

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUCCESS OF LATINO AND LATINA INTERNATIONAL
STUDENTS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

by

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(Under the Direction of Maria Navarro)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the factors that influenced the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school at a Research I institution in the South East of the United States. The design of this study was qualitative. Purposive and snowball sampling were the methods to recruit the sixteen participants of this study. Semi-structured interviews took place during the fall of 2015 and the spring of 2016. Findings from this study resulted in ten constructs: campus setting, racist rhetoric, academic environment, recruitment techniques, retention techniques, student background, cultural and academic transition, resilient skills, personal life situations, and professional development. Findings provided by participants will assist U.S. universities and colleges, Latin American governments, and parents to help this population succeed in higher education.

INDEX WORDS: Latino/a international students, success, recruitment and retention

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, family, Chandlèr Thômas, and friends who have sacrificed everything for me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly global economy facing the challenge of feeding nine billion people by 2050, Latino/a international students are important agents in the integration of knowledge, education, and skills to develop and address solutions. International students diversify campus and educational programs, provide a multicultural lens for global issues at their respective universities and colleges, and significantly contribute to the economy of the host country (HRC, 2010). The superior quality of education in the U.S., especially the opportunities to do research, the quality of facilities and technology, and disciplinary expertise are among the reasons that international students decide to study abroad and better their options in the international context (Szelényi, 2006). The U.S. remains the best destination for Latino/a international students, and many students worldwide, to pursue a degree in higher education (IIE, 2011).

Statement of the Problem

Among the reasons that international students migrate to develop countries for higher education are to acquire the professional expertise to assume key positions in their country of origin (Szelényi, 2006). In the U.S., the top three countries of origin of international students are China, India, and South Korea, which represent approximately 58 percent of the total enrollment of international students (IIE, 2015). For the 2014-2015 academic school year, 974,926 international students studied at U.S. universities and colleges; a 10 percent increase from the previous school year's enrollment of 886,052 international students (IIE, 2015).

When reviewing all the nations of origin for international students, Latin America, and the Caribbean are represented with only 8.9 percent of total enrollments (IIE, 2015). Mexico and Brazil accounted for the majority of Latino/a international students (IIE, 2015). This region encompasses a vast variety of countries, backgrounds, people, and cultures that offer an excellent opportunity to recruit a diverse group of students from all backgrounds and not only from Brazil and Mexico.

The retention of students is also important, more international students are dropping off before earning their degree because institutions are focusing more on increasing numbers of international students and forgetting about these students' needs and expectations to be successful (Johnson-Elie, 2015). Decreasing attrition of international students from U.S. universities and colleges depends on bridging the gap between recruitment and retention mismatches (Choudaha & Schulmann, 2014). International students will serve as agents of change, intending for their professional careers to have an impact on a global scale. Aiding their success should be a priority of the U.S., Latin America, and around the world. Therefore, it is of great importance to support their path to higher education.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine, describe, and develop a framework of the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school at a major land-grant university. The study examined student experiences with the application and decision process, navigating of integrating into a new system and culture, and the culmination of their graduate program with the ultimate goal of graduation. The case of Latino/a international students at the University of Georgia was presented.

The following objectives helped the researcher in accomplishing the study's purpose: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

Significance of the Study

There has been intensive research about U.S. Latino/a (domestic) students and other international students, but little inquiry has been made specifically for Latino/a international students. The development of a framework to better understand the factors that influence the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school is vital to increase the enrollment of this population and more significantly aid them in succeeding.

Conceptual framework

The Nora Student Engagement Model (2006) was studied and adapted to determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a students in graduate school. This model suggested a shared responsibility between the student to persist and the institution to retain (Nora, 2006). The Nora (2006) Student Engagement Model proposed six major constructs: “(1) precollege and pull factors, (2) the sense of purpose and the institutional allegiance, (3) the academic and social experiences, (4) the cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, (5) the goal determination and the institutional allegiance, and (6) persistence” (p .2). Figure 1 represents the theoretical framework that guided the study.

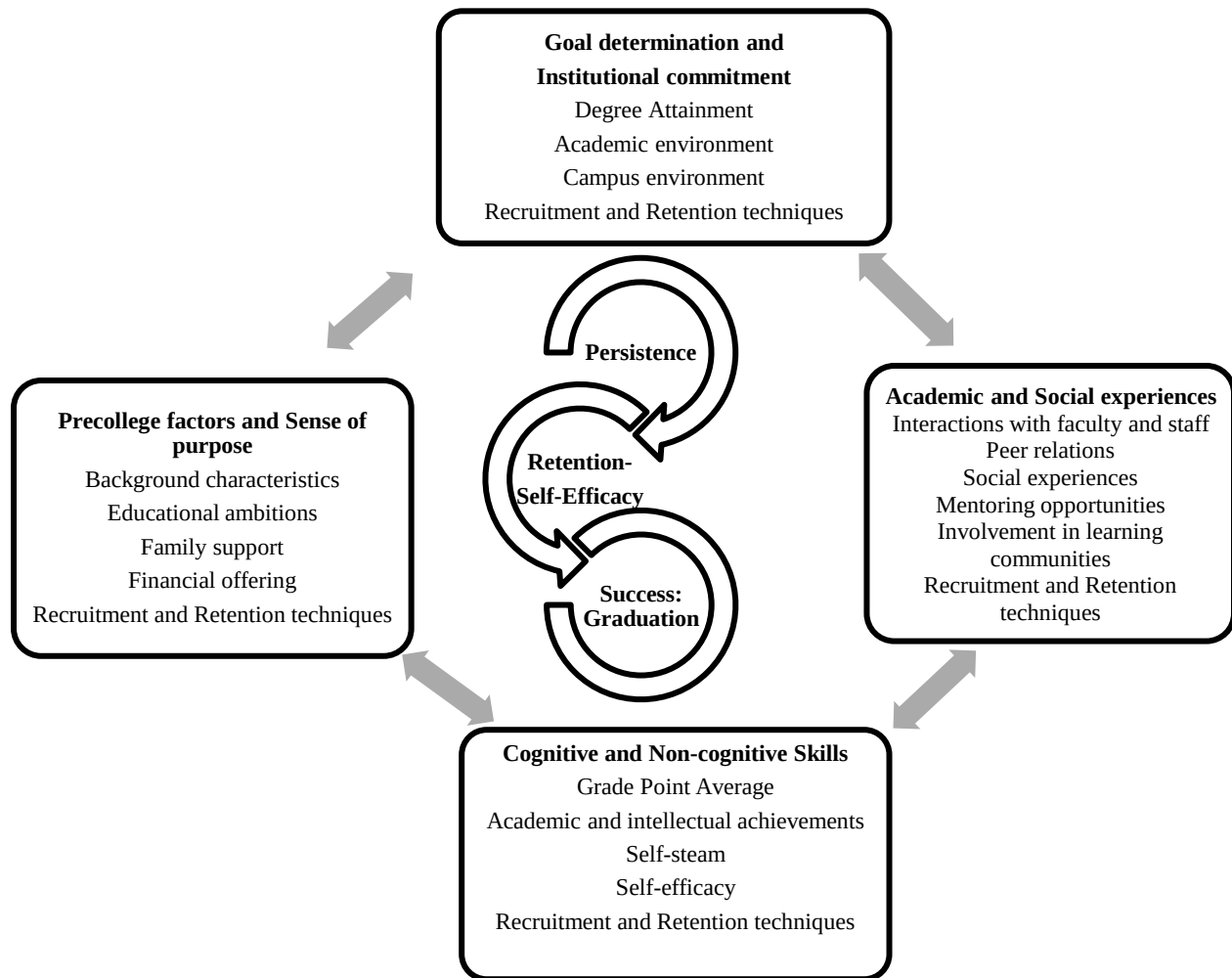


Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework, adapted from the Nora (2006) student engagement model.

The researcher adjusted the theoretical framework from the literature reviewed with the purpose to add critical factors such as recruitment and retention techniques that were part of the objectives of the study but were not addressed in the Nora (2006) model. The six major constructs of Nora (2006) were narrowed to 5 major constructs: 1) precollege factors and sense of purpose, (2) academic and social experiences, (3) cognitive and non-cognitive skills, (4) goal determination and institutional commitment, and (5) persistence and student success.

Additionally, the constructs academic environment, campus environment, and recruitment and retention techniques have been added specifically from the literature reviewed.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to graduate students that self-identified as Latino/a international students (n=16) at the University of Georgia.

Limitations

The small sample size of Latino/a international students enrolled at the University of Georgia for the 2015/2016 academic year was the primary limitation of this study. Additionally, the conceptual framework and the literature review is based on scholarship where most of the fieldwork has been done with undergraduate students, rather than graduate students, and with dominant culture students, or when dealing with minorities, with U.S. Latino/a students (domestic), or international students (not just from Latin America), and may not represent the factors influencing the population under investigation.

Our research is a case study of the experience of sixteen graduate students at UGA. The results of the study are limited and do not represent the experiences of all Latino/a international students in the U.S. Results may not be generalized to other students or other U.S. institutions.

Operational Definitions

Success. The term success in this research project refers to graduation from a university setting, in this case, the University of Georgia. This term considers all aspects of the student process, spanning from the decision to apply to a U.S. institution, continuing throughout the different stages as a student, and culminating in graduation.

Latin America and the Caribbean. It is a region of the American continent. This region includes part of North America (excludes the United States of America and Canada), Central America, South America, and the Caribbean.

U.S. Latino or Latina students (domestic). These are students that consider the U.S. their home. Their origins are from Latin America, or their parents are originally from Latin America, but their families are settled in the U.S.

Latino or Latina International students or Latin American students. These are students who hold F-1 or M-1 student visas, and who live in the U.S. while pursuing a higher education degree, because they are pursuing the degree. These students' home countries are in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Other International Students: These are students who hold F-1 or M-1 student visas, and who live in the U.S. while pursuing a higher educational degree. These students' home countries are located in regions of the world besides the Americas.

Graduate students: These are students earning an advanced academic degree (i.e. master's and doctoral degrees) with the general requirement that before the enrollment in graduate school they must have earned an undergraduate (bachelor's) degree.

Chapter Summary

Among the reasons that international students migrate to develop countries for higher education are to acquire the professional expertise to assume key positions in their home countries (Szelényi, 2006). When reviewing all the nations of origin for international students, Latin America, and the Caribbean are represented with only 8.9 percent of total enrollments (IIE, 2015). Mexico and Brazil accounted for the majority of Latino/a international students (IIE, 2015). This region encompasses a vast variety of countries, backgrounds, people, and cultures

that offer an excellent opportunity to recruit a diverse group of students from all walks of life and not only from Brazil and Mexico. The purpose of this study was to examine, describe, and develop a framework of the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school at a major land-grant university. The following objectives helped the researcher in accomplishing the study's purpose: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following components of the literature review are discussed in this section: (1) research objectives and introduction; (2) institutional constructs; (3) student constructs; and (4) chapter summary.

Research Objectives and Introduction

The following objectives guided the study: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

Relevant literature was studied to examine the factors that influence the success of students in college. Particularly, the success of Latino/a international graduate students. However, the research did not find many relevant publications that focused on that particular group of students. Thus, the literature review was expanded to literature about “all” students, with particular attention to factors that might affect cultural/racial/ethnic minorities, underrepresented groups, first generation students, international students, or graduate students in a different manner than students from dominant groups.

Most of the literature suggested a shared responsibility between the student to persist and the institution to retain (Abood & White, 2012). Specifically, Vincent Tinto’s work, drop out

from higher education (Tinto, 1975); and the Nora Student Engagement Model (Nora, 2006), are the two most influential works that claim this shared responsibility.

Driven by this shared responsibility, the literature reviewed suggested institutional and student constructs. Figure 1 reports the constructs that account for institutions and the constructs that account for students. The institutional constructs are campus environment; academic environment; recruitment techniques; and retention techniques. The student constructs are student background characteristics; previous academic performance; parents, siblings, family, and friends' support; financial situation while in the U.S.; acculturation stressors; resilient personalities and coping strategies; and academic commitment.

