although UNP might have

been on their initial list of colleges, they elected to attend a community college instead.

There were various reasons for this, including the challenges some dealt with, including

their immigration status. Edgar and Elizabeth's immigration status affected the type of aid

they were eligible for, and that caused the cost of attendance to become an issue. For

Edgar, this was a reality he had to face. He recalled the internal conversation he had with

himself when he chose to attend a community college and then once at the community

college how he came to his decision to step away from school. His immigration status

made it so that he did not think a four-year university was a possibility. He did not think

there would be resources, scholarships, and financial aid to help him cover some of the

costs. Edgar was not the only participant whose immigration status caused them concerns

regarding cost.

Elizabeth's perspective was very similar to that of Edgar's. She indicated she

opted for "realistic goals," cost being a factor in how she chose an institution. Elizabeth

stated she wanted to attend a community college as it was attainable. She did not consider

a four-year institution a possibility as the cost would be too high. Instead, Elizabeth chose

to attend a community college which would reduce her overall cost. Elizabeth also talked

about how she worked while attending school to make it possible. Another participant

who shared a similar experience was Melissa – whose immigration status also caused

some challenges. Melissa, too, sought opportunities like scholarships to help her reduce

costs. Cost reduction was a big priority for her, and the local community college could

save her money. For Melissa, cost was the factor in deciding not to attend UNP out of

high school. Melissa stated the following about her decision,

> I was set on going to UNP if I wasn't going to go to [a community college]. Like,
> UNP was that option, that first option. And I'm like "okay, I'm gonna go here"
> but because of my economic situation, I was like, okay, you know [community
> college] is the most viable kind of option. And then I'll transfer to UNP.

Carlos was another transfer student who decided UNP would not be the best choice

because of costs and academics. Again, in his case, cost was not a singular factor. Carlos

did not feel confident about his academic abilities to begin college, so he opted to save on

the costs while he figured out his academic plans. Carlos mentioned an older cousin who

did not know what they wanted to study and took six years to complete their degree. He

explained his reason for not attending UNP out of high school by explaining the

following,

> I want to be more sure of what I wanted to do, so [community college] was the
> best option for me. It was cheaper, I just didn't feel like my, I guess my emotional
> self wasn't ready for a four-year university, yet. I needed to build up good habits.

Like everyone else, Carlos echoed that cost was a major factor in his decision. For many,

making their college expenses manageable made higher education a possibility. For

Edgar and Elizabeth, whose immigration status posed challenges (i.e., undocumented),

the cost was ultimately a major barrier when they considered whether or not higher

education was possible. For the rest of the group, the cost was reduced by the types of

financial aid packages they received (e.g., state grants, federal grants, institution grants),

along with the type of scholarships they could receive.

When participants considered attending an institution, the second most common factor

that came up persistently was family, more specifically, the *proximity to family*. Students

would state the importance of remaining close to home. For many, UNP was close

enough to home that it played an important role in their decision to attend. Their reasons

for remaining close to family varied and included reasons like having responsibilities at

home, having challenging home dynamics that made it difficult to leave, or having to

help out around the house. Stephanie, Jessica, Berenice, and Elizabeth all help to

highlight how UNP's proximity played a role when assessing their options.

When Stephanie was considering other college offers, she recalled family and the distance from them playing a factor in choosing which college to attend. She explained that she needed to stay close to home to help out. For example, while considering an out-of-state school, Stephanie mentioned she could not be too far from home because the move would have hurt her mom. Stephanie explained that her mom would have been broken-hearted if she left to attend a school out-of-state. She explained she could not just leave for school and needed to support her family. Stephanie recalled her thought process, stating,

> Um, my parents worked, so I had to basically raise my two little brothers while they were at work. When I started applying for colleges and stuff, my parents were going through a rough patch, so it was like, if I left, like, what would be of this family, you know. You know, I just did a lot of things like a mother would do in terms of taking care of my brothers, I would clean the house. I wouldn't really engage in a lot of after school activities during school because, you know, not that I didn't want to but I, I had to be home. So UNP was also really just a big option because things were rough at home and I was like well, I can't leave, you know.

She explained that UNP's proximity to her family and the cost of attending UNP made it her logical choice. Other students expressed the same mindset of needing to stay close to home to help out.

Jessica echoed some of the same sentiments as Stephanie when she was going through weighing her options. Jessica wanted to ensure that her college was close to home. Jessica recalled her factors in selecting UNP, "I was going through some family things that I didn't want to leave home [and] at that time, the main factor was being close to home, and then it came [down] to like the costs." Much like Stephanie, Jessica felt the need to stay close to home at the time because of family circumstances. Her factors were

not exclusive when considering affordability and family. Distance from family was

important not just for Jessica and Stephanie but was also an important consideration for

nine of the students. For example, Leo and Carlos brought up family as a factor but did

not overtly state that they needed to stay close. Carlos stated that he stayed close to home

to help his father with the family business as it was new, and he could be more available

if he were within a reasonable distance.

When interviewing students with a husband/wife/partner or children, how they

referred to family changed. Family was not about their parents, but instead their partners

and/or children. The reasons for remaining close to family changed slightly depending on

the person's situation. Older participants who had formed their own families indicated

having to consider their partners and/or children as part of their consideration. This

contrasted with the younger participants who were considering their parents and/or

siblings. In comparison, older participants had to weigh family responsibility a bit

differently.

With family, Berenice had to factor in how long a degree would take to complete

and how close the school was to her home and family. She remembered her selection

process as follows,

> The other thing was that [UNP] wasn't a far move. And so when you have a
> family it's really, for me at least, it really wasn't realistic to think that we were all
> going to pick [up and move]. My husband has a career, so it wasn't realistic to
> think we were all going to pick up and move to a different city so that I could
> transfer, you know.

Berenice had to consider how her selection would affect her husband and his career.

Additionally, because she had a child, she needed a parent-friendly school. She recalled

UNP mentioning on its website that they were a parent-friendly school, which also drew her to UNP.

Another participant who factored in UNP's distance from her family was Elizabeth. Elizabeth had to consider how her immigration status affected her choices. She recalled feeling that her ability to pursue a four-year institution was impossible. So, she focused on completing two associate degrees at the local community college. As her immigration circumstances changed, so did her opportunities. Elizabeth told her story and shared that her mindset about attending a university changed after receiving DACA because of her husband. As Elizabeth's circumstances changed, so did her outlook on a four-year institution. When she considered various options, her family was a constant factor. She discussed considering other four-year institutions to transfer to, expressing,

> I knew about other schools. Like [Northwest State College], however, UNP seemed more [tangible], because I always knew my life circumstances. I had a kid. I wasn't just going to pick up to go to college, or [move to another] state, or even another city.

Much like Berenice, Elizabeth considered the effects that her college choice would have on her family. In this case, Elizabeth's family affected how far she was willing to move. In addition to UNP being close to her community college, it would allow her and her family to remain in their home without too much change. Others, like Edgar, also faced these challenges as he continued his education. He, too, had to consider his partner's life and career when weighing his options and how far he was willing to move. Like Elizabeth and Berenice, Edgar also decided UNP would be a logical choice regarding proximity and stability for his family. For everyone, staying close to family was

important, especially as they continued their education. Aria was the only one who moved, but she already had her sister in town. In addition to family and proximity being one of the primary factors, another factor was the type of degree programs the school offered.

When participants examined the various college options available to them, the *type of degree programs* available at the institution was also one of the top factors they considered. The students used printed materials like brochures and the college's website to access information on degree programs offered. The six who transitioned from high school to UNP, like Moises, Aria, and Sonia, all considered this factor when considering colleges. They needed to ensure that the institution they selected had the major that would allow them to pursue their career. Non-transfers did not face the challenges of assessing how their credits would transfer and instead focused on the admission factors. Even though non-transfer students, like Stephanie, expressed not knowing their major coming in, they knew they had many options at UNP, which made them confident they could find one at some point.

Moises had considered various colleges that included private and public schools on his college list. Moises prioritized cost when comparing the schools; however, he wanted to make sure his chosen college had his major available. He recalled his process of selecting UNP as follows,

> My major wasn't, it wasn't offered at any of those three schools. Or like, what I wanted to study wasn't offered at any of the schools that I wanted to attend. So, between money, the scholarship, and UNP was one of the few schools that offered my major, ultimately it made me decide to go to UNP.

Moises had considered other colleges because each school presented something appealing to him. For example, one private catholic college was close to home and in the same city as UNP. This college appealed to Moises because he was raised Catholic. He strongly weighed another state college but realized it would not be as cost-effective. There was also another college 15 minutes from his home that was viewed as a prestigious school, but ultimately, he could not make it happen because of the high cost. Once he reflected on his options, he had to take into account which college checked the most boxes for him. UNP checked off several factors for him, especially the cost and degree program available.

Sonia had weighed different options when it came to her list of colleges as well. As she assessed the colleges with business programs, she also considered her family and the distance. For Sonia, it came down to two schools with a business program. She shared,

> The only [colleges] that really caught my eye was, well, the one that mainly caught my eye was [State University], so it was [SU]. But it was far and my family has a business, so it wasn't really going to work out. UNP had a business program, so I ended up only applying to UNP because I knew that's where I wanted to go, I wanted to go, like I knew I'd get in. I have really advanced classes; I had finished a year of college already in high school. But the reason business drew me to UNP is because… because in UNP they had a really good business program and it's [ranked]the same as the business program as SU. But I knew I wanted to be in [the city] and my connections needed to be here. So, it was like a no-brainer for me. So, I only applied to UNP, and I got in.

For Sonia, UNP not only had the degree program she wanted to complete, but UNP was also competitively ranked against SU. UNP also met her other factors, which included staying close to home and reducing costs. She explained how UNP met these needs,

> I liked the school because it was far enough away from home where it felt like, okay, I'm not home, this is not my parents, it's just me. I'm at least half an hour away, or 45 minutes to an hour with traffic. I'm like, this is nice, it feels like I'm far away enough from home, but I'm still close enough to be able to drive back every day.

Like Sonia, other participants assessed their college choices based on the major, distance to family, and cost. Moreover, transfer students found themselves in a unique situation compared to non-transfer students. Transfer students not only reviewed the degree programs available but also factored in whether UNP would be the best option for their transfer credits.

Berenice recalled having to find a school that fit her college degree plan. While factoring in her family, she recalled having to find a school that would have the right major and would accept her transfer credits. For help, she turned to her community college's website to review degree requirements.

> It was basically a lot of looking online and then looking at [my community college's] website on their transfer worksheets, because they have transfer agreements with most of the [state] universities. And so they will list on there, if you're trying to transfer over, what [the universities] look for, for that specific major. What [courses] they expect you to have done. And what they'll accept as far as, like, classes from [the community college]. And so I, that was another reason why I chose UNP because it was like a seamless fit. Whereas the other universities had more requirements. Where [other schools] required classes that I really felt like [I was] completely uninterested in taking. And I felt like it was just adding on something that was irrelevant.

It was important for Berenice to ensure her courses were meaningful and would count towards a degree requirement. Berenice had already switched majors several times before she decided on business. In deciding on business, she focused on which state universities would allow her to save time and money. Berenice's experience was like many other

transfer students who were trying to select a school and program that would allow them

to transfer their credits.

Melissa was another participant who started off at a local community college

because of costs but ultimately wanted to transfer to UNP. She was focused on pursuing a

degree in social work but later transitioned to sociology.

> I didn't apply to the school of social work, so I was like, okay so what is the
> closest thing to social work and I was [interested in the] sociology, psychology
> kind of area. So I chose sociology just because I like learning about people and
> structures and systems and just everything. And so I was like, okay, I'll do that.
> But I think, for me, it was just more the accessibility, and the cost. Because I
> could have gone to other schools that I was accepted to, but it was just expensive
> and I was like, I can't do that.

Melissa had to balance the ability to transfer her credits over to UNP and the school's

distance from her family and cost. For her, UNP was possible because she had been

working on earning college credits in high school. Melissa mentioned her goal was to

finish her bachelor's degree, so she planned ahead and recognized which school would

help her transfer her credits. She wanted to ensure that the courses she completed fit into

her plan to attend UNP to complete her bachelor's degree. Like the other transfer

students, they all indicated having to research multiple schools to better understand how

transferring credits worked, and if UNP would offer them the best transition. They each

undertook the challenge of researching the various schools around the area.

Marketing and college factors collide. As the participants weighed their college

selection factors, their expectations did not always match up with how UNP was

marketed. This was compounded for these first-generation participants as they came in

with limited college knowledge. Their limited college knowledge affected how they

interpreted information and this affected their experiences in college as well. The following are examples of how the students' college knowledge and the information they received set them up for undesirable experiences. Some career paths are more challenging to navigate than others. Without assistance, some participants got lost. As mentioned before, one of the primary reasons Daisy chose UNP was cost, and the 4-years guarantee program. However, upon enrolling, Daisy would later learn that UNP might not have been the best choice for her and her intended major. As a first-generation, she did not fully understand the degree options at UNP. Nobody in her family had pursued a healthcare profession, so she did not have a clear understanding of what steps she would need to take to complete her nursing degree. Daisy recalled her thought process and some uncertainties that came up after her first year at UNP,

> I do definitely get some uncertainty sometimes because, um… especially… I'm studying to become a nurse and I did not know this, especially before committing to UNP, that they do not have a nursing program to transition students. You have to go to like [Nursing Northwest] or some other school that supports that. And that really, that really made me [think] "ah man, maybe I chose the wrong school." But [the UNP advisors] said, "oh you can complete this and then you can transition over there." And so yeah, I do have some uncertainties about UNP. But so far. I feel like this can work, but I wish I chose somewhere else.

Daisy reflected on whether she made the right choice. She chose UNP because it had the lowest out-of-pocket cost, which was her primary factor. However, the school does not have a nursing program, so she will have to add time to her graduation timeline. Daisy is still optimistic that things can work out for her. However, the shortest route she can now take would require her to take three years at UNP before applying to a nursing program. The 4-years guaranteed program does not cover the costs associated with nursing school,

and she will need to restart her search for a nursing school in another year. This challenge, unfortunately, is common for first-generation students. This is because first-generation students often come from low-income households with limited money, so they often focus on the lowest-cost school (Rood, 2009). Previous research has also shown that first-generation students have a higher priority in terms of the financial aid award package and shorter time to completion when compared to continuing-generation students (Rood, 2009). The goal of reducing costs can cause tunnel vision, which can affect first-generation students and their college choice. This is especially true when they do not know the courses they may need for a particular profession.

Berenice selected UNP because of the ability to transfer her community college credits. While at the community college, she heard from her GED counselors about UNP and the ability for students to transfer community college credits. This helped Berenice shift her attention to UNP and helped her begin her research on the school. She conducted much of the research on her own, as she did not want to rely on others. Relying on herself meant she would have to undergo trial and error to find a degree program that would work for her. Other studies have also found that first-generation students have a lower tendency to ask for help, and typically venture out on their own (Schwartz et al., 2018). In venturing on their own, students can head into their search and choice stages with misconceptions and misinformation. This can sometimes cause a delay in their educational journey.

Berenice recognized that being able to transfer her credits would allow her to save time and money. UNP would be the one school that would allow her to transfer her

credits easily. As a business student, Berenice had also read online that UNP had a

parent-friendly business program. The program would have a flexible schedule, providing

multiple course options and the ability to join online. As a mother, she thought this was a

great benefit. However, in time, she felt as though what she had read online and what she

was experiencing was misleading. She explained,

> [UNP] tends to put out a lot of posts [online] about how they're parent friendly
> and how they have childcare and online classes, etc. But what they don't put out
> there is that they offer very few online classes for some of the requirements. And
> the ones that they do offer fill up very quickly. And for the child care, you might
> not qualify for it and if you do, there are certain deadlines that you have to meet,
> and you have to like be on top of this so even if you're not aware of that, you
> better be on top of it because if not then you know, you're going to be out of luck.
> And so, I don't know, that's, those are my frustrations that they, I feel like they
> made it look a certain way and I was like, "oh this is" but I was ignorant to the
> fact that you really have to like dig deeper to be able to perfect know if what
> they're saying is true.

As a mother, having a program that would provide flexibility and support was important

for Berenice. However, this is not what she experienced, and from her point of view, the

school did not provide that clarity. Still, she did not blame the school; instead, she

thought it was up to her to have known. UNP's marketing as a parent-friendly school also

played a role in persuading Berenice to think of UNP as a good fit. The ability to take

classes online and be at home drew her in. However, it is important to acknowledge that

how an institution defines parent-friendly may be different from how a prospective

student defines parent-friendly. Still, Berenice was not the only participant who felt

misled by how UNP marketed itself.