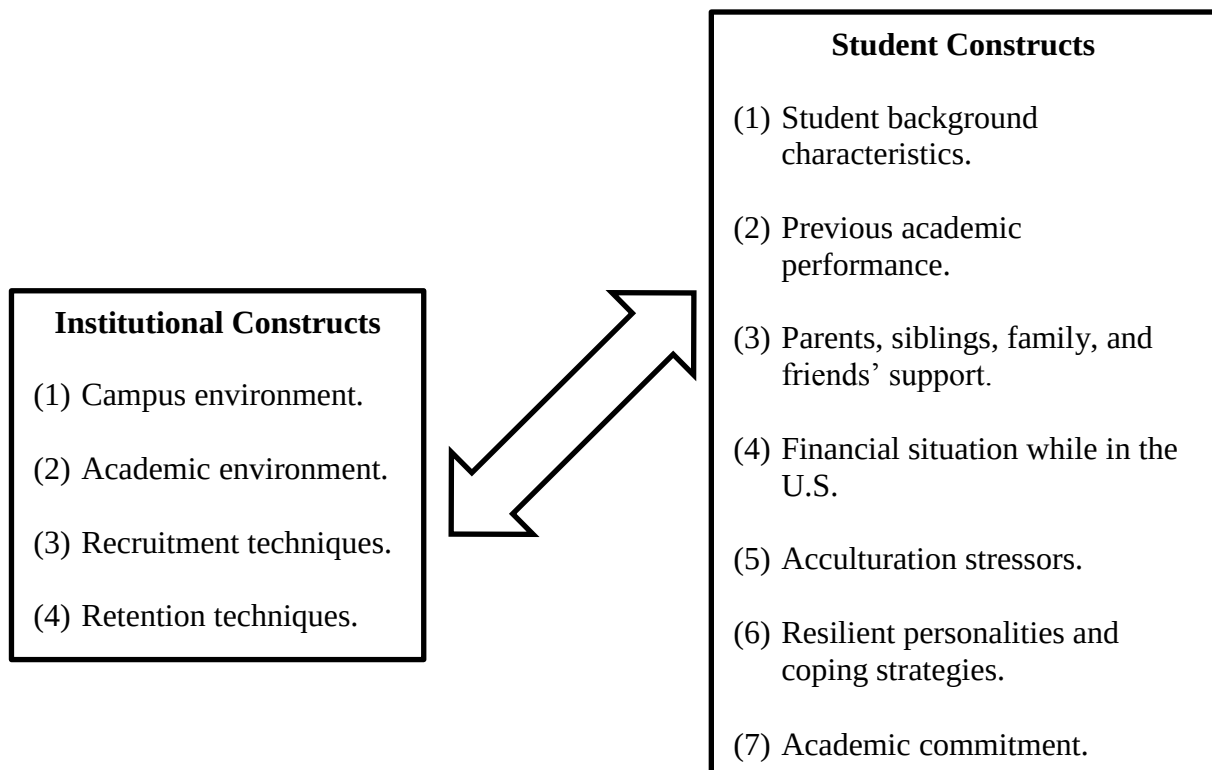


Figure 2.1. Institutional and student constructs influencing student success, drawn from the literature.

In this literature review chapter, the researcher analyzed each of these constructs separately. Recruitment and retention techniques are both factors that influence student success, and strategies that universities can utilize to address these factors. To facilitate organization of the thesis, recruitment and retention techniques are discussed in this literature review as factors influencing the success of students. In the discussion section, the focus on recruitment and retention techniques will be switched to that of strategies to address the key factors influencing student success that emerged from the data.

Institutional Constructs

The institutional constructs that emerged from the literature reviewed were: campus environment; academic environment; recruitment techniques; and retention techniques. Each of these constructs has different constructs or factors that the researcher discussed in depth throughout this chapter.

Campus Environment

Student organizations. Joining an organization can help students to succeed. The organization and its members, through engagement with the student, can provide social interactions and academic support that can result in high academic outcomes and have a positive impact on student retention (Hernandez & Lopez, 2004; Sandoval et al., 2014; Tinto, 1975). According to Hernandez & Lopez (2004), colleges and universities should ensure that Latino students have multiple options for on-campus student organizations. In particular, they suggest that promoting Latino-based organizations could have greater benefits than other options because they might also help as a recruitment tool, attracting Latino students by giving them a sense of belonging.

Diverse faculty and staff with a similar background. Latino faculty and staff presence on campuses has been confirmed to have a positive effect on student persistence and retention (Oseguera, 2009). Oseguera (2009) argued that a campus environment with diverse faculty and staff may foster success by serving as role models, friends, and advisors to students in new settings. Additionally, a diverse group of faculty and staff may better understand the problems faced by students with different backgrounds (Oseguera, 2009).

This factor has been recognized by many universities and some ways to address it include hiring more members of ethnic minority groups such as hiring more Latino faculty and staff (Benford & Gess-Newsome, 2006). Second, existing faculty should be offered training opportunities that help them understand how to better relate with and help minority students (Benford & Gess-Newsome, 2006).

Social events. By attending social events, students may socialize with peers and members of the community and better cope with problems they encounter in college or graduate school. A study about the stress levels of college students, Pariat, Rynjah & Kharjana (2014) found that the lack of attendance to social events may lead to social stress. The literature suggests that promoting a variety of social events within the campus environment may serve as useful recruitment and retention techniques to help minimize social stress among students (Pariat et al., 2014).

Extracurricular activities. Being involved in activities such as hobbies and sports may increase students' success (Buller, 2010). Furthermore, these activities outside the classroom become coping strategies that college students use to protect themselves from stressors and to gain physical health (Welle & Graf, 2011). This factor has been noted to be one of the most

important aspects of how college students deal with stress, yet, many college students are still suffering stress symptoms (Welle & Graf, 2011).

Peer-support systems and supportive environment. A supportive environment is one in which students, through interactions and relationships, receive support from the institution, faculty, and peers (NSSE, 2014).

In a study of the factors impacting persistence for African-American and Latino community college students, Radovic (2010) found that supportive actions, such as access to a counselor, may serve as a technique to cultivate persistence. Therefore, universities should offer counseling services as a retention to increasing persistence (Radovic, 2010).

One of the retention techniques used by universities to help students thrive is to provide social support. Students with higher social support tend to experience higher adjustment levels while in college and lower levels of depression which may lead to cope more effectively and succeed (Sümer, Poyrazli & Grahame, 2008).

The National Survey of Student Engagement (2014) reported how institutions use their resources to organize curriculum and other learning programs to get students to engage and succeed. The engagement indicator “supportive environment” showed that students considered that providing learning support services (tutoring services, writing center), opportunities to be involved socially, and support for the well-being (recreation, health care, counseling), were the most used tools by their institutions.

Education of domestic students. Awareness among and education of U.S. students of the presence of international students on campus may promote success and support to international students (HRC, 2011). One of the retention techniques to integrate both, international students and domestic students is to develop cross-cultural initiatives (HRC, 2011).

Friendly campuses. A friendly campus environment is one in which different languages, cultures, opinions, and diversity in general, are fostered, promoted, and integrated. A friendly environment may stimulate student success by creating a sense of openness, belonging, and interaction.

Hanover Research Council, HRC (2011) reported practices in the recruitment and retention of international students commonly used in Anglophone countries. In their report, they present what IDP Education, a major student placement and research firm, and EducationUSA, the Department of State's international recruitment body suggests to develop and implement to provide international students with friendly campuses.

For example, to support international students, IDP Education proposes: “guaranteeing student housing, guaranteeing places of worship, classify students as more than simply “international” ensuring students activities specifically for international students, and providing a cost of living breakdown and on-campus job opportunities” (HRC, 2011, p. 44).

Similarly, EducationUSA advice includes “creating a special section on the website for international students, educating the leadership, faculty and staff on the legal, cultural, and educational issues faced by international students, hire staff particularly dedicated to the application process of potential international students and the needs of international students, offering a separate orientation for new international students, providing additional English language support and instruction, providing housing options for international students over vacation periods, and initiating a local host family program to integrate international students into the local community and culture” (HRC, 2011, p. 44).

The quality of interactions. Better quality of interactions between students and professors is a step towards better academic outcomes, interactions with students, teachers, and

peers are key to high-quality classrooms and a high quality of learning (NSSE, 2014).

Furthermore, student interactions with institutional agents, such as administration and staff, incite better academic outcomes (Tovar, 2014).

Crisp, Taggart, & Nora (2015) found that Latino students' interactions with supportive individuals emerge to be useful in promoting persistence. Crisp et al. (2015) reported qualitative and quantitative findings of what it appears to be some techniques used for quality of interactions with supportive individuals. These techniques are the use of role models, mentors and mentoring opportunities, parents, peers, Latino communities on campus, encouragement and support from friends, peer and family resources, and on-campus ties to professors (Crisp et al., 2015).

Academic Environment

Classroom dynamics. Classroom dynamics refers to the interaction between teachers and students, and between students themselves. Setting up a positive, comfortable, and interactive learning environment will lead to the engagement of everyone (Peterson, 2012). Some of the most efficient techniques in classroom dynamics are motivation and participation (Peterson, 2012).

Class size. To some students, classes with a larger number of students do not encourage their learning. In a study of school-level factors influencing student achievement of Latinos in elementary schools in Los Angeles, Kieffer (2012) found that it is preferable to have smaller class sizes. If a relocation of funding in an institution alters the size of the class, minority students may be influenced (Kieffer, 2012). Kieffer (2012) also argue that over the past years, class size has been modified to measure teacher effectiveness, but has not been utilized to measure the best class size to stimulate success.

Learning with peers. Peers play a fundamental role in student success. Peers share experiences, strengths, fears, goals, study skills, and achievements. While in College, supportive peers can help in solving academic problems and preparing students to deal with the stress while and after college (NSSE, 2014).

In a study about the impact of peers on college preparation, CHEPA (2006) found that strong peer relationships have proven to influence students' academic success and help them better achieve their academic potential. Most students rely on connections with their peers. Some of these connections are based on shared interests, while others are based on a desire to belong to and be part of a particular group or a desire to succeed in their studies (CHEPA, 2006).

This factor is well-known by universities to have a positive influence on students' academic preparation and success and some of the techniques that CHEPA (2005) recommend to foster peers to learn with each other create environments that unite students based on a common academic identity and schedule regular meeting times.

Experience with faculty. Experiences between students and faculty are essential to success. These interactions can impact the cognitive growth, development, and persistence of college students (NSSE, 2014). Additionally, students who have contact with faculty outside of the classroom are also more likely to persist and succeed (Creighton, 2007). Universities should provide students with involvement experiences with faculty both inside and outside the classroom to lead higher student satisfaction with their university (Creighton, 2007).

Recruitment Techniques

Recruitment techniques for Latino students need to include the parents and family in a multicultural way (Gilroy, 2010). Among the most influential factors in recruitment are the offering of low tuition and financial aid.

Offering of low tuition. In a study about the recruitment and retention of Hispanic undergraduate students in public universities, Montalvo (2012) found that the offering of low tuition is key to successful recruitment of this population. Expensive universities and colleges are less attended unless there is access to greater financial aid (Montalvo, 2012; Eichler & Martinez, 2012).

Financial aid. Increasing students' persistence can be a direct factor of financial aid offered by the institution, specifically for minority populations like Latino students (Abood et al., 2012; Creighton, 2007; Morales, 2010; Mbuva, 2011; Oseguera, 2009; Sandoval et al., 2014). Specifically, institutions with financial aid, specifically for minorities, are attractive and not only help recruit more students, but also promote access to and success in higher education (Abood et al., 2012; Creighton, 2007).

Retention Techniques

Most of the retention techniques used by higher education institutions address one or more of the factors influencing the success of students discussed earlier in this chapter. Some retention techniques are orientation programs, supportive and caring staff, advising, tutoring and mentoring, communication strategies, incentives and benefits, and full-time employment.

Orientation programs. In a study of orientation programs in graduate programs, Benavides & Keyes (2016) found that these programs help students achieve academic and social integration. Orientation programs in a university setting may also be designed to inform students

about institutional and personal expectations, thereby improving student retention and making them feel supported and welcomed (Benavides & Keyes, 2016).

Supportive and caring staff. Employees of U.S. universities and college should be knowledgeable sources of information and serve the students beyond the duties of their job title in efforts to stimulate success (Montalvo, 2012). Supportive and caring staff, focusing on students' academic needs, can guide and motivate success (Crisp, Taggart & Nora, 2015; Mbuva, 2011; Montalvo, 2012).

Advising, tutoring and mentoring. In a study about the influence of advisors and mentors on urban Latino students' college experience Torres & Hernandez (2007) found that, encouragement to success may come from mentors and advisors within the College setting, and this can facilitate the academic and social integration of Latino students into their new environment and help demystify aspects of university life that can be challenging. Specifically, building a positive relationship with an advisor, mentor, or tutor is related both to a stronger sense of belonging and a more positive academic self-concept (Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013).

Communication strategies. An excellent communication channel between the student and the institution is a critical factor to success in both the application process and student performance in school (Peterson, 2012). For undergraduate and high school students, strong, clear communication between the school and the parents is of great significance and may result in high academic outcomes (Gilroy, 2010; Peterson 2012). According to Gilroy (2010) and Peterson (2012), this communication with parents is of particular importance for Latino high school and undergraduate students because they are not familiar with the process of higher education.

Incentives and benefits. Incentives and benefits can be an effective technique to minimize barriers to success. In a study about the power and pitfalls of education incentives Allan & Roland (2011) found that well-designed rewards and financial incentive programs for students could improve their academic achievement at relatively low costs. Because Hispanic students face difficulties to entering college, it is necessary to establish incentive and benefit programs specifically for this population (Baltimore, 1995).

Full-time Employment. In a study on graduate students about persistence through their doctoral program, Santicola (2013) found that full-time employment makes students successful. However, this requires students to be able to balance work, school, and family commitments and responsibilities (Santicola, 2013).

Student Constructs

The student constructs that emerged from the literature reviewed were: student background characteristics; previous academic performance; parents, siblings, family, and friends' support; financial situation; acculturation stressors; resilient personalities and coping strategies; and academic commitment. Each of these constructs has different factors that the researcher discussed in depth throughout this chapter.

Student Background Characteristics

Country of origin. It is the country of birth or the permanent place of residency of the student. Country of origin may have an impact on the students' preferred way of learning, often linked to culture, and, it may have a bearing on their academic outcomes (Torres, 2014).

Socio-cultural-economic characteristics. In a study of English learners and Hispanic students, Flores (2010) found that poverty, a single-parent status, access to resources, quality of

education, and social status are among the characteristics with the most influence on these students' academic achievement.

Students from underrepresented socio-cultural-economic backgrounds, which include ethnic minorities and first-generation students are considered to be at a disadvantage because the average income of their families is lower than that of families with a college tradition and dominant-culture families (Coy-Ogan, 2009; Hernandez, 2005). Other social-cultural-economic factors also play a role, such as immigration status, ethnic identity, and the cultural environment (Mbuva, 2011).

Identity and Religion. In a study of English learners and Hispanic students, Creighton (2007) found that in Hispanic households, religion is a significant component of their belief system. Especially, Hispanic college students connect success to the degree in which the institution they attend fits the role of their identity and religion (Creighton, 2007).

Previous Academic Performance

Previous academic performance is a predictor of future academic achievement (Crosby, 2011). A student's skills and knowledge that helped him or her to succeed in high school may adopt similar strategies to succeed in college (Crosby, 2011).

Grade Point Average (GPA). A student with previous high GPA may earn a high GPA while in college (Crosby, 2011). However, such a claim is also unknown because GPA may not be the best measurement in predicting student success (Crosby, 2011). Students who have more life experiences and skill sets may have a higher potential for success and should not necessarily be measured by GPA and standardized test scores (Duranczyk et al., 2015).

Parents, Siblings, Family, and Friends' Support

While in college or graduate school, students may be influenced by the people in their surroundings, such as parents, siblings, family, and friends.

Parents and Siblings Support. While most of the literature analyzing the impact of parental and siblings involvement addresses high school students, some authors have studied this variable at the college level (McCarron, & Inkelas, 2006; Ong, Phinney & Dennis, 2006; Zybala, 2012), and among graduate students. Cavazos argued that parental support is a valuable factor for the academic success of Latino college students (as cited in Zymbala, 2012). A close participation and relationship of parents in their children's education can have a direct impact on the student's performance (Zybala, 2012).

Additionally, Zymbala (2012) found that Latino students may come from families in which their parents have limited knowledge about the educational system which can result in a lack of assistance and guidance when entering college. Zymbala (2012) also argued that different retention programs such as strengthening the family's connection to school and parental readiness programs may prepare their children for college.

Sibling influence is also related to student success. A student with siblings that were enrolled in college and graduated successfully may be influenced by those siblings' experiences to apply to a higher institution and pursue a degree (Eichler & Martinez, 2012). Additionally, siblings may replace parents as information sources in college choices (Eichler & Martinez, 2012).

The Influence of Family and Friends. The support of another family such as aunts, uncles, and cousins may be a central component for Latino students' success. This is because one defining characteristic of Latin American families is that all decisions are made together and

aligned with family interests (Gilroy, 2010). Eichler & Martinez (2012) found that friends influence Latino student's decision to attend and graduate from college, friends provide information and support to make decisions. They also provide a source of valuable moral support which fosters success (Eichler & Martinez, 2012; Mondragon, 2010).

Financial Situation

The financial condition of students plays an important role in their success in college, and it is well documented in the literature to be a factor influencing directly minority populations such as Latinos (Montalvo, 2012; Nora, 2009). The student's financial status may depend on factors such as tuition, work, and cost of living.

The cost of attendance. The cost of attendance to a higher education institution can influence many Latino students in deciding whether or not to pursue a career and succeed. The high cost may result in higher dropouts rates when students are forced to leave college due to the lack of financial aid or assistantship support (Montalvo, 2012). The cost of attendance directly influences enrollment and retention rates. Retention techniques to helping minimize these costs are to provide lower tuition rates and greater financial aid opportunities (Montalvo, 2012).

Work. Work is also stated as a barrier to success, regardless of whether a student has financial aid. Part-time jobs can help minimize educational expenses and other financial responsibilities (Creighton, 2007). However, opportunities such as working off-campus, whether full-time or part-time, may unintentionally lessen students' opportunities to interact with other members of the institution, both faculty, and peers (Creighton, 2007).

Living costs. High costs of living such as rent, utilities, and transportation have economic, social, and emotional consequences for students. High costs of living can also result

in lower academic performance, and lead to financial stress when students are unable to pay these costs due to their limited budget (Pariat, Rynjah & Kharjana, 2007).

Financial situation is a core component of students' success and different retention techniques such as additional financial aid specifically to this population, availability, and offering of scholarships, incentives, and lower tuition may serve as key to decrease attrition and to increase enrolment (Creighton, 2007; Hernandez, 2006; Montalvo, 2012; Nora, 2009). Additionally, concentrating on the family and getting parents engaged when recruiting Latino students may serve as a retention technique to promote success for this population (Hernandez, 2006).

Acculturation Stressors

Culture shock. The effects of culture shock of students should not be underestimated. Culture shock is the loss of emotional harmony when a student moves to an unfamiliar environment (HRC, 2010). Students may also be excited with the novel aspects of being immersed in a new culture. However, cultural shock emerges when students cannot adjust to these changes (HRC, 2010). As students begin to understand the new culture and what causes the culture shock, they will start to adapt and adjust (Leong, 2015). This cultural adjustment is a necessary, complex process to minimize cultural shock and social stress (Leong, 2015).

Language Barriers. Several studies suggest that Latino (Domestic) students and international students face language barriers. Specifically, Nguyen (2013) and Smith & Khawaja (2011), argued that English language barriers can impact international students in writing assignments, lecture comprehension, oral and written examinations, communication channels, and the ability to ask questions.

Sociocultural stressors. Smith & Khawaja (2011) in their study of the acculturation experiences of international students found that students have to establish a new sociocultural network after leaving their friends and family. This challenge of the new sociocultural environment may contribute to students' feelings of loneliness and may result in difficulties in adjusting (HRC, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Different retention techniques are used by universities that promote a sense of belonging to minimize sociocultural stressors (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

Emotional stress. Emotional stress is a common factor influencing students' success. In a study about stress levels of college students, Pariat, Rynjah & Kharjana (2014) found that among the most frequent emotional stressors are adjusting and managing a romantic relationship, having things not go according to plan, not feeling self-confident, and feeling lonely, anxious, and without a support system. Emotional stress can be difficult to overcome, and retention techniques that promote the well-being of students may aid in minimizing emotional stressors.

Resilient Personalities and Coping Strategies

The literature studied stated the following resilient personalities and coping strategies: determination to succeed, goals, self-efficacy, personal life management, supporting peers, the ability to adjust to academics and the new environment, academic achievement, problem-solving skills, time management, study skills, values, social integration, and behavior.

The determination to succeed. College students with little determination to succeed may fail to do well academically, and therefore struggle with being successful (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes & Klingsmith, 2014). This determination to succeed includes how students plan their lives, what future goals they have, and the amount of self-confidence in their ability to succeed (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2014).

Goals. The factor that students identify as one of the most essential for their success was goals (Buller, 2010). When a student is goal-oriented, that diminishes the probability of distracting thoughts (Buller, 2010). Alternatively, the student uses time productively (Buller, 2010). Additionally, being goal-oriented prevents negative emotions such as uneasiness and anxiety, helps students keep their self-efficacy when facing academic failure, and encourages them to do better (Dong-il, & Young-An, 2015).

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is another important factor for college students; it is the resilient strategy most associated with academic success (Morales, 2010). Self-efficacy emerges from the personal characteristics of resilient and effectiveness (Storlie, Moreno, & Portman, 2013). It reflects not only the student's ability to succeed but also to manage barriers, fears, behavior, and academic and social environment issues (Storlie et al., 2013).

In a study of the influence of self-efficacy, coping efficacy, and family of underrepresented, first-generation, and low-income graduate students, Tate, Fouad, Marks, Young, Guzman, and Williams (2015) found that, for some students, the transition to graduate is less difficult due to strong self-efficacy and ability to assimilate the new setting.

Personal life and Time management. In the areas of personal life and time management, students plan and organize their personal goals, career goals, and daily schedules. Students' management of time and personal life are the most significant variable guiding this factor towards higher academic outcomes and success (Dong-il & Young-An, 2015). Having a controlled and balanced personal life, as well as time management skills, may be useful as coping strategies (Welle & Graf, 2011).

Problem-solving skills and Study skills. Problem-solving skills relate variables such as defining problems, generating ways to solve problems, and implementing solutions. Excellent

problem-solving skills minimize the risk of stress and dropouts. The main coping strategies are critical thinking and decision-making (Mbuva, 2011). Additionally, developing excellent study skills may foster success and help to cope with stressors faced during graduate school (Buller, 2010).

Values. Values can be divided into two categories: personal values and the university's values. First, personal values are a decisive component in Latin American households. Values such as family unity, identity and religion, friendship, and behavior may influence the student's academic success (Creighton, 2007).

However, the university's values are also important. These values may help with academic and social integration, and assist the student in succeeding (Creighton, 2007). Incorporating personal values with campus values may foster success and build resilient personalities and coping strategies (Creighton, 2007).

Behavior. Behavior may determine student success while in college or graduate school. Students' ability to maintain an exemplary behavior towards the campus and academic environment may stimulate an adequate behavior that causes higher educational outcomes (Perna & Thomas, 2006). Behavior includes attitudes toward the university, academic honesty, and interaction with others. However, it is also of high importance to living in a culture of exemplary relations, connections, and friendships (Mbuva, 2011; Storlie et al., 2013).

Social integration. Integration into the new system is a core factor for student success. It helps develop resilient personalities and coping strategies. Social integration is a dynamic process of students' lives in which they participate in dialogue to achieve and maintain peaceful social relations within the university setting and its surroundings (Tinto, 1975).