Moises grew up about an hour away from UNP. He remembered learning about

UNP in middle school and hearing about it throughout high school. It would not be until

his junior year that he seriously considered UNP. The pre-college program he joined in

high school helped him learn more about state institutions. However, he did not recall

specific marketing materials that piqued his interest to apply. During the interview,

Moises was reflecting on his experiences with UNP when he realized how things were

marketed to him. He recalled that as a first-generation student, he did not know that there

were differences he should have been aware of between universities. He thought all

public four-year institutions were relatively the same. Specifically, he realized that what

was painted for him about UNP, and what he has experienced are completely different.

He explained his realization as follows,

> I remember I got to UNP and I'm thinking "alright UNP!" University of
> Northwest Pacific, it's gonna be like University of Pacific Oak, Pacific State, even
> Red Alder State. I get here, 90% of the student body commutes. If you've ever
> been at UNP [at] 11 o'clock, 12, 1:00 a.m. I've lived there. There is, there's
> nobody, there's homeless people doing heroin on campus. What school has that?!
> [laughter]
> They advertise it as "oh, you know, we're non-traditional, you know, we're in the
> city, heart of downtown [Redland], let [our college assist] the [community]. But I
> remember I was just so disappointed, you know, I look at my friends, and they're
> not even friends, but people that I knew that went to other schools [they have] this
> and that, and Red Alder State has this. [UNP] ain't got that.
>
> I'm just like, you know, in hindsight I see why UNP is cheaper compared to those
> schools. Because they don't really show you that, you know. Their goal is to sell
> you that stereotypical college life, that's not the goal, that's not what UNP is, [the
> stereotypical college life]. But see, me, first-gen, I thought they were all the same.
> And you know, they, and I don't know if this is my fault, or if it's the school's
> fault, or who. I don't, I don't even think it's anybody's fault really but, you know, I
> just wish there was more like info on that. You know.
>
> You know, yeah, if you're a high schooler coming out to [UNP] as a freshman,
> like going to college right away, you know, UNP should say [something], you
> know. It's probably gonna be bad marketing if they say it, but like, let me know
> the majority of the people are in their late twenties, not early, 18 or 19.

Moises was aware of UNP as a college but was not aware of what a commuter college was or that UNP's location would put him in unfortunate situations. His and all other students' expectations were shaped by what they read on the brochures and the website and influenced by their college knowledge. They come in with limited knowledge, and even pre-college programs, advisors, and teachers cannot always correct them. The absence of, or limited access to, cultural and social capital puts the students at a disadvantage.

These experiences help to illustrate the disconnect between what an institution shares/markets and how first-generation Latinx students interpret it. As the participants reflected on their experiences, one common message they shared was how they shouldered the blame for not knowing. They would question if it was their fault for not conducting enough research. However, there is a deeper cause for concern here, as Hoxby and Turner (2015) found in their research that with little aid, first-generation students follow their own assumptions. This has a domino effect, as students with limited social and cultural capital can choose a school that can add time and money to their education. In their research, students also shortened their options because they did not understand college jargon (e.g., flagship university, liberal arts, research institution) where they assumed specific colleges were not suitable for them based on assumptions. Without the social and cultural capital to make the same informed decision as continuing-generation students, first-generation students are left to make their best guess.

Even though participants could not recall marketing playing a direct role in convincing them to enroll, it affected how they perceived UNP. All participants

referenced finding information that helped with checking off their consideration factors of cost and degree options. Whether it was a scholarship to reduce cost, a parent-friendly program, or the campus environment, the interviews helped to highlight some of the disconnect between the information marketed online and how the student interprets that information.

The misconceptions participants came into the process with, and the interpretations they made manifested in several ways. Participants like Leo, Edgar, Sonia, and Daisy limited their list of colleges. Instead, they had to rely on what they read on the brochures, online, or heard from a representative. Daisy assumed that private school was too elite and that the lower-cost school was the best option. Meanwhile, Carlos, Sonia, and Leo mentioned missing out on resources offered to first-generation students.

Their experiences also helped to highlight how UNP shares its college information, setting the expectation that all students who interact with the information should have a certain level of college knowledge. Each were expected to understand the information and the resources available to them. Marketing and recruitment affected them by not helping to create informed students (customers). By not meeting students where they are at, UNP's marketing did not reach this population of students in a way that sought to educate and correct misconceptions.

UNP's website shared extensive information, and participants highlighted information about tuition, degree options, and possible scholarships available. Stephanie, Moises, Melissa, Berenice, and Aria shared having some type of assistance with reviewing the information with the help of mentors or pre-college programs. However, the rest of the

students spoke about missed UNP resources, like those that helped serve first-generation and/or Latinx students. Although these programs had online web pages, participants seemed to have difficulty finding them because they were unaware of their existence.

To revisit the third question in the study, how is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing? UNP's marketing did indeed affect the participants' college choice process. Their marketing and recruitment efforts helped to attract students to the college. This was evident as everyone was aware of UNP. UNP also visited 11 of the 12 students' high schools to talk to them during college events or class visits. UNP also informed the participants of their scholarships and how they were an affordable option through their website and brochures. Several students like Daisy, Moises, Jessica, Sonia, Melissa, Leo, and Carlos also referenced alums as the primary motivators for applying to UNP. These alumni were teachers, mentors, and family members who had knowledge of UNP. These UNP alumni also had an impact on how the participants perceived UNP and whether they considered it a viable option. However, those who did not have the social and cultural capital needed to assess all the information shared, such as tuition costs and career outcomes. They initially believed a cheaper cost would help them complete their degree, and three years in for Jessica, she is not so convinced it was worth it. Participants like Daisy and Jessica reflected and pondered whether they should have made a different choice. Other examples presented themselves with participants who needed help identifying specialized programs for low-income, first-generation, and ethnic/racial minority students three to four years later.

Previous research highlights and supports the importance of providing support to first-generation students during the search and choice stages. Hoxby and Turner's (2015) research supports the findings, recognizing how first-generation students struggle to make sense of the information colleges share with them. Even as the participants narrowed down their lists, they were not always sure of the choice they would make. Students in Hoxby and Turner's study had difficulties by not being able to differentiate a flagship university from any other university. That was echoed in this study as well. Moises did participate in a pre-college program, and even so, he indicated that he did not know a lot coming in. This is one example of how the lack of college knowledge can affect a student's college selection. Through marketing, higher education institutions can help students by meeting them where they are at. Cremonini et al. (2008) proposed that companies have culturally sensitive marketing materials by understanding the needs of populations like first-generation Latinx students to better tailor marketing efforts and create more informed students.

Conclusion

The study explored the experience of first-generation Latinx students and how UNP's marketing affected their college choice experience. Through qualitative interviews, 12 participants were interviewed via video technology to learn from their college choice process. In this section, the study helped to highlight three themes: (1) Building a college-bound identity and self-resilience, (2) Accessing social and cultural capital, and (3) Marketing and its effects on students. The themes helped to highlight the first-generation Latinx student experience and how they progressed through the college

choice stages. Each theme helped to address the three research questions of the study that aimed to understand how the students overcame adversity in their college choice process, how the students admitted to UNP leveraged their social and cultural capital, and lastly, how their experiences were affected by UNP's marketing.

The findings showed that family had a significant role in building the students' college-bound identity. This ensured that they pursued higher education and continued to UNP. Additionally, the study helped illustrate how social and cultural capital positively impacted those with individualized assistance and mentors (e.g., counselors, teachers, friends). These participants could use their social network to expand their knowledge about higher education (social and cultural capital). In contrast, those with limited access to mentorship and support seemed the most challenged through the process, often coming into college with more misconceptions about schools, aid, and academic program opportunities available. Lastly, the findings explored how marketing affected the students' college choice experience and how their college selection factors played a role in their selection of UNP. The students helped to highlight the challenges and barriers first-generation Latinx students face as they progress through their college choice stages and how marketing affected their selection of the University of Northwest Pacific (UNP).