Social integration does not mean forced assimilation or forced integration into a new society or culture; it means that students can integrate into the new system and be successful without experiencing significant difficulties (Tinto, 1975). When students have the ability to integrate, it may result in high academic outcomes and happiness (Tinto, 1975).

Academic Commitment

Research. Graduate school is a time when students become interested and immersed in research, research projects, and research proposals (Tate et al., 2015). They read research articles, conduct research projects, write research articles, and publish, all core requirements of their graduate programs (Tate et al., 2015). A student is less likely to be successful if he or she does not become interested and immersed in research while pursuing an advanced degree (Tate et al., 2015). When students' self-efficacy and self-motivation for conducting graduate-level research increase, so does their pursuit for success (Tate et al., 2015).

Academic integration. In a study about dropout from higher education, Tinto (1975) found that academic integration refers to the extent in which students integrate and adapt to the school work, classes, and challenges of the education system. Tinto (1975) argued that academic integration seems to be increasingly more important to persistence and success than social integration, when students fail to integrate into their new academic system, their likelihood to persist is reduced.

Recruitment techniques to promote academic integration for college students include hiring personnel that can help students with tutoring and study skills instruction (Lotkowski, Robbins, Noeth, & ACT, 2004). Retention techniques for better academic integration incorporate formal and informal interactions with faculty, academic peers, and staff (Lotkowski et al., 2004).

Psychological Adjustment. In a study of the factors that contribute to the adjustment of international students, Mesidor and Sly (2016) found that psychological health status is a key predictor of students' psychological adjustment, which has an effect on their academic success.

Establishing social supportive systems may serve as a retention technique to help students in maintaining psychological health (Mesidor & Sly, 2016). Additionally, universities that aid students in developing positive coping styles may also assist as an effective retention technique to increase students' well-being and quality of social life (Mesidor & Sly, 2016).

Chapter Summary

The researcher studied relevant literature to examine the factors that influence the success of “all” students, college students, graduate students, and international students. The researcher also explored factors that may affect cultural/racial/ethnic minorities, underrepresented groups, and first generation students in a different manner than students from dominant groups. The literature suggested eleven major constructs : student background characteristics; previous academic performance; parents, siblings, family, and friends' support; financial situation while in the U.S.; acculturation stressors; resilient personalities and coping strategies; academic commitment; campus environment; academic environment; recruitment techniques; and retention techniques.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The following components of the research methodology are discussed in this section: (1) research objectives, (2) research design, (3) participants and sampling procedures, (4) data collection, and (5) data analysis. The researcher has addressed issues such as (1) trustworthiness and (2) subjectivity statement, which promote legitimacy of the study.

Research Objectives

The following objectives helped the researcher in accomplishing the study's purpose: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

Research Design

The researcher used a qualitative design. Specifically, an interpretivist design. The interpretivist design was the epistemology that guided this study. This interpretivist design relied on the researcher and the participants as the instruments to gather the data (Prasad, 2005). In this study, the researcher used the subjects' interpretations of the factors influencing their success in graduate school.

Multiple interviews with graduate students at the University of Georgia was the methodology used for the study. With all the interviews being conducted at the university, the researcher investigated the participants in their natural environment (Abood et al., 2012).

Qualitative interviewing involves asking questions and getting answers from participants (Cohen, 2006). Qualitative interviewing has a variety of forms structured, semi-structured, in-depth, or unstructured (Seidman, 2012). In this research, semi-structured interviews were the main method of data collection, as well as the researcher that served as a critical component to collect data. The purpose of semi-structured interviews in this study was to understand the experiences of the participants and the meaning that make their stories rich (Seidman, 2012).

Participants and Sampling Procedures

Participants

The research sample consisted of sixteen Latino/a international students enrolled in graduate school for the academic year of 2015-2016. In the beginning, the overall objective was to examine two populations of Latino/a international students: those enrolled in undergraduate programs and those enrolled in graduate programs. However, only graduate students showed interest in participating. Therefore, the researcher adjusted the research design to only study students in graduate school.

Sampling procedures

Purposive and snowball sampling were the techniques used to select participants. In purposive sampling, the researcher selected students based on their perceived ability to provide valuable information to the phenomenon under investigation (Abood et al., 2012). The main approaches to recruiting participants were via recruitment emails and informational flyers sent to the listserv of International Student Life (Appendix A & B).

Snowball sampling served as the second technique to recruit participants. After each semi-structured interview session was over, the researcher asked participants to recommend another student that could fulfill the two main requirements: be a Latino/a international student

holding an F-1 or M-1 visa and be enrolled in a graduate program at the University of Georgia for the academic year of 2015-2016. However, it was also important that the student could provide valuable information to the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive and snowball sampling gave the researcher the ability to study a variety of students enrolled in distinct graduate programs.

Data Collection

The primary method of data collection was two series of semi-structured interviews. Additionally, the researcher was a central piece of the data collection. These two series of interviews served as the substance of the study, as they provided an in-depth look into the experiences of the population under investigation.

Before starting the interviews, the researcher obtained Institutional Review Board Approval as a guideline enforced by the university (Appendix A). Once the Institutional Review Board provided approval, the researcher contacted the Director of International Student Life, Justin Jeffery, and discussed the possibility to send a recruitment email to Latino/a international students through the International Student Life's listserve (procedure approved by the IRB protocol). The email asked students to participate voluntarily in a 50-60 minutes interview session. Also, the researcher posted informational flyers throughout the university (Appendices B & C).

Interested students contacted the researcher requesting more information about the study and possible dates to conduct the interview. The researcher sent the interested students the pertinent information, and together they scheduled the first round of interviews. Before the interviews, the researcher sent the participants the consent form via email so they could read it

and at the moment of the interview, address and discuss any questions before signing and proceeding with the interview.

There was a total of six interviews scheduled in cooperation with the participants for November and December 2015. These six interviews were the first stage of interviews. There was a total of 10 interviews planned for January, February, March and April 2016, which pertained to the second interviewing cycle.

Seidman (2012) suggests a three-interview series model as a technique to truly explore the meaning of participants' experiences; this was the basis for the decision to do a preliminary series of six interviews and a second series of interviews. By conducting the first series of interviews, the researcher adjusted the semi-structured interview protocol as needed, and also gathered a preliminary analysis of the phenomenon under investigation and adjusted the protocol with probing questions to explore issues mentioned by participants that could need clarification.

Series of Interviews One and Two

Series One

The literature reviewed, and the conceptual framework described in Chapter 1, served to develop the interview protocol used during the first series of semi-structured interviews (Appendix D). The main open-ended questions asked to participants were the following:

1. What are the factors influencing your success in graduate school?
2. What recruitment techniques do you consider were helpful in the application process?
3. What retention techniques do you consider to be beneficial for your success?
4. When talking about the responsibility of your success, whom do you think is more responsible for the success, UGA or you? Moreover, why?

The researcher conducted the interviews in the conference room in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication at Four Towers Building. All interviews were audio-recorded, as all participants specifically agreed to the audio-recording when they signed the consent form (Appendix F). The interviews lasted approximately one hour depending on the responses of the interviewees and the final summary made by the interviewer. However, no interview lasted over one hour, as stated in the IRB submission.

The researcher saved each interview, the consent forms, the audio-recording, and the notes packages in a locked cabinet located in 129A Four Towers Building, in the ALEC graduate students' offices. The first round of interviews resulted in six interview transcripts and six interview session notes packages. In the following days, the researcher transcribed the audio recordings verbatim (word for word) and assigned an identification code according to the order of the interview session and the year. Because the participants expressed great interest in having the researcher use their direct quotes, the researcher gave them the opportunity to choose their pseudonyms, to be used in the reporting of the data and indirect representation of participants. This gave them more ownership of the research and allowed them to better feel they were able to voice to their own experiences. Table 1 lists the assigned identification numbers to the interviews and pseudonyms chosen by participants.

Table 3.1

Identification Numbers to Interview Transcriptions and Interview Session Note Packages, and Corresponding Pseudonyms.

Transcription name	Identification number	Pseudonym
Verbatim transcription one	AFALL2015-T1	Helena
Verbatim transcription two	AFALL2015-T2	Green
Verbatim transcription three	AFALL2015-T3	Eduardo
Verbatim transcription four	AFALL2015-T4	Alexander
Verbatim transcription five	AFALL2015-T5	Andrés
Verbatim transcription six	AFALL2015-T6	Gerardo

Series Two

The second series of interviews took place during spring 2016. It consisted of ten face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The researcher recruited participants using the same methods, purposive and snowball sampling. Because many Brazilians participated in the first series of interviews, the researcher purposively made efforts to recruit non-Brazilian students from Latin America. The researcher made greater efforts to recruit non-Brazilians students to collect data on other Latin American students that can benefit from the research results and to include a more diverse of group of participants from the vast variety of countries that encompass the region.

The main open-ended questions asked to participants were:

1. What are the factors influencing your success in graduate school?
2. What recruitment techniques do you consider were helpful in the application process?
3. What retention techniques to do you consider to be beneficial for your success?
4. When talking about the responsibility of your success, whom do you think is more responsible for the success, UGA or you? Moreover, why?

During the initial analysis of the first series of six interviews, different issues arose that needed clarification, and theoretical saturation was not yet present. Accordingly, the researcher

considered it was necessary to adjust the interview protocol (Appendix E) with more probing questions with the only purpose of clarifying such issues.

Among the probing questions developed to clarify issues that were not clear to the research were:

1. Do you believe that doing research is part of being successful in your program?
2. What would happen if you would not be able to publish before graduation day?
3. Have these food differences that you have mentioned affected your health?
4. Do you feel unsafe just outside UGA or also inside UGA?
5. Why massive shooting in other US universities concern you?
6. Why gun violence in the US concern you

As with the first round of interviews, after each interview, the researcher saved the consent forms, the audio-recording, and the notes in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office. The second round of interviews yielded ten transcripts and notes packages. In the following days, the researcher transcribed the recordings verbatim. The researcher achieved theoretical saturation by the end of the second round of interviews, Table 2 lists the identification numbers and pseudonyms assigned in the second series of interviews.

Table 3.2

Identification Numbers and Pseudonyms for Interview Series Two.

Transcription name	Identification number	Pseudonym
Verbatim transcription one	ASPRING2016-T1	Lisandro
Verbatim transcription two	ASPRING2016-T2	Teresa
Verbatim transcription three	ASPRING2016-T3	Margarita
Verbatim transcription four	ASPRING2016-T4	Mariano
Verbatim transcription five	ASPRING2016-T5	Maria
Verbatim transcription six	ASPRING2016-T6	Daniel Ezekiel
Verbatim transcription seven	ASPRING2016-T7	Leo
Verbatim transcription eight	ASPRING2016-T8	Zacarias
Verbatim transcription nine	ASPRING2016-T9	John
Verbatim transcription ten	ASPRING2016-T10	Johnny

Data Analysis

Thematic coding and categorization were the methods used to analyze the data of the two series of interviews. This technique of coding involved identifying pieces of information in the participants' quotations, which were linked to a common category that formed the constructs. After identifying the constructs, this coding technique also allowed the researcher to establish a framework of thematic ideas (Gibbs, 2007), in this case, a framework of constructs of the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school. There are different approaches to thematic coding and categorizing (Gibbs, 2007). These approaches include interpretative phenomenological analysis, grounded theory analysis, template analysis, and framework analysis (Gibbs, 2007). In this study, the researcher implemented framework analysis.

In the 1980s social policy researchers at the National Centre for Social Research developed the framework analysis technique as a method to analyze qualitative data (Smith & Firth, 2011). This method can be used to manage a large amount of qualitative textual data and undertake analysis systematically (Smith & Firth, 2011). According to Ritchie and Lewis (as cited in Smith & Firth, 2011), this systematic analysis enables the researcher to explore data in depth while simultaneously maintaining an efficient and transparent audit trail, which enhances both the rigor of the analytical processes and the credibility of the findings.