Chapter 5: Discussions & Implications

Introduction

This study used a qualitative approach to examine the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students and how University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing affected their experience. The following questions guided the study: 1) how do first-generation Latinx students overcome adversity when working through the college choice process? 2) how do first-generation Latinx students admitted to UNP leverage their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice process? 3) How is the college choice experience of first-generation Latinx students affected by University of Northwest Pacific's (UNP) marketing? The study explored the students' college choice process to better understand how marketing affected their experience, and how students selected UNP as their institution of choice. The study also helped to highlight the challenges and barriers the first-generation Latinx students faced, and how they overcame those barriers. The study included 12 participants who were all interviewed via online video technology.

Synthesis of Findings

The study explored the college choice experiences of 12 first-generation Latinx participants attending UNP and examined how UNP's marketing affected their experiences. Using Hossler and Gallagher's (1987) College Choice model to frame the findings, the data was analyzed through the cultural and social capital lenses. The findings help highlight three themes in the study, the first being how participants build their college-bound identity and self-resilience. During the predisposition stage, most

participants knew from a young age that they would go to college. They grew up valuing

education because of their parents. This included parental reinforcement of the value of

education and parents strategically finding ways to provide educational advantages to

their children. Families helped build capital by placing children in resourceful schools or

by having the students reach out to family members who could share cultural capital to

assist with questions.

However, parental support was typically in the form of moral and emotional

support. Everyone experienced limitations with respect to the type of help parents could

provide in the search and choice stages. The limited support during these stages was due

to the parents' education and knowledge about the higher education system. Studies have

examined how parental knowledge and educational background may help students assess

their college choices (Pagano & Terkla, 1991). For first-generation students and their

parents, a lack of accurate college information, such as not knowing the true cost of

attendance, may affect the student's choice, as many of those students are unaware of the

financial options available to them (Valencia, 2018; Immerwahr, 2003). This played out

differently for participants in the study, but one common theme was their parents' fear of

misguiding their children. This fear meant many participants had to seek assistance or

navigate the process independently.

The second theme that was highlighted was how accessing social and cultural

capital significantly helped the participants through their search stage and even the choice

stage. The participants' experiences varied considerably regarding the type and level of

support they received. On one end were students with individualized support through pre-

college programs and mentors who helped build their social and cultural capital. Previous

research has also found that students who had strong support or were part of a pre-college

program focused on assisting first-generation students were better prepared and had

smoother transitions to college (Donovan & Johnson, 2005). On the other end of the

spectrum were individuals with limited support, with high school/college counselors

providing prescriptive counseling and providing limited help (e.g., look at these schools).

Furthermore, there were those who perceived asking for help as bothersome to staff,

which limited their engagement.

These experiences helped illustrate how social and cultural capital help prepare

students to assess their options. While in their pre-college programs or with their

mentors, participants learned about higher education institutions. Opportunities to grow

their cultural capital also occurred through building their social capital. This capital

allowed them to apply to more schools for better options. However, those without help

often limited their options. In previous studies, research has shown how the role of a

counselor can have a positive impact while also sharing their own cultural capital (Bell et

al., 2009; Enberg & Allen, 2011). In the study, students who could identify college

resources before enrolling in their college were participants who took part in pre-college

programs or had individualized support. Those who did not have access to resources

often had more misconceptions. First-generation students often face challenges when

applying to college, and their decisions may be based on assumptions that may have

significant effects (Hoxby & Turner, 2015). Additionally, studies have shown that

support during the college choice process plays a role in how challenging the student

experience is, as those without assistance often must navigate the process alone (Ceja, 2009).

The third theme, Marketing and its effects on students found that participants interacted with UNP in various ways. Three of which were college representatives, printed materials, and the college website. In considering UNP, all 12 students focused on the cost of attendance, proximity to family, and degree options offered. Most referenced their awareness of the four-year guaranteed scholarship as a major draw because they were conscious of the cost. This is not atypical, as other research has found similar findings, where first-generation students prioritized financial aid and time to degree completion when selecting a college to attend (Rood, 2009). Additionally, proximity to home was another factor participants considered. This also aligned with previous research, which showed that first-generation students, compared to continuing-generation students, prioritize their proximity to home when selecting a college (Stewart & Post, 1990; Nunez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Students factoring the college's distance from their family is not new, and for minority students, it has been shown to be a strong determinant of which college they select (Stewart & Post, 1990). The participants in the study had to weigh the information shared by colleges, with their selection factors, while also using their social and cultural capital to assess their options. Some felt they made the right selection, while others had second thoughts about whether or not they made the best choice. The participants talked about the disadvantages they had coming in, but shouldered the blame when they felt they were misled or they felt they missed out on an opportunity. Still, the participants overcame their challenges to gain admission to UNP.

Situated in a Larger Context

Over ten years, from 2007 to 2017, the cost of college attendance has risen continuously. The average cost of a public four-year institution increased from $13,429 (2007) to $20,050 (2017) when adjusting for inflation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). Private four-year institutions have seen a steeper increase, from $30,226 (2007) to $43,139 (2017), when adjusting for inflation (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). As tuition and fees have increased over time, institutions have had to adapt their strategies to maintain and increase enrollment. The increase in cost is not a recent phenomenon. In the 1990s, tuition and fees increased across the U.S. for all public and private institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Kinzie et al., 2004). In the past, as colleges and universities increased their costs, the concern for paying for college increased as well, causing students and families to search for the "best deal" (Kinzie et al., 2004). Colleges, back then, as they do now, responded to these student concerns in various ways, one of which was to use financial aid strategies, "such as tuition discounting, as well as early-admission, and early-decision strategies to influence students' enrollment decisions" (Kinzie et al., 2004, p. 2). As the cost of education continues to rise faster than the earnings of families, it becomes clear why students factor in and prioritize cost above all else. In response, colleges ramp up their marketing efforts to attract more students.

Although marketing has become more aggressive in pursuit of recruitment, one tactic that continues to be overused is rankings. Publishing rankings does not always work on students (Brennan et al., 2007; Cremonini et al., 2008). Previous research has

shown that rankings like "best college," "best party school," or "best buys," do not always have the same influence on all students (McDonough, Antonio, Walpole, & Perez, 1998). Instead, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, such as first-generation and low-income students, will not necessarily know how to take advantage of this information. McDonough et al. (1998) expressed concerns about how marketing was growing and becoming too privatized. They pointed to college knowledge becoming privatized, with so many private entities collecting, sharing, and distributing college rankings. As this continued, families from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tended to use this information. The research highlighted how having college knowledge helped privileged families leverage their social and cultural capital to their advantage.

The pressure of low enrollment, federal and state divestment, and growing competition has driven schools to invest more in marketing. In 2016, private not-for-profit colleges spent more on marketing than for-profit institutions (McKenzie, 2019). Colleges began to shift several years ago to a more aggressive form of marketing and began to use tools like blogs and podcasts to help with persuading students to attend their college (Towers, 2006). These examples show how institutions implement consumer models in their strategies. As described by Court et al. (2009), the consumer model uses the tactics of private industries, which reaches consumers by meeting them at the source of their information, generally word-of-mouth and internet sites (e.g., google reviews, college reviews, U.S. News Weekly). Much like companies, colleges and universities find themselves competing to build their brand and positioning themselves online to be competitive in the marketplace.

As the landscape continues to change and colleges adapt to their challenges, they can also consider how they market and share information in an equitable manner. As colleges feel competitive pressure to pursue more students, it becomes important to ask whether the goal of college marketing is to influence and persuade, or to inform, or all. Although colleges have adapted their model to be more like a business, that does not mean schools need to function as a business (Cooper, 2009). This also means that as institutions focus on the financial challenges, they can also consider employing recruitment strategies that attract students equitably. After all, marketing means to disseminate information and inform the consumer (Onsman, 2008). Students and parents have stated that the glossiness of brochures is not enough, and they wish to have actual details (Venezia, 2003). How colleges tackle these issues may be approached in various ways.

First-generation Latinx students face many challenges when they journey through their college choice process. Understanding how college marketing affects these students, and how it can continue to affect the college choice experience is important to recognize beyond UNP. The challenges students and colleges face are not particular to just this institution. Instead, the findings from this study can be useful for all state public four-year institutions. As discussed previously, the state currently has a high percentage of adults without a four-year degree. This is a state challenge, with Oregon having a large percentage of Latinx adults not enrolling into four-year institutions (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, n.d.-a; Cox, 2021). As Oregon looks to reach its 40-40-20 goal, the responsibility to increase the number of Latinx students enrolled in college lies

on all of higher education. This is especially true for four-year institutions that help

students complete their four-year degree. To increase the number of Latinx first-

generation college students, four-year institutions must assess how they recruit and how

their marketing affects the college choice process. Still, there is good news, as Oregon

approved the increase in funding the Oregon Opportunity Grant, which assists low-

income Oregonians. This is important as first-generation students tend to come from low-

income backgrounds (Engle & Tinto, 2008). As more aid becomes available, there is

greater opportunity to help more students. Also, as colleges continue their recruitment,

they must recognize how external and internal factors contribute to the challenges

students face and how they can best help serve these potential applicants.