Phase One: Transcription

For the framework method analysis, a verbatim transcription of the interview is needed (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid & Redwood, 2013). During this phase, the researcher transcribed the interview audio-recordings himself one by one, and there was no outsourcing to a professional transcriber. The process of transcription was an excellent opportunity for the researcher to become immersed in the data and make memos of possible codes, constructs, or ideas about the phenomenon under investigation.

Phase Two: Becoming familiar with the transcripts, interview notes, and reflective journal.

Becoming familiar with the interview transcriptions, the interview notes, and the reflective notes written in the reflective journal is vital to interpretation (Gale et al., 2013). First, the researcher read the interview transcriptions, the interview notes, and the reflective notes written in the reflective journal in depth and one by one. This with the goal of reflecting upon the effectiveness of the researcher as the interviewer and to then prepare better for the data analysis.

This phase gave the researcher the opportunity to familiarize himself with the rich textual data collected from the 16 interviews and to write possible preliminary emerging codes to be used in the coding phase. At the same time, it gave him the opportunity to write any analytical

notes, thoughts, ideas, or impressions of the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher implemented the same process for interview series one and two (see above).

Phase Three: Coding with ATLAS.ti, Series of Interviews One and Two

For the analysis process, the researcher chose ATLAS.ti to facilitate coding. ATLAS.ti is a software for the qualitative analysis of textual, graphical, audio, and video data (Frieze, 2012). After becoming familiar with the transcripts, the interview notes, and the reflective journal, the researcher carefully read each transcript line by line, applying a label (a ‘code’) to the quotations in the passages that were essential to the phenomenon under investigation (Gale et al., 2013).

The first step of the analysis process consisted of creating the Hermeneutic Unit (HU). The Hermeneutic Unit provided the space that contains the project, encompassing everything in the project such as primary documents, quotations, and codes (Frieze, 2012). The name assigned to the Hermeneutic Unit was Hugo Moran-ALEC-Thesis-FinalDataAnalysis-2015-2016. The second step of the data analysis consisted of the creation of the Primary Documents (PDs). Primary Documents represent the data added to the Hermeneutic Unit (Frieze, 2013). In this study, the Primary Documents were the interview transcriptions from the interview sessions, making a total of sixteen added to the Hermeneutic Unit.

The third step in the data analysis process consisted of the coding process. First, the researcher read through the primary documents to identify relevant and important quotations. After identifying relevant and meaningful quotations, the researcher assigned a respective code to that particular quotation. Next, the researcher arranged the codes into categories that would then form the constructs of the new framework based on the data. As constructs emerged, the researcher compared them with the eleven constructs from the literature reviewed to better label them and to develop the finalized model.

External researchers should independently provide feedback about the coding process for validation purposes and to ensure that one particular perspective does not dominate (Gale et al., 2013). Because of this, the fourth step was to provide a fellow researcher with all the codes, categories, and constructs to gather her feedback, this helped with validation purposes and ensured that the researcher was not putting his own perspective into the results.

Phase Four: Developing the Finalized Framework.

After receiving feedback from the fellow researcher about the codes categories, and constructs the researcher adjusted and modified them accordingly. The new codes and categories helped in the development of the constructs and the new framework (Chapters 4 & 5).

Trustworthiness

Demonstrating that the interpretation of the results is sound, strong, consistent, valid, and worth attention is an important part of a qualitative research inquiry (Cohen, 2006). Therefore, the researcher addressed trustworthiness mostly based on a rigorous process of data collection and analysis, and the peer review of the thesis committee and a fellow researcher. Lincoln and Guba stated that trustworthiness involves three stages credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (as cited in Cohen, 2006).

Credibility refers to the degree in which the researcher and, most importantly, the reader can have the confidence in the accuracy of the findings presented (Cohen, 2006). One of the techniques to ensure credibility is member checks. Lincoln and Guba argued that this is the most critical stage for providing credibility (as cited in Cohen, 2006). Member checks technique is when the data, interpretations, and conclusions of the study are tested with the participants (Cohen, 2006).

In this study, at the end of every interview, the researcher summarized the interview by mentioning specific quotes or constructs that seemed to appear in the discussion. The transcriptions were then sent to each of the participants. The interviewees had the opportunity to review and reflect the summary and to the transcript itself. Also, the researcher gave the participants ample time and freedom to express themselves about the different factors influencing their success.

Transferability means ensuring that the findings of a study have applicability in other settings (Cohen, 2006), cultures, stages, and case studies. Lincoln and Guba reported that thick description was a technique to achieve something comparable to a type of external validity (as cited in Cohen, 2006). This study employed thorough and comprehensive description (thick description) to achieve such 'external validity,' utilizing sufficient detail to ensure that the findings are easily transferable to other times, universities, colleges, settings, situations, and people.

Dependability refers to the extent in which the results of a study are consistent and can be repeated to other populations (Cohen, 2006). In this study, the research committee and a fellow researcher examined, critiqued, and gave feedback to both the process and write-up of the results. A current Master's student in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, served as the fellow researcher. She was not involved in the research process but helped evaluate the accuracy and assess whether or not the process, findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the literature review and the data collected in the interviews (Cohen, 2006). The use of a reflective journal and ATLAS.ti also helped the researcher in achieving dependability.

Confirmability is the scope of neutrality to which the findings of a research project are shaped by the participants' experiences and not the researcher's experiences (Cohen, 2006). In this study, the technique used for confirmability was the conceptual framework and the literature reviewed. By conducting an extensive content analysis of the literature and Nora (2006) Student Engagement Model, the researcher developed a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Additionally, as with dependability, a fellow researcher examined, critiqued, and gave feedback to both the process and write-up of the results.

Subjectivity Statement

The researcher acknowledges the importance of evaluating himself for the credibility of this study. In qualitative research, it is of extreme importance to reflect on the direct relation or the personal purpose of the researcher in proposing and conducting the study (Abood et al., 2012).

Subjectivity Statement: Written in First Person

My name is Hugo Alexander Morán Chávez. I am from a small village in the State of La Libertad, El Salvador, Central America. I am now a graduate student and research assistant in the Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Commutation. I am a holder of an F-1 visa. Therefore, I am considered a Latino international graduate student at the University of Georgia. The perceived relation from the researcher to the study is that I may be experiencing the same factors influencing the target population, in my own way.

This close relation to the studied population helped me develop sensitivity and gave me the ability to think critically and theoretically based on personal experiences at the moment of data collection and data analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Furthermore, my background and close relation with the population provided a better understanding of the research topic. My passion about many issues that influence and affect this population compelled me. I am passionate about the various programs that can serve to improve student success and increase the population of Latino/a international students at the University of Georgia. I am convinced that these students, agricultural majors and those from STEM fields, will help the world address the great challenge of feeding nine billion people by 2050.

Moreover, I have taken rigorous classes that qualify me to conduct a valid qualitative inquiry about the population under investigation. I took a class on Latino (domestic students) issues in education: EDUC 5710/7710 – LLED 7045 Issues in Latino/a Education that strengthened my knowledge about the many problems facing this population locally and globally. Furthermore, I have taken two qualitative research courses: ALDR 8200 Research Methods in Agricultural Education, and QUAL 8400 Qualitative Research Traditions. All these classes have given me the necessary tools and skills to conduct valid and reliable qualitative research.

While I believe that my personal experience has helped me better understand and interact with the research participants, it might have also blurred the lines between the experience of the participants and my own experiences, and I am aware that my passion for the topic might push me to add my voice to the data, taking away some of the voice of my participants. While I could be one of the participants of this study, I have my own background and set of experiences, and I cannot speak for my participants, thus, need to be careful to give them their own voice rather than speak through them.

This subjectivity statement was necessary to address my possible bias and was monitored throughout the entire research process with the support of the research committee and fellow

researcher. It was known a priori, freeing the students in this study to express their stories and experiences without my bias or personal interest affecting or pushing the answers.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research Design and Methodology

Qualitative inquiry is an interdisciplinary, unique, creative, and rigorous craft in which the researcher learns and develops throughout the stages of data collection, analysis, and reporting the results (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Using an interpretivist design has several strengths and limitations. There is no perfect design nor theoretical perspective. All depends on the target population, the settings, context, time, the researcher, and the goals (Atieno, 2009).

The limitation of this study was that of the interpretivist approach, as it relates to subjectivity, where there was room for bias on behalf of the researcher. The second limitation was that primary data, derived from interpretivist inquiry, cannot be generalized or extended to wider populations of Latino/a international students at the graduate school level. The last limitation was the lack of triangulation. The use of only interviews with the students themselves may limit the understanding of viewpoints of these students, and of other stakeholders responsible for helping this population succeed.

At the same time, those limitations became strengths. The main strength of this interpretivist design was that the two series of semi-structured interviews in which the researcher's close relation to the target population gave him the advantage to better understand the study, the participants, and the phenomenon under investigation. Another strength was that this interpretivist study aimed to gather in-depth and rich textual data from the participants in a trustworthy and honest way (Prasad, 2005).

Chapter Summary

The researcher used a qualitative design. Specifically, an interpretivist design. The interpretivist design was the epistemology that guided this study. In this research, the main method of data collection was two series of semi-structured interviews as well as the researcher that served as a critical component to collect data. The purpose of semi-structured interviews in this study was to understand the experiences of the participants and the significance that make their stories rich (Seidman, 2012). The research sample consisted of sixteen Latino/a international students enrolled in graduate school for the academic year of 2015-2016. The researcher selected the participants through purposive and snowball sampling. For both the preliminary and the final analysis of the transcriptions the researcher used thematic coding and categorization. Framework analysis was specifically chosen to analyze the data. The researcher addressed issues such as (1) trustworthiness and (2) subjectivity statement, which gave legitimacy to the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, the following components are discussed: (1) introduction and summary of the study, (2) discussion of constructs and proposed model, (3) demographics, (4) institutional factors, (5) student factors, (6) the shared responsibility, and (7) chapter summary.

Introduction and Summary of the Study

This chapter summarizes the experiences of Lisandro, Teresa, Margarita, Mariano, Maria, Daniel Ezekiel, Leo, Sacarias, John, Johnny, Helena, Green, Eduardo, Alexander, Andrés, and Gerardo. Sixteen Latino/a international graduate students enrolled in the graduate school at the University of Georgia. This chapter presents the in-depth and thick description of the data collected through the two series of semi-structured interviews. The researcher together with the participants discussed and agreed on the pseudonyms used in this study chapter as a way of giving voice and ownership to their stories.

The purpose of this study was to examine, describe, and develop a framework of the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school at a major land-grant university. The study examined student experiences with the application and decision process, navigating and integrating into a new system and culture, and the culmination of their graduate program with the ultimate goal of graduation. The case of Latino/a international students at the University of Georgia was presented.

The following objectives helped the researcher in accomplishing the study's purpose: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate

school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

Discussion of Constructs and Proposed Model

After the first six interviews, the researcher adjusted the interview protocol for a second series of interviews. The adjustment did not alter the four central open-ended questions, common in all interviews, nor did it alter the focus of the interviews. The adjustment was done to include probing questions that could help clarify issues that were not clear to the researcher after the first series of interviews, and go more in-depth into some of the issues brought up during the first interviews.

The constructs and proposed model presented in this chapter were revealed through the data of the sixteen interviews. As constructs emerged, the researcher compared them with the literature reviewed to better label them and to develop the finalized model. Additionally, the researcher shared the constructs with the research team, the fellow researcher, and peer debriefer to increase trustworthiness. Both the primary researcher as well as the research team and fellow researcher agreed that the following constructs were significant: campus environment, the racist rhetoric, academic environment, recruitment techniques, retention techniques, background, cultural and academic transition, resilient skills, personal life situations, and professional development.

The researcher divided each construct into factors, presented in the framework below, which are discussed more in detail in the following pages of quotations taken from the sixteen interviews. Figure 1 represents the results of the following research objectives 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine

helpful recruitment techniques, and 3) determine beneficial retention techniques. The following model represents a unique opportunity to better understand the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students for practitioners, researchers, and students and parents themselves. Figure 1 represents the framework to better understand the factors that influence the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school as a vital tool to increase the enrollment of this population and more significantly aid them in succeeding.

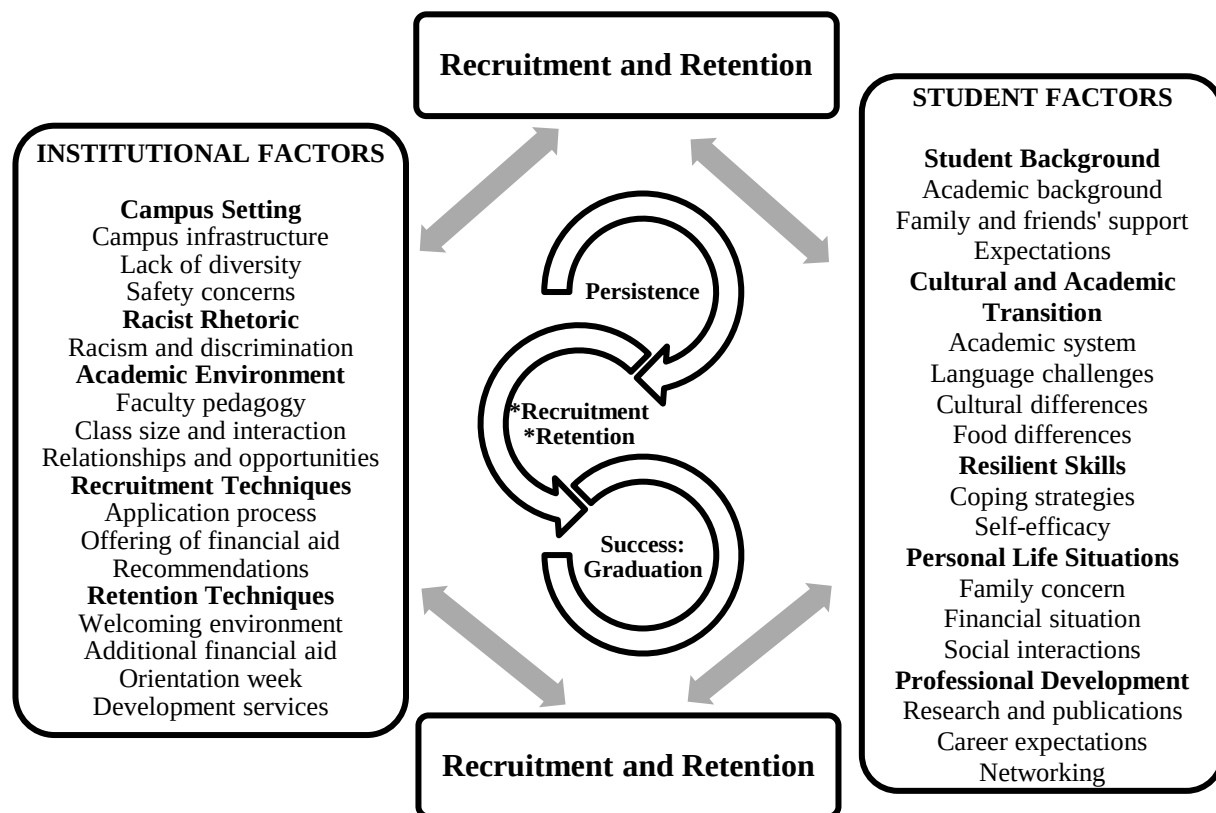


Figure 4.1. Factors influencing the success of Latino/a international student in graduate school.

Demographics

Table 4.1 reports the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The researcher asked participants about their demographic information. Among the information provided were gender information (male, female), classification information (Master, Ph.D.), background information (urban, rural), and degree completion status.

Table 4.1

Latino/a International Students Demographic Characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	8	50
Female	8	50
Academic Level		
Masters	7	43.8
Ph.D.	9	56.3
Country of Origin		
Brazil	8	50
Colombia	3	18.8
Chile	1	6.3
Ecuador	1	6.3
Uruguay	1	6.3
Argentina	1	6.3
Costa Rica	1	6.3
Background		
Rural	6	37.5
Urban	10	62.5
Marital Status		
Single students with no dependents	10	62.5
Married students with dependents	6	37.5
Degree Completion Status	<i>f</i>	years
Masters	7	3.2
Ph.D.	9	0.9

Note: N=16, masters students degree completion is a usually below of 2 years, Ph.D. students degree completion is a usually below 5 years.

Institutional Constructs

Table 4.2 displays the institutional constructs regarding the factors influencing the success of Latino and Latina international students in graduate school. This table is based on the proposed model presented above (See page 45), but the researcher has added the audit trail that specifies the participants that mentioned each factor. Additionally, the table reports the frequency and percentage of participants that mentioned each factor.

Table 4.2

Institutional Factors Influencing Latino/a International Students in Graduate School, Frequency, Percentage, and ID of Participants Mentioning that Factor.

Institutional Constructs	<i>f</i>	Participant (P)	%
Campus Setting			
Campus infrastructure	11	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15	68.8
Lack of diversity	13	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16	81.3
Safety concerns	14	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16	87.5
Racist Rhetoric			
Racism and discrimination	14	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16	87.5
Academic Environment			
Faculty pedagogy	12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 15	75
Class size and interaction	12	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	75
Relationships and opportunities	10	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16	62.5
Recruitment Techniques			
Application process	10	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 14, 15	62.5
Offering of financial support	14	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 15, 16	87.5
Recommendations	10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16	62.5
Retention Techniques			
Welcoming environment	10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 15, 16	62.5
Additional financial support	10	1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16	62.5
Orientation week	9	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13	56.3
Development services	8	1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9,	50.0

Note: The following pseudonymous corresponded to each participant: Helena P1, Green P2, Eduardo P3, Alexander P4, Andrés P5, Gerardo P6, Lisandro P7, Teresa P8, Margarita P9, Mariano P10, Maria P11, Daniel Ezekiel P12, Leo P13, Sacarias P14, John P15, Johnny P16.

Campus Setting

Campus infrastructure

When describing the campus infrastructure, 68.8% of participants consistently reported that some aspects of the infrastructure were adequate and convenient, contributing to their success academically and socially. The infrastructure most often mentioned as appropriate and practical was the university's Family and Graduate Housing apartments.

Maria suggested that she is never late to class because of Family and Graduate Housing apartments, indicating the following:

I live in family housing so for me is very close to my college which is good because I am never late. I just walk or take a 1-minute bus ride, so it is very convenient (PD11, 109).

However, not all students agreed that Family and Graduate Housing apartments were convenient or an adequate place to live. Four participants suggested that although family housing was convenient, the infrastructure was not sufficient to receive international students.

For example, John indicated:

Something that I hated it was Family Housing, this place is not well prepared to receive international students. Because the infrastructure is ugly, old, not well equipped. I know very convenient because is close to campus and family housing but the infrastructure is horrible, ugly and it is expensive for the quality it has (PD15, 68).

Participants stated that the second issue in the campus infrastructure was the car-dependent culture of Athens-Clark County and the university's campus. The most common problem was when not owning a car.

Green indicated that all the buildings are built far away from each other, making it exhausting to walk. He expressed it the following way:

I do think here they have a car culture. A car culture because if you do not have a car you are no one, you cannot go places. Sometimes you have to walk far to go somewhere. It's exhausting. Here the places are too far away, too many cars (PD2, 44).

The third issue was the unstable transportation system of Athens-Clarke County and the University of Georgia. On weekdays, participants stated that they have the opportunity to use the university buses and the Athens transit buses, but during weekends, this system is unstable and limits them to perform only certain activities.

Lisandro responded to this issue in the following way:

I use the bus, and the bus it is not bad, but they do not have service during the weekends. During weekends is bad, is not functional. Sometimes there are not even service, so the system sometimes is unstable (PD7, 87).

Helena was one of the participants who indicated the issue of being too busy during weekdays to do groceries, indicating the following:

There is a bus system, but it is very unstable during weekends, and I do not have time to do groceries during the week because I have classes and homework plus research hours (PD1, 50).

Latino/a international students stated that the factors influencing their success within the campus infrastructure were Family and Graduate Housing apartments, the car-dependent culture, and the unstable transportation system during weekends. Participants indicated that Family and Graduate Housing apartments allowed them to walk to class or take a one-minute bus ride. Not owning a car was a problem because buildings at the university are built far away from each other, making it exhausting to walk. Participants indicated that during weekends was the time they had to perform different activities for the week such grocery shopping but the unstable transportation system limited them to perform such activities.

Lack of diversity

Participants stated a lack of diversity at the university. Specifically, 81.3% of participants identified a lack of other Latino/a international students in their graduate programs and around campus in general, feeling underrepresented. When discussing the small population of Latino/a

international students, Brazilian students happen to be the biggest representation from Latin America.

Additionally, students reported a high population of Asian students as well. China, India, and South Korea were the top 3 countries represented at the graduate level. In the case of Asian students, it was reported that not only was there a high population but they may also struggle more with language skills and social interactions than other international students.

Maria was one of the participants who indicated that there was a high population of Asian students and that Latino/a international students were underrepresented, even marginalized. She presented her situation the following way:

We have a lot of Chinese students; what I think is great at some point because you have people from other countries but they are too many. Latinos, we are not that many, we are underrepresented, in my department we are just two (PD11, 119).

Margarita was one of the participants who indicated the issue of problems with interaction with Asian students. For her, the relation with these international students was not as good as she would wanted. She expressed it the following way:

Chinese groups are very close. Sometimes you can talk to them when they are your classmates because you have to, and you interact with them, but it is more difficult actually to go and hang out with a group of Chinese students (PD9, 63).

Lisandro suggested that Asian students struggled with language more than other populations but at the same time that these students were great people and hard workers. He said:

I see more Chinese, Korean and Indian students. Moreover, they should improve their communications skills. A lot of Chinese students struggle with English more than other populations. Additionally, they are amazing people, and they like to work hard as we do (PD7, 113).

Participants identified a lack of other Latino/a international students, with more Brazilian students enrolled. China, India, and South Korea were the top 3 countries mentioned.

Participants also identified a large population of Asian students and that this population struggled

more with English and social interactions. Students indicated that a large population of Asian students was not a factor influencing their success rather it proved that the university is more Asian- student oriented, making some Latino/a international students feel marginalized.

Safety concerns

The safety concern was a factor mentioned, 87.5% of participants indicated safety concerns within not just the university's campus environment but in Athens-Clark County and the U.S. in general. Specifically, rapes on campus and gun violence. Students suggested that they not feel safe walking alone on campus or doing homework on campus at night because they have heard of rapes on campus before and the authorities have not addressed this issue but instead have hidden it and reported the issue as rumors. All of the female participants suggested a fear of rapes.

I have heard about a rape on campus. It's something that concerns me. I don't know if it's safe to be here. At night sometimes I would like to be at my office working around 8:00 PM or 9:00 PM and then go home but sometimes I struggle with that. The police said that this issue did not happen, and I was like, what seriously? Then you think if the campus is safe or not (PD9, 53).

Additionally, students indicated that the gun violence was the second issue of the safety concern and was influencing the students' U.S. experience. According to participants, gun violence in the U.S. was not only fear, but a reality that was happening on other campuses where mentally unstable or students under the influence of drugs or alcohol could perform mass shootings. Furthermore, the recent gun bill discussed by Georgia's politicians on allowing guns on campus was seen as a mistake and against their safety. At the time of the data analysis, Governor Nathan Deal vetoed such gun bill.

John, for example, explained it in the following way:

I am scared that every time I am on campus or more specifically in Tate Center, I fear that some crazy guy it's going to start a massive shooting, and it's going to kill many

students. And also Georgia just pass a bill where they may allow guns on campuses which are even scariest because now is going to be easy for someone just to bring a gun to campus and start shooting (PD15, 56).

Participants discussed safety concerns as factors influencing their success, 87.5% of students indicated not feeling safe at the university's campus, Athens-Clark County and the U.S. in general. Rapes and the gun violence were the main safety concerns factors influencing their success academically and socially. In the case of rapes, students stated that authorities had not addressed this issue rather had hidden it and reported the rape issue as rumors. Gun violence was the last factor mentioned. Participants indicated that this gun violence was happening at another universities' campuses, where the fear of mentally unstable people could start a massive shooting was the main concerned.