Implications

The question of whether students should be labeled as customers is a matter of

debate. However, evidence points to the benefits of treating students as customers. Gibbs

(2018) believes this debate is no longer fruitful as students are treated as customers

regardless, and the focus should be on how we treat the students. Other researchers share

his view, such as Hanover Research (2015), who reviewed how colleges spend their

budget, strategize their marketing, and use new technologies to market and recruit

students. Their data investigated how colleges evaluate and assess their marketing

campaigns to calculate their return on investment from social media, landing pages,

branding, and other marketing techniques. Much like any business, institutions want to

understand how to best use their resources to reach the maximum number of students.

This strategy does not differ from companies that sell goods and how they market to their

customers. Gibbs (2018) is correct when he states that students are now treated as customers and that colleges market and recruit students in an enrollment-driven manner. The push to increase enrollment continues to be a priority for colleges as they struggle to remain financially viable as the state and federal support decreases and prospective students also decline. Despite the challenges, the question must be asked whether there is a balanced approach in marketing that combines the institutions' need to attract students with the needs of diverse students.

Recognizing that marketing affects college choice, strategies may be used to address both student and college goals throughout the college choice process. The following section will discuss the implications of the findings and provide specific recommended strategies Oregon four-year institutions can implement to improve the student experience of first-generation Latinx students. The hope is to reach a balanced approach, creating informed students while institutions continue increasing enrollment numbers.

Financial Literacy and Transparency

As first-generation Latinx students come into the search and choice stages with limited college knowledge, colleges will need to shift away from the expectation that all students come with the same set of cultural and social capital. Institutions can begin by building cultural capital through the information they share. Sharing how the actual cost compares to the sticker price could be a starting point (Columbia College, n.d.). The sticker price can be defined as "the annual cost of attendance advertised by any particular school" (Columbia College, n.d.). In contrast, the net price is what families actually pay

(i.e., the sticker price - financial aid = net price). However, time and time again, previous research has shown that students and their families often rule out a school because of the sticker price (Kelley, 2011). Students who may not understand the sticker price and net price may not apply to the college because of this misunderstanding. By decreasing their options these first-generation Latinx students limited the choices they had available to them. However, it will not be enough to share terms but to also explain why and how these terms are used. Previous research has shown that institutions have a history of using terminology that people rarely use outside the academic sector (Johnson & Chapman, 1979). Tools such as modules and other interactive formats could be embedded into the college website to help engage students in learning.

Akers (2020) has also suggested that institutions eliminate the invisible menu. The invisible menu refers to the concept of colleges hiding, or not sharing, the actual costs associated with attending their institutions. This is similar to the federal requirement that requires institutions that receive federal aid to provide net prices and calculators (Perna, Wright-Kim & Jiang, 2019). The federal requires colleges to provide total cost and cost per credit information. The invisible menu also refers to the sticker prices that show the price a person paying out-of-pocket would pay. This is usually presented as the total cost of attending a school. For example, attending UNP would cost a student $29,000 annually to pay for tuition, books, housing, and personal expenses. However, rarely does anyone ever pay the full out-of-pocket costs. Instead, students pay less than $29,000 once they take into account state, school, and private scholarships, grants, and other forms of aid. Whitford (2020) expanded on the notion of sticker prices having

consequences, as it may discourage students and families from even applying to a

college. The discount model that private and public colleges use also lacks transparency,

as the model hides how much the student will actually pay until later in the admission

process. This means a student will not know what they will pay before applying. They

will not know how much a particular school costs them unless they apply and are

admitted. Few colleges have recognized the challenges first-generation students face with

these types of models; however, one college has stated, "Very often the discount model is

not as helpful to first-generation families -- it's very confusing" (Whitford, 2020, p.1).

Recognizing how information is presented is the first step in finding other ways to better

inform and not lose one's audience.

UNP already shares tables that provide tuition and fees. This would be considered

its sticker price. UNP should instead present information that could help inform students

how the out-of-pocket price is calculated. In the past year, 2023, UNP has also posted

information about being the most affordable institution – referring to their no-cost degree.

However, when clicking on the links there is no comparison chart to identify why UNP is

affordable. There would need to be clarity around what makes UNP affordable and how

these costs compare to other institutions. This would be able to outline how "University

X" compares to UNP. This would help students and their families evaluate their total

potential costs. Without the cultural and social capital, the families would not know that

once they are accepted, there might be federal, state, and institutional aid that will dictate

how much they will owe. Simply showing the sticker prices does not help first-generation

students understand this. Thus, UNP needs to rethink how to teach its audience to

understand their financial situation better. This will help remove the disconnect between what is currently shared and how that is interpreted by the students and their families (sticker price vs. out-of-pocket price).

Previous studies have also suggested that institutions provide more price transparency by providing cost estimates before students are admitted (Akers, 2020). These estimates could assist students earlier on as they apply to colleges. Additionally, the way in which federal aid is awarded should become less cumbersome for students and families. Colleges could provide set tables that would allow students and institutions to build out a financial aid package based on the datasets available. The federal aid information, along with any possible college scholarships, could allow students to know their potential actual costs before committing to an institution. At a higher level, Akers (2020) suggests, "Congress should pass legislation to revise the eligibility rules for the Pell Grants so that award amounts can be determined before applying to college, using a simple look-up table" (p.1). Having access to financial aid information ahead of time, incorporated into the college's net price calculator, would give students a clearer picture of their actual costs. This information and strategies to teach students can further assist first-generation students in their financial decisions.

These are important changes in creating transparency and informing customers. These changes consider how limited college knowledge may influence the student's borrowing behavior (Avery & Turner, 2012; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Limited college knowledge can sometimes have negative consequences, as previous research has found that first-generation students are more likely to take out larger sums of loans than

continuing-generation students (Furquim et al., 2017). Additionally, how students learn

this information has to be taken into account. Previous research has shown that students

perceive websites as a source of information where they can find answers to their

questions (LeFauve, 2001). This was affirmed by the participants in the study, all of

whom mentioned using the website to learn more about UNP and other institutions. If

students perceive the websites as information sharing, and colleges aggressively try to

attract students, then colleges can find a way to balance their marketing approach. For

example, when a college indicates its rankings as most affordable, it would be useful to

indicate why this is important. Families do not often know why a college is "affordable"

and what factors contributed to those rankings. Providing information on things like these

can also help be equitable with the information being shared. UNP could start with small

changes by implementing tools to better support these students.

Resources for First-generation Students

In the study, participants talked about missed opportunities when going through

the college choice process, explaining how they were unable to apply to specific

programs available to them because they were unaware of support programs,

scholarships, or degree programs until they arrived on campus. Some were not introduced

to specific programs until they met individuals who provided this information (e.g.,

friends who introduced TRIO). As first-generation students, they had limited college

knowledge, which made their ability to foresee possible resources more challenging. As

previously stated, a first-generation student does not know how to identify resources they

are unaware of. And, for many of the participants in the study, not having access to

resources that aided first-generation Latinx students made their transition more difficult.

In recognizing that first-generation Latinx students have specific needs, colleges could

also segment their marketing and communication messaging to target these populations.

UNP and other colleges have implemented strategies to help first-generation

students find available resources. This includes web pages dedicated to teaching students

what it means to be first-generation and web pages with information on the resources

available to first-generation students (Brown University, n.d.; Northwestern University,

n.d.). UNP has a web page dedicated to first-generation students called "I am a first-

generation student" that provides prospective students with stories of other students like

them, statistics on first-generation students, and numerous on-campus resources.

UNP and many other institutions have implemented Customer Relationship

Management (CRM) systems that can help track prospective students. Through the

student application, these CRM systems can help institutions like UNP pull applicants

who are first-generation students and help push first-generation messaging out to these

students. These CRM systems allow institutions to tailor their messages and can create

different messaging that creates awareness and explains the benefits of such a program.