Racist Rhetoric

Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination were factors discussed as influencing the participants' success while in graduate school, 87.5% of students stated that there was a feeling of racism and discrimination. The interviewees felt that other people viewed them as either undocumented or different from themselves, causing a sense of racism. The most common issue was receiving racist comments while speaking Spanish or Portuguese in public places such as Walmart and downtown Athens. A phrase that seemed to comprise the common racist rhetoric was "You are in America, speak English."

Alexander indicated that at Walmart, he experienced an intriguing language debate with a cashier. He said:

Sometimes there is some racism or discrimination. Sometimes when I walk somewhere, I feel like people know I am Latino, and they see me in a different way. One day I was at Walmart and my wife called me, and I started talking in Spanish and the cashier yelled at

me and told me to stop talking in Spanish or she would not scan my items, but I did not care, I just took my things and went to the self-check-in (PD4, 58).

Maria suggested that she had similar experiences, but the only places where she felt a racist rhetoric was downtown Athens and Walmart. When walking in downtown Athens, she was speaking Spanish, and someone told her to speak only English. She also experienced a similar issue when shopping at Walmart. She expressed the issue the following way:

If you go to Walmart or downtown you feel an environment of racism, or in my case, I feel people see me differently. If you go to Walmart, and you speak Spanish, it is bad. They do not like people that go around speaking Spanish. They tell you not to talk in Spanish. I think Georgia and even here at UGA and Athens they still very racist because even downtown sometimes they tell ... Speak English this is AMERICA... Which makes me crazy because America is not a country is a continent, I am American; you are American, and so they are totally wrong (PD11, 127).

Furthermore, other participants suggested that there was a small difference between Northern and Western states such as New York and California where they felt more welcomed and comfortable than in Southern states such as Georgia. This statement brought a discussion of the still racial issues in the South where Mariano suggested the following:

I have lived in New York and Los Angeles, so in those places, I would be accepted for everybody to be a foreigner like because I am from [country of origin], and it would be regular stuff. They love for me to speak Spanish. But here in some areas sometimes I feel racism; people here don't know yet how to deal with diversity, or other cultures or skin colors or how to react to an international student or a foreigner (PD10, 68).

Daniel Ezekiel suggested that in North Georgia during a summer internship people were not as welcoming as he was expecting. He tried to avoid racism at all times. He responded with the following:

In the summer I worked at the University North Georgia, and it's a small town, and there I could feel that I stood out, and people are not used to be around people of other races rather than Caucasians, and I remember going to a bar and people looking at me like what are you doing here. I am very careful when I go out, and I am very careful selecting my friends so I can avoid any racism (PD12, 71).

Moreover, students debated the limited access to education that the U.S. education system imposes to undocumented Latinos. For participants, this was a discrimination factor. This factor did not directly influence their success but was making their cultural experience different and bitter. They argued that people from Latin America come to this country for better educational opportunities and being denied such access because of their immigration status is a negative and discriminatory aspect of the system.

Maria argued about the fact that the university prevented the enrollment of undocumented Latinos no matter how well prepared and smart these students may be. She said:

I also want to say something about discrimination here. I think students not having the status to study here at UGA just because they are immigrants or they have DACA, and they can't study is not good. UGA does not allow them to come here and it's bad because no matter their status, they all should have the same opportunity to study and get education (PD11, 42).

Margarita was even more convinced about this discrimination issue. She said:

I work with undocumented students and it does not matter how smart you are, it does not matter how talented you are, especially in Georgia. Not having papers is a factor that will prevent you from being successful because the law is going to work against you in that sense. It's a discrimination issue but people and politicians deny it (PD9, 89).

Fourteen Latino/a international students reported that the two factors regarding racism and discrimination that were influencing their success were receiving racist comments while speaking Spanish and the limited access to education that the U.S. education system imposes to undocumented Latinos. While speaking Spanish participants experienced the racist rhetoric "You are in America, speak English." Additionally, participants indicated that a difference exists between Northern, Western states, and Southern states. In Northern, and Western states Latino/a international students would feel more welcomed than in Southern states. When discussing the limited access to education that the U.S. education system imposes to undocumented Latinos,

participants indicated that this matter was not only a discrimination problem but in the end, was “a new segregation issue of the South.” According to participants, this new issue prevents many undocumented Latinos to access education and be successful, but at the same time, it brings to light the ongoing racial and discriminatory issues of the state of Georgia.

Academic Environment

Faculty Pedagogy

Seventy-five percent of participants indicated that faculty in a graduate level at the university should have the following competencies: be approachable, be professional, motivate students, and have leadership skills.

Margarita talked about her professors being approachable. She responded in the following way:

The professors of this department are approachable. If they are busy, they tell you to come tomorrow and if not next day and they try to reply to your email within two business day. Students are a priority for professors (PD9, 50).

John said that a factor that influenced his success was meeting faculty in informal settings. He mentioned that this informal setting created a different environment that improved his motivation and also offered a different connection rather than just the student-professor classroom relation.

They have coffee hours where students and professors interact, but they talk to you as peers as if you would be a friend, and that makes you feel better you know whom you get to see them on the other side of the charco as we said in Latin America. And I really like that being able to interact with them in an informally way so that also can affect my motivation (PD15, 48).

The second aspect discussed with participants was faculty professionalism. This professionalism encompasses aspects such as being organized, having good teaching methods, and the having thorough content knowledge. Within the seventy-five percent of participants that indicated this factor of faculty pedagogy, eleven of them stated that their professors were professional. Additionally, when discussing teaching methods, there were divided opinions.

Alexander, for example, suggested that professors were organized. He said:

First, the professors are professional. They have an organized syllabus; they have some office hours that you can go there and talk to them. I think this is the most positive aspect of studying here (PD4, 20).

Green mentioned how the professors in his department prepared students for the outside world, and the teaching methods were adequate. He shared:

How the department prepares us to explain statistics, the way they prepare you for the outside world, there are excellent statisticians, but you will not be successful if you do not have the skill to teach and public speaking and not be afraid of talking to people. I think this is good and would be the biggest factor (PD2, 89).

Other students had a different experience with professors and their teaching methods. The main issue was when students took classes in other departments; the teaching methods varied from one department to another.

John suggested the following:

There is a big difference between the classes in the [department] and here my department. Teachers in that college just write on the whiteboard now, and students just copy what they are writing, that is from the 1920s. And there are many 1920s teachers in those classes, and I feel like I did not come from [country of origin] and pay all this money to get this kind of 1920s teaching techniques (PD15, 52).

Lack of motivation from the faculty was another issue. Most of the time, faculty take for granted that these students know how to do everything and will not face barriers. In fact, an underlying meaning of this theme was that students struggled with the lack of encouragement from their professors.

Daniel Ezekiel indicated that his professors did not motivate students. He described the issue in the following way:

At the beginning, I did not feel that I had much support being an international student from my professors. I think they took for granted that I knew how to do everything that I would not have linguistic problems or problems with my classes or research (PD12, 95).

In the beginning, some professors scared their students instead of motivating them. For example, one participant said:

I think that here most people or professors they talk to you if they are trying to scare you. They tell you this is difficult you are not going to achieve it, be aware, be aware and study hard, study hard. The professors do not give you positive things; they scared you (PD3, 64).

Alexander suggested that he had to drop a class because the professor clearly said that some students would have to drop the class simply because the class was too big for him to manage.

I had to quit one of the classes because of the professor. He said that the class had 25 students, and he was used to teach in classes of 15 students and he said “so many of you will have to withdraw”. He did everything he could to make people quit the class and I was one of the students that quit (PD4, 20).

Lack of leadership skills in some of the professors was another issue. This lack of leadership was because of different aspects such as young teachers, first timers in advising graduate students and the possible lack of experience in academia.

Gerardo said:

I saw some young professors, and they lack leadership skills. They lack experience with graduate students; they have the skills, though, but they do not seem ready yet to work with us and lead us (PD6, 39).

Seventy-five percent of participants indicated that such competencies include be approachable, be professional, motivate students, and have leadership skills. These competencies can either foster or diminish the ability to study and earn excellent academic outcomes. Participants indicated that professors were professional. However, participants stated that although faculty was professional, inadequate teaching methods were present at the university's graduate school. Being approachable and professional does not mean that professors motivate the student to be successful, participants indicated a lack of leadership skills in some professors.

Class Size and Interaction

Participants stated (75%) that smaller classes influenced their success due to the increase of interaction among teachers and students. According to participants, smaller classes of 8-20 students were more manageable resulting in better learning outcomes.

A student said that smaller classes helped her interact more.

My classes are about between 8-20 people who are good. It helps you to interact more and have a one to one conversation with your professor and the other peers. In the end, if the class is very interactive I think I learn more (PD11, 118).

Participants suggested that an adequate class interaction was one where teachers and students engaged in different activities and class discussions. Not having an adequate class interaction was the second issue.

Andrés said that the class interaction in his graduate program was not adequate and named it the SIT-LISTEN-GO system, meaning that students sit in class, listen to someone, and then go without fostering a true learning environment. Andrés indicated:

Here, is a system that I called SIT-LISTEN-GO. Just sit down, listen, and then go. And it is not a good interaction, and I do not like it. I do not learn in an environment like that. It affects me because if I feel that the environment is not interesting, I do not participate as much (PD5, 63).

Another problem that arose about class interaction was the issue of mixing graduate students and undergraduate students in one class. Latino and Latina international students stated that this technique was not adequate. Gerardo said:

The size of the classes is good when the class is just with graduate students and not when they mix us. I do not like the way they try to differentiate the graduate students and the undergraduate students. I think is not fair. They want the undergrads to write a grant, and they have no preparation for it (PD6, 67).

Of the sixteen participants, 75% indicated that smaller class size of around 8-20 students was adequate to foster a healthy learning environment. Participants also referred to an adequate

class interaction the one in which appropriate and fruitful activities were exchanged between faculty and students. However, the inadequate class interaction was a factor mentioned by participants and this class interaction did not foster their learning, but rather diminished it or made the process of learning deficient and slow. The biggest problem with the inadequate class interaction was the “SIT-LISTEN-GO” system and when mixing graduate students with undergraduate students.

Relationships and Opportunities

Participants discussed the relationships and opportunities that were influencing their success, 62.5% of participants stated that among the relationships and opportunities influencing their success in graduate school were assistantships, supportive advisors, and supportive bosses. In the case of Latino international students, the quality of their advisor was of high importance to their success.

Helena gave the following response:

I would say it would be the quality of my advisor as well. If your advisor is committed to helping you, to guide you, to advise you, to provide you with opportunities that would help you grow and then write a thesis or dissertation that is acceptable, then I am successful (PD4, 28).

Zacarias confirmed that having a supportive advisor was a factor of success. He said:

My advisor is a factor for my success; I do not have doubts about it. He is very supportive, and we have at least one face-to-face meeting every week. I am really thankful that I chose him (PD14, 47).

Maria said that it was not only about having a supportive advisor but also a supportive boss. For her, there was something else beyond the quality of her advisor and boss. For her, it was crucial that her boss both spoke Spanish and had knowledge about the Latin American culture.

She responded in the following way:

Yeah that my advisor and boss they all speak Spanish, and they all have lived in Latin America, and then my other boss also speaks some kind of Spanish, but they are all North American. But I believe that makes a difference for my success because they understand me more. I can relate more to them than the other people around my department (PD11, 140).

The second aspect of these relationships and opportunities was the experiences students gained through their assistantships. The one most valuable experience participants mentioned was the teaching opportunities they had.

Daniel Ezekiel said:

I am teaching [major] and [language] right now, and I am a Teaching Assistant, and that is a great experience because I like teaching and will help me in the future to be in academia and be successful (PD12, 28).

When discussing the different relationships and opportunities, 62.5% of participants stated that a supportive advisor, a supportive boss, and the various opportunities through their assistantships such as teaching opportunities were key factors in their success. Participants indicated that it was not only that they needed to be supportive but also to have a similar background or knowledge about Spanish or Latin America.