Additionally, some institutions have also created tailored brochures for first-

generation students. Vanderbilt is an example of how to share resources and aid to first-

generation students and their families. They provide handbooks to first-generation

families, specifically targeting parents (Vanderbilt University, n.d.). The resources aim to

provide parents with the knowledge and tools to support their students. Initiatives like

these can also be expanded by formatting similar materials in various languages to ensure

that families can learn and support their students even when English is not the primary

language.

Another layer of complexity that arose from this study was the immigration status

of three students. The students spoke about their financial limitations. Although they

could attend a four-year university, they did not have as much financial support. Federal

grants and loans were not available to them as they were not eligible (Federal Student

Aid, n.d.). Although they could apply for private scholarships, many were unaware of any

aid. They were unaware of any college programs they could join that would allow them.

For example, they would be ineligible for TRIO because it is a federal program.

However, other school-sponsored programs not tied to federal dollars would be a great

resource. UNP had one of these programs, which could be highlighted to ensure that first-

generation students who are undocumented could also access such services.

With institutions implementing strategies to assist first-generation students, UNP

may also begin to assess how and if these pages are serving their purpose. Colleges like

UNP can use marketing and recruitment strategies like segmentation to target first-

generation Latinx students. UNP could leverage its data to identify first-generation and

Latinx students with purposeful links in their admission letters. None of the participants

in the study mentioned visiting a specific web page that could lead them to additional

resources. Instead, they all spoke about having to find things on their own.

Because first-generation students make up 20 percent of the incoming classes, and

with more than half of the 20 percent identifying as Latinx, it is important to pay

attention to this group of students (Eagan et al., 2017). UNP's student numbers reflect the

national average, with one in five students fitting this demographic. It can become an

important strategy to provide first-generation Latinx students with tailored marketing –

informing them of the resources that may be available to them. As mentioned before,

schools are already implementing ways to reach and inform students (i.e., brochures,

handbooks, web pages). Making information available online is not enough; thus, finding

different modes of communicating this information will be helpful in disseminating

information. Data show that more than 40 percent of high school first-generation students

prefer email as a method of communication (Bermejo, 2017). Moreover, students prefer

direct mail and phone calls over text messaging (Bermejo, 2017). Understanding how to

reach students will ensure that first-generation students are guided toward the available

brochures, web pages, and handbooks. In addition, institutions can diversify how they

communicate with their students, as some web pages are heavy with text. Instead,

institutions should use visual content featuring infographics, interactive pictograms,

videos, animations, and data visualizations to complement the text information being

shared (Gamble, 2012). It would allow students to gather and learn information through

different formats. Previous research on online learning has also found that visuals are

helpful in the learning process (Zhang, Zhou, Briggs & Nunamaker, 2006). Zhang et al.

(2006) found in their research that "video is a rich and powerful medium being used in e-

learning. It can present information in an attractive and consistent manner" (p. 16).

Schools like UNP can teach through their marketing and ensure that disadvantaged

populations such as first-generation Latinx students may benefit from the available

resources.

Outreach Program: Building Capital

In the study, pre-college programs were one of the most beneficial resources that first-generation Latinx students had during their college choice process. The programs allowed students to connect with college student mentors and staff. These connections allowed students to build their cultural and social capital by learning more about higher education. The programs assisted students with college visits, research, and guidance in assessing their options. High schools or not-for-profits were typically the providers of the programs that organized activities or classes. With high schools initiating much of the programming, it is reasonable to ask what college institutions should also be doing to assist students as well. This brings up the recommendation of UNP and other institutions to be more involved through outreach programs. This includes assisting both pre-college programs and high school counselors. Not only would students gain accurate information from the experts (e.g., UNP), but students would be better informed. Additionally, early intervention will not only help prepare students to be better informed, but it will introduce brand awareness, which may further encourage students to attend college and create a larger pool of prospective students.

Higher education institutions are experts, and they know what they expect of students personally, professionally, and academically. With institutions setting the expectations and requirements, there are no better teachers than the higher education institutions themselves. Because of their expertise, it becomes crucial for institutions to become involved with outreach initiatives. Previous research has found that even at the high school level when high schools provide college information, there has been a

disconnect between what the high school believed to be helpful and what was actually

helpful (Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Recognizing the gaps in knowledge and

expectation makes it crucial to include colleges. Pre-college programs help to provide

students with social, cultural, and economic capital, as the programs prepare students for

the application and search process (Gray-Nicolas, 2017). The programs serve to bridge

the K-12 and higher education systems (Gray-Nicolas, 2017). Thus, pre-college programs

serve to provide students with accurate and important college information to best prepare

them for their transition (Hoffman, Vargas, & Santos, 2009). Pre-college programs have

proven to help students, and have been effective in helping to enroll low-income and

Latinx students (Bettinger & Evans, 2019). However, previous research has shown that

high school staff need additional training to provide the guidance needed by first-

generation students and their families (Swail et al., 2003). This means higher education

institutions should work with pre-college programs to improve the information being

taught and shared. Moreover, this will allow for a more streamlined process where the

college's expectations and high school preparation meet. This would allow the programs

to assist students as they begin their college search.

Engle and Tinto's (2008) research has also recommended providing non-college

counselors with specialized training to better assist students. Simmons (2011) notes that

counselors often lack specialized training on higher education information (e.g.,

requirements, majors, professional tracks) to assist students best. It is important to note

this lack of training, as studies have also found that counselors significantly impact

students when sharing cultural capital (Bell et al., 2009; Enberg & Allen, 2011). As

Robinson and Roksa (2016) state, "counselors who understand the college application process can potentially fill in the knowledge gaps of students and parents with limited social and cultural capital" (p. 864). Recognizing the impact school counselors have on students is crucial to ensure students are provided with accurate and helpful information. Institutions such as UNP could provide district or state training to counseling staff. With the aid of technology, this could be done by setting modules or recording training to provide accessibility. The staff would be provided with accurate and helpful information, as it would come from the experts themselves. By better equipping pre-college programs and counselors, institutions could provide college knowledge ahead of time and ensure that students coming to their websites, schools, and administrators, have a better understanding of the information they read.

UNP already has a foundation upon which they can build. UNP has pre-college programs through its Upward Bound program and engineering fields. However, Upward Bound appears to have stopped its program in 2022-23, while the engineering programs are run through the College of Engineering. UNP could extend its programs by creating a centralized program or supporting each college in hosting its own outreach programs. If UNP centralized efforts, or worked with each college, they could develop a template for how staff and faculty engage. This would promote faculty and staff involvement as well as support UNP members with resources on how to work with pre-college students. Another possibility is to work with community programs. For example, there is a local community organization that supports Latina students in 3rd-12th grade by providing support to attend college. Identifying programs like these can be of benefit to both the

students and families served and UNP. Expanding to these types of programs can be an attainable goal.

Recommendation for Future Research

Further research on first-generation Latinx students could examine the student experience through a different research methodology. For example, a longitudinal study could examine students in 11th and 12th grade and assess their experiences prior to college. Exploring their experiences as they research institutions and as they go through the college application process. The study could also continue their research and follow the students for one to two years to examine whether the students are satisfied with their choice and how they are experiencing college. The study would allow for more accurate data, as the data would be collected as the students go through the process.

Another study could be a case study, that also includes university staff. It would provide a different perspective and insight into how institutions create and implement their plans. Are there gaps between what the university wants to see happen and the students' experience? This could also include other sources of data, such as the actual messages and mail being sent out to prospective students. A more rounded collection of information could add to the body of knowledge by gaining an understanding of all the members involved in the process.

In addition, new studies could expand on the students who participate in the study. For example, those who decided not to attend UNP. This would examine the experience of those students to better understand the factors that contributed to attending a different institution and whether marketing played a role. It would also allow UNP to

better understand what might not be working and how they can improve in other aspects of their work.

Lastly, the study was completed at a predominantly white institution. However, it could have been completed at another institution with more ethnic and racial diversity. It would examine those students' experiences and what that institution may be doing differently or the same to recruit a higher number of ethnic and racial minority students.

Limitations of the Study

Although the study aimed to provide as much accurate data as possible, the study had some limitations. Some advantages of video interviews include a wider reach to students outside the university area and convenience for the participants. However, one limitation included how the interviews were conducted. The video interviews caused some technical difficulties. These difficulties included video or audio cutting out during the interviews. The technical difficulties resulted in stopping the interview and beginning once more once the audio and video were stable. All questions and answers were repeated to minimize loss of information. However, the difficulties disrupted the information flow and the participant's thought process. On some occasions, video and audio were interrupted, so students had to restate their answers; in those cases, some would shorten their initial answers. Although students remained engaged and continued with the interview, the brief interruptions could have been avoided through in-person interviews – however, this was not an option. The technical difficulties could have resulted in missed critical information that may have contributed to the results or

analysis. I would use paraphrasing and restating techniques to avoid missing too much data to ensure the collected data was accurately understood.

A second limitation of this qualitative study is the possibility of data inaccuracy. This is because of the participants' inability to recall or share their experiences accurately. Shepard (2020) explains that qualitative interviews can pose challenges as the researcher relies on the participant's honesty and ability to recall. Inaccuracy could arise in how they recall their experiences, circumstances, opinions, or behaviors. Additionally, Weiss (1995) explained that if a participant would like to refrain from sharing specific information about their experiences, or behaviors, they would easily be able to, as the researcher would have a hard time verifying if the information is accurate. Inaccuracies in behavior could have skewed the data collected; however, because the interviews were held via video, I could observe participants as much as possible for any visible discomfort, hesitation, or anxiety. This allowed me to stop when I needed to reassess the interview. Additionally, to minimize inaccurate information, follow-up questions were asked to ensure participants could expand on general statements they made. Furthermore, if there were any observations of anxiety or discomfort, I would rephrase questions, pivot my questions, or remind participants that they did not have to share any more than they wanted to. This was to help ensure the participants felt comfortable with the information they shared. As well as ensure that they did not feel the need to provide data that was not accurate.

Qualitative interviews can also be difficult and challenging when asking participants to recall information from years ago (Weiss, 1995). Some of the individuals

in the study were several years removed from their college choice experience; anywhere

from one year to four years. Weiss (1995) warns that there may be vagueness in a

person's answers as they have difficulty recalling or cannot recall specific events or

experiences. Participants in the study who were seniors were often the students who had a

harder time recalling specific names and/or events that occurred. However, they were

able to recall and explain how they felt and what they went through. In the study, I

attempted to create rapport with the participants to ensure the participants felt

comfortable during the interview. I did so by explaining my interest in the study, what the

goal of the study was, and how the study could help with gaps in research. This was to

illustrate authenticity and connect with students to ensure they felt they were part of the

study and contributing to the literature.

A third limitation of the study was its sample size. The study aimed to recruit a

minimum sample size of 16. This sample size was based on previous research by

Hennick et al. (2017). Their research indicated that qualitative research that sought to

explore and understand the experience of individuals should aim for 16-24. I was not able

to get to 16, mainly due to COVID-19 limitations. I began my research at the beginning

of the pandemic, which caused recruitment challenges. Zoom was still new to everyone,

and as such, students were hard to reach and there was limited success. Still, the same

sample size makes it hard to generalize and is very specific to this group of participants.

In addition to the study's limitations, it is just as important to acknowledge the

limitations of the data analysis. Limitations include the researcher's research subjectivity

(Creswell, 2013). As the principal investigator of this study, I am also a first-generation

Latino student who faced similar challenges as the subjects of my study did during the college choice process. Because of this, I want to acknowledge that the outcome of my research study could be biased. To overcome this, researchers must find strategies to reduce and minimize their own bias (Peshkin, 1988). One strategy I applied was bracketing, which allowed for the writing of initial and potential biases before the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This helped to ensure that any biases were recognized and acknowledged before commencing data analysis. The second strategy to reduce bias was member checking. Member checking involved checking and allowing the participants to provide feedback on the data that was collected and interpreted. This would help reduce subjectivity and allow the participants' voices, experiences, and stories to come through as authentically and accurately as possible.

Although there were several limitations, the study placed safeguards to minimize as much interference as possible. These safeguards included using active listening skills, following up with participants to ensure statements were accurately interpreted, using nonverbal cues to gauge the conversations, and using self-assessment to minimize bias.

Conclusion

The study explored the college choice experience of 12 University of Northwest Pacific (UNP) first-generation Latinx students to better understand how UNP's marketing affected their experience. The results provided insight into how the students navigated the challenges they faced and overcame. The study helped to answer the three questions guiding the study by examining how students overcame adversity when working through the college choice process. It also gave insight into how the students admitted to UNP

leveraged their social and cultural capital to successfully navigate the college choice

process. Lastly, the study helped to discover how the students were affected by UNP's

marketing.

In this chapter, I situate the study and its findings in a larger context: examining

how college marketing continues to evolve and the impact it can have on students. As

colleges face decreasing enrollment rates and state and federal divestment (National

Center for Education Statistics, n.d; U.S. Department of Education, 2019) sensitivity to

the impact of these practices is important. The challenges colleges face affect the

aggressive marketing approach used to recruit students (Brennan et al., 2007). Institutions

may shift or pivot to equitable recruitment practices while still boosting enrollment.

Recognizing the challenges first-generation Latinx students face and implementing

strategies to assist them will help all parties involved. Creating informed customers

ensures that students choose the right school. In assisting students in their learning,

institutions help create and build a larger applicant pool.

It must also be acknowledged that the study has limitations, and the results cannot

be generalized. The findings could help inform marketing and recruitment practices by

highlighting where gaps exist and how to best improve current practices. Building on this

work, UNP could undertake an examination of the college choice experience of all first-

generation students, as well as examine the challenges experienced by diverse racial and

ethnic students. Moreover, increasing the number of participants may also affect the

results and help to highlight additional gaps not found in this smaller study. There is no

limit to the student segmentation a study could take, to better understand the differences

and similarities of each student population. There is no simple solution to the complex

challenges first-generation Latinx students face, but universities can portray their

characteristics authentically and accurately when communicating with prospective

students through their marketing and recruitment media (Helland et al., 2002; Braxton,

2001). Additionally, there needs to be a change in the college culture. Colleges must not

expect all students to come into the college choice process with the same level of cultural

and social capital. Instead, it is important to recognize how inequitable marketing is for

first-generation Latinx students. The problem lies with current college expectations, not

students and parents. Valencia (2018) argues that educators have a responsibility to assist

students and parents in ensuring that students have equitable preparation and guidance.

Thus, as institutions help prepare the next generation of students for the workforce, they

must also pay attention to those beginning their college journey. Higher education

institutions should continue recruiting students with strategies that create equitable

opportunities for all.

As the study concluded, students were asked what words of wisdom or advice

they had for the next group of first-generation Latinx students beginning their process. I

conclude this chapter by providing some of the students' words of wisdom below.

Melissa

> I would say. Don't limit yourself. Don't limit yourself to what you think you can
> get because what you think that you can get is different from what you can do. I
> know that I thought a lot about what I could have done if I had actually kept that
> discipline of preparing myself to aim high[er]. There's nothing wrong with going
> to community college. I definitely support the idea of going to community
> college. I think it's a really good resource. And if you can, go! But definitely, if
> you know that you can go higher, go farther and get those opportunities. I know
> it's sometimes hard to leave your family, the environment that you're in, because

it's a safe environment, that's what you know. But I would definitely say just don't limit yourself and just explore, expose yourself to new environments because that's really how you learn.

Leo

Some advice would be, look into the student organizations that [schools] may have. Look deeper into… some of the resources that they provide because honestly before I came to UNP, I wasn't provided any of that information… it's great that I found it on my own but there's some things where I'm just like, man I wish I would have known about [them] earlier. I've told this story many times before too. So, I mean, it's kind of like, like great opportunities that could be missed opportunities.

Elizabeth

I would advise [students] to definitely use, make use of the resource centers. TRIO was offered to me before I, you know, I picked it. The bridge program was offered to me. I didn't realize the impact and the need that I would have for it. Until I was within the institution. That would be my advice. Definitely take all those resources, anything and everything you can get mentorships.

Stephanie

I think being completely honest, what schools you're choosing, um, being completely honest on your application. Not saying that I lied on my application… You know, being completely honest about who you are, not always trying to be [the] perfect student and making that known to these schools is something that I would tell high schoolers. You know, it shows a lot of character, and it shows that we're all human and especially being first-gen.

Moises

I would say is, one, go [to a college] by yourself or with a group of friends and just observe… Go and explore, and don't be afraid to ask as many questions as you can. I would say definitely ask all the questions you can ask to really prepare yourself. Two, I would advise you to, go to the school. To go to school and actually see how it is before you make an assumption about if you really want to go. And three, I would say enjoy. Come with an open mind. Think of it as you're coming in with no knowledge… just take things open minded, you know. I feel like college gives that great ability [to learn]... where you could come with that open mind and we could always learn from anything and everybody.

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Appendix A: Top 10

Appendix B: Four-year Guarantee

Appendix C: Majors

WHAT WE OFFER

120+ majors, minors and concentrations lay the groundwork for a lifetime of learning and curiosity.

A
Anthropology
Applied Health & Fitness
Applied Linguistics
Architecture
Art History
Art Practice
Arts & Letters*

B
Biology
Black Studies
Business
    Accounting
    Advertising Management
    Finance
    Human Resources Management*
    Management & Leadership*
    Marketing
    Supply & Logistics Management*

C
Chemistry
    Biochemistry
Child, Youth & Family Studies
Communication
Community Development
Conflict Resolution
Creative Writing
Criminology & Criminal Justice*

E
Earth Science
Economics
    Quantitative Economics

Engineering
    Biomedical Informatics
    Civil Engineering
    Computer Engineering
    Computer Science
    Electrical Engineering
    Environmental Engineering
    Mechanical Engineering
English*
Environmental Science
Environmental Studies

F
Film

G
Geography
Geology
Graphic Design

H
Health Studies
    Aging Services
    Community Health Education
    Health Sciences
    School Health
History

I
International & Global Studies*
    African Studies
    East Asian Studies
    European Studies
    International Development
    Latin American Studies
    Middle East Studies

pdx.edu/academic-programs

J
Judaic Studies

L
Liberal Studies*

M
Music
Composition
Education
Jazz
Musicology/Ethnomusicology
Performance
Sonic Arts
Theory
Voice

P
Philosophy
Physics
Biomedical Physics
Environmental Physics
Political Science
Public Service
Pre-Health Programs**
Pre-Chiropractic
Pre-Clinical Laboratory Science
Pre-Dental Hygiene
Pre-Dentistry
Pre-Medicine
Pre-Naturopathic Medicine
Pre-Nursing
Pre-Occupational Therapy
Pre-Optometry
Pre-Pharmacy

Pre-Physical Therapy
Pre-Physician Assistant
Pre-Radiation Therapy
Pre-Veterinary Medicine
Pre-Law**
Pre-Teacher Education**
Psychology

S
Science
Sexuality, Gender, &
    Queer Studies
Social Science*
Social Work
Sociology
Speech & Hearing Sciences

T
Theater Arts

U
Urban & Public Affairs*

W
Women's Studies
World Languages & Literatures
Arabic
Chinese
French
German
Japanese
Russian
Spanish

*Online option available   **Pre-professional pathways

Appendix D: Email Invitation for interview recruitment

Hello,
I hope this email finds you well. Allow me to introduce myself, my name is David Cortez and I am a doctoral student in the Higher Education and Leadership Program (ELP) here at Portland State University. I am currently researching how the marketing and recruitment materials used by PSU affected first-generation Latinx students through their admission and college choice process. In order to learn about the student experience, I am reaching out to you to see if you would be willing to participate in the study. If you decide to take part in the study, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview. There three ways to participate in the study and you may choose the form of interview that is most convenient to you, this includes an:
- In-person interview, *or*
- Online video interview, *or*
- Phone interview

To participate you must:
- Self-identify as Hispanic, Latino/Latina/Latinx, or other identities that can include, but not limited to Chicano, Chicana, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Afro-Latinx, White Hispanic, etc., *and you are a*
- Portland State University freshmen student, *and are a*
- First-generation student; meaning neither of your parents completed their bachelor's degree *(if you have an older sibling/family member that is in college - or completed college- but neither of your parents completed college, you are still first-generation)*, and
- At least 18 years old

The findings in the study can help to identify common barriers and challenges faced by first-generation Latinx students, and how to improve best practices to better serve our students.

If you are interested, but have any questions or concerns about the study please feel free to reach out to me at any time.

Thank you,

David Cortez
Doctoral Student
Graduate School of Education at Portland State University
dcortez@pdx.edu

Appendix E: Informed Consent

College Marketing and Recruitment: The effects on first-generation Latinx students

Invitation

You are invited to participate in a research study that seeks to understand how the recruitment and marketing materials Portland State University produces affected first-generation Latinx students in their admission and college choice process. The goal is to gain a better understanding of the student experience to inform and improve best practices. The research is being conducted by a doctoral student from the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at Portland State University (PSU).

The research will consist of in-person, online video, or over the phone interviews with first-generation, self-identified Hispanic, Latino/Latina/Latinx, Portland State University or Portland Community College freshmen students. Should you wish to take part in the study you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview. The study will be conducted by a doctoral candidate student at PSU, who will be the only one who has access to the study's information and recordings.

Risk and Rights

By participating in the study, the student can be at potential risk of feeling uncomfortable. The discomfort can come from the interview questions that might bring up unwanted feelings. It is important to note that participants have the complete right to refuse to answer any questions, or stop the interview at any time. A participant will not suffer any repercussions if they decide to not answer an interview question, stop the interview, or even withdraw from the study completely.

An additional risk for the participant can be a breach of confidentiality. All measures will be taken with password protected devices, as well as password protected software, and encrypted transmission of data, however there is a minimal risk of breach of confidentiality. To add another layer of protection, participant's name will not be included in the collected information and recording. Instead a pseudonym will be used when recording and tracking information to minimize risk.

Benefits

As a participant you will not be receiving monetary compensation for your participation in the study. However, by participating in this study, participants can help fill in the gaps in the body of literature. Additionally, the findings in the study can help to identify common barriers and challenges faced by first-generation Latinx students.

Confidentiality of records and Dissemination

There will be several safeguards set in place to ensure confidentiality. Researcher has undergone training on privacy and confidentiality for IRB approval. Additionally, in-person and over-the-phone interviews will be recorded on digital recorder and phone. The recordings will then be immediately transferred to a secure online cloud storage where

the data will be stored, and the recorder files will be deleted. For online video interviews the data will be recorded via Zoom and stored in the cloud storage. Additionally, all data stored will be saved under the pseudonym of the participant for an extra layer of security. Participants pseudonym will be used in the research and publications, so the participants name will never appear publicly or in any publications.

Contact information
If you have any questions or concerns about your participation in the study, or about your rights as a participant in the study you may contact the Human Subjects Research Review Committee via:

<div align="center">

Mail
Sponsored Projects Administration
PO Box 751 (SPA)
Portland, OR 97207

Phone
503-725-9900

Email
spa@pdx.edu

</div>

If you have specific regarding the study please contact the researcher via email:
David Cortez   dcortez@pdx.edu

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the above information, and have agreed to take part in the study. Please know that you may withdraw your consent at any time without penalty. By signing the consent form, you are not waiving any legal
claims or rights. The researcher will provide you with a copy of this form for
your own records.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix F: Interview Questions

Demographics Questions
What was the highest grade your mother completed? Father? Guardian?

Interview Questions
The questions asked in the interview will ask you to reflect back on your experience when searching for colleges, and navigating the admission and college choice process:
1. How did you hear about Portland State University and/or Portland Community College?
2. Who influenced you to want to continue with your education? And ultimately decide to attend PSU? Not attend PSU?
3. What do you remember about the PSU marketing materials?
   a. Where did you obtain PSU marketing materials?
4. Could you describe your experience with the marketing materials?
   a. Do you remember if you found some found information useful as you went through admission and college selection process?
   b. Do you remember if you found some found information creating barriers for you as you went through admission and college selection process?
5. Could you describe how your family supported you with your college search and selection process?
   a. Could you discuss who these individuals were and how did they help?
   b. If you did not have support, how did you navigate this?
6. Could you describe how your social circle (non-family) supported you with your college search and selection process?
   a. Could you discuss who these individuals were and how did they help?
   b. If you did not have support, how did you navigate this?
7. Could you describe your experiences with the PSU recruitment officers?
   a. How helpful were they in explaining the college admission process?
   b. Did you reach out to them? Did they reach out to you?
      i. How did this make you feel?
8. Was there any information you wished was included in the materials or online that you would have found helpful?
   a. If so, what would that information be?
9. Looking back at your whole experience from the college search to finally selecting, or not selecting, PSU, what are some learning moments you take with you? Any advice you would give a student starting their college search?