Recruitment techniques

Application process

It is crucial not only to help students complete the application process but to communicate clearly with them during that time and share valuable information. Ten participants stated that during the application process bilingual documentation, the selection criteria and process, the lack of initial communication, students being influenced to apply by friends and university faculty and staff, the university's website and ranking, and Georgia's favorable weather were the most critical factors.

The first factor discussed was the lack of bilingual documentation. Participants mentioned that the university should provide bilingual documentation for their parents because the decision whether to study abroad or not are based and decided as a family and not personally. Parents wanted to read the information by themselves. Green responded the following way:

UGA needs to make everything bilingual because you know this stuff. We are from Latin America, and all the decisions we make are made together with our families and even though we might be able to read them the stuff in English, they would prefer to read them themselves (PD2, 99).

The second issue discussed in the application process was the selection criteria and process. To participants, the university's application process and selection criteria was confusing and overwhelming.

Gerardo responded in the following way:

There is no a clear criteria or answer. If you have these grades, you will be accepted or anything else. Here is so broad you do not know what's the criteria is going to be for you or others (PD6, 66).

Students indicated that the late communication from the university's admissions office and the different colleges, and units were a factor that influenced their application process as well. The most common problem was the late communication regarding whether or not they were accepted, and more valuable if financial support was available and offered.

Alexander reacted in the following way:

I wrote to the professors, and the director of the program and I got feedback from every director but not from UGA. They accepted me but were not responding my emails, so you do not know what's going on (PD4, 41).

Another student confirmed the issue:

They contacted me saying "yes yes, come to study." But I wanted to see a formal letter from UGA saying we are giving you the opportunity to be a Ph.D. student. They should be more prompt to reply or make the decisions because I needed to take decisions. They are slow in replying (PD6, 70).

Students had the influence to attend or apply to a higher education institution. Among the most common influencers were personal friends and preliminary university advisors. When discussing the influence of friends, it was clear that 1) they wanted to study abroad as their friends had and, 2) friends encouraged and helped them to apply and find financial support.

Daniel Ezekiel said:

My closest friend applied to a scholarship in [Country of origin], and now he is here in the U.S. doing a master in informatics. So I said to myself why not me, why not apply? So I decided to apply, and I applied, and I was granted a scholarship, and now I am here (PD3, 12).

Lisandro said that his friend allowed him to stay at her home and visit the university's campus.

He shared the following way:

One of my friends told me about UGA, and I spent time here in February at his home, which is close and because I had the opportunity to come, see the campus and meet some professors here (PD7, 77).

When discussing the influence of preliminary advisors whether from the university or their home governments, participants agreed that they were a key aspect in taking the final decision. Furthermore, other university staff such as department heads, administrators, and professors also influenced some students.

John indicated the following way:

In the end, it was the preliminary advisor that kind of convinced, hahahaha. He said how great the program was, and he told me many favorable stories about the department alumnus and all that kind of stuff (PD15, 65).

Mariano said the director was nice to him and encouraged him to apply.

When I was applying to UGA the director, she was the nicest person I met here and that convince me to take my final decision (PD10, 86).

Another student mentioned the help he received was through the Fulbright advisor:

I think my application process was very positive since I applied through Fulbright. I was assigned an academic advisor so then this person would do everything for me, contact the university, so I had much help. I did not apply by myself (PD4, 70).

The university's website provided students information about clubs and facilities Athens-Clark County, student housing information, and pictures of the campus.

Helena said that the website provided her enough information:

I searched UGA, and I saw pictures of the campus that were on the website. It really helped me make my decision (PD2, 71).

One of the recruitment technique that helped students made their decision to study at the university was the favorable weather of Georgia. Participants suggested that although Georgia is not located in the tropics, it appeared to have similar climatic conditions of some Latin American countries.

Daniel Ezekiel said Georgia's weather was convenient for him and that Latinos at UGA prefer a state that is not cold. He responded in the following way:

The weather since I am from a country that is hot. I do not know if I would like to live in a country or state that is so cold. Here is not very cold. I survive, which makes UGA convenient for many Latinos that experience a hard time with cold weather or are not used to cold weather (PD12, 75).

The third most important aspect that played a major role in the application process was the university's ranking. Before applying, participants investigated the university's ranking compared to other U.S. institutions. Specifically, they investigated the ranking of their intended colleges and programs.

Eduardo expressed the following about the university ranking:

There is a page that ranks the colleges. This website listed UGA as one of the top schools to study statistics in the country, and that was really important to me (PD3, 81).

Ten participants stated that the lack bilingual documentation, the overwhelming selection criteria and process, the lack of initial communication, students being influenced to apply by friends and university faculty and staff, the university's website and ranking, and Georgia's favorable weather were key elements in their decision to enroll at the university.

Offering of Financial Support

Of the 16 participants, 87.55% stated that financial support was one of the most important factors when making the final decision to attend the university. The predominant source of funding was a scholarship through the Fulbright program. The second source of financing was the university.

Participants agreed that whether they had Fulbright or UGA financial support, they were living like a "graduate student." Participants referred to the term "I live like a graduate student" as a student that cannot afford luxury products, cannot go out with friends regularly, and someone that has only enough money to survive each month until graduation. Green mentioned that he did not worry about finances because the scholarship he received from his government pays tuition, covers student fees, and expenses:

They give me all the tuition, and I do not have to pay anything. They give me the student fees too. They cover me with the insurance and give me a monthly income so I can pay my rent and other expenses. I just have to worry about studying and not worry about money at all, or about the future (PD2, 30).

Eduardo was in a similar situation. He mentioned how his scholarship came from his home country government and:

Most of the money comes from the [country of origin] government, but they do a partnership with the Fulbright Fund. The scholarship pays for my tuition and gives me a monthly income (PD3, 15).

Alexander responded the following way regarding financial support from the university:

Number one would be the assistantship that UGA offers or the tuition waiver because, without it, I would not be able to be here. The assistantship gives me also a monthly stipend that is not much, but it helps me to survive and be successful (PD4, 46).

Zacarias mentioned how his department made sure that all students, despite their nationality, are given a fair assistantship:

This department makes sure that every single student, despite the nationality or social and economic status, has a scholarship for five years, which is great (PD14, 74).

As stated by fourteen Latino/a international students (81%), financial support remains the primary factor in making the decision to study abroad. Without this aid, the majority of students would not have been able to pay the cost of tuition and living expenses. The two sources of financial assistance that these students had access were Latin American governments' funding through Fulbright and UGA funding through assistantships. Both funding sources provided students with enough money to live "like a graduate student" and cover tuition, and living expenses.

Recommendations

The researcher compiled recommendations from participants to provide the university and future Latino and Latina international students with necessary elements that can be used to help them better while in graduate school. The researcher collected nine participant's responses. To the university, students recommended diversifying the population of Latino/a international students. They argued that recruiting more students of this population would do well to the university's diversity efforts, campus environment, and academic environment. Additionally, they suggested that any attempt to recruit more students from Latin America needed to be inclusive of other countries, not only from Brazil, which forms the grand majority of Latino international students.

Andrés mentioned the necessity of partnerships with other Latin American countries:

There are not many Latino students on campus, and I believe that it would be an asset like partnerships with more universities. I know they have with Costa Rica and Brazil, but there are more universities that we can partner with (PD5, 83).

Green was concerned about the lack of students from Central America. He said:

We have so many countries in Latin America, but we are underrepresented here. There are only a few people from Latin America. In general, we have a lot of Brazilians but not from elsewhere, especially because we are so diverse, and we have smart people. Especially I do not see many people from Central America here (PD2, 58).

Eduardo addressed the same issue, but he also suggested that bringing a more diverse group of

Latino students could give a different cultural experience to the campus. He said:

I would like to see more Latino international students. UGA should recruit a more diverse group, not just Brazilians. If they do this, it would be great. It would give a special cultural experience to the campus environment (PD3, 74).

Students also stated that recruiting more Latinos could help them socialize more, positively

influence their success because they share similar cultures, backgrounds, and problems. Gerardo said:

Whenever you see a foreign person, usually they come the strong ones and mostly from China, but there are a few from Latin America. It would be awesome to see more students with similar background because we have a similar culture, similar food, and similar problems (PD6, 80).

The discussion of the different decisions of studying abroad was rich. Latino/a international students leave home mostly because of the lack of opportunities in Latin America. Second, these students want a better education. Third, they believe that one day they will go back to their countries, and they will not only help their families to have a better life and help their countries, but also will help Latin America in general.

Zacarias for example, said that bringing more Latinos would mean that Latin America will have more qualified people to change the world:

I would like to see more Latinos, because it would mean that more people from Latin America are more qualified to change the world and be successful. I dream a day where we will have even better education in our countries that we will not need to travel all the way to get a decent education (PD14, 90).

To future Latino/a international students, participants recommended what they wish they were told before coming to the U.S. The first recommendation was to practice a lot English before coming to the U.S.

Mariano recommended to practice a lot of English:

I would recommend practicing a lot of English before coming here because is a real struggle (PD10, 102).

Maria recommended finding a good mentor:

I would recommend them to find a good mentor and advisor because when you come here, you are too young you do not know anybody you can get stressed and all that and young will need help (PD11, 92).

John recommended having a clear goal to be successful:

I would say to come here with a clear goal because that is your anchor, because when I am sad, or I want to give up, my goal keeps me going. Because of, you know, what's the reason why you come here that going to be your motto and you will overcome the challenges (PD15, 72).

Johnny said not to be afraid of asking for help when needed:

Know what you want. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Sometimes we are afraid of asking for help because we are foreigners, and we are afraid that they will say no, but I advise not to do that. Go out there and ask for help every time you need it. There are people ready to help you (PD16, 73).

Helena said that Latino/a international students should learn time management skills before coming:

The second one is to learn time management skills to balance your personal life and the academic life. Because, if not, you will be ended up burnt and with just bad experiences. You are going to be here four years so since the beginning you need to work with time management skills (PD1, 73).

Fourteen participants shared their most important recommendation to university and future Latino international students. They stated that the university should increase the diversity of this population by making more partnerships with Latin American governments that have a little present of students enrolled. To future Latino/a international students participant shared what they wish they were told. The recommendations were practice a lot of English before coming to the U.S., finding a good mentor, having a clear goal, not to be afraid of asking for help, and learn time management skills.

Retention Techniques

The retention techniques that influence the success of the population under investigation are discussed in this theme. They can either aid the student to make the decision whether to stay or not and graduate successfully.

Welcoming Environment

Of the sixteen participants, 62.5% discussed and indicated the importance of coming to a new place and encountering a welcoming environment as being crucial to their success. The most important aspect of a welcoming environment was the welcoming people. Participants argued that upon their arrival, welcoming, in a friendly way, and generous people received them. Alexander responded the following way:

Sometimes I feel a little overwhelmed by the generosity. People want to help you, they tell you how you are, do you need a ride, and what can I help you with. So the people is really generous (PD4, 10).

Gerardo confirmed this factor. He said that the feeling of support of the welcoming people helped him to be successful. He shared the following:

And the feeling of support that all people are trying to help me if I need something. Everyone around here is very helpful. I feel blessed when I feel supportive that push me to be more useful because I see that people care (PD6, 47).

Ten Latino/a international students (63%) indicated that the welcoming environment they encountered upon their arrival, helped them minimize the cultural shock but also provided them with new friends and a supportive system.

Additional financial support

When discussing financial support, 62.5% of participants stated the additional financial support was necessary. For students with dependents, additional financial support was necessary to help them with living costs. For single students, the additional financial support was in terms of access to scholarships while in graduate school.

Lisandro is one of the participants who mentioned that a graduate assistantship or scholarship was not enough for students with dependents. He explained the following:

When considering a person for an assistantship, if the individual has a family, the university should consider additional money to help the student and his/her family. Also, the health insurance should be a cover for the entire family. It is not enough for students with dependents (PD7, 115).

The second most issue was that, as international students, they stated to lack either access to scholarship opportunities or had limited access to them.

Margarita suggested that being an international student limited her options to access financial support:

It is hard to come here and get a scholarship. So I think Latino and Latina international students have the financial limitation that most US students do not have. We cannot easily access to financial aid unless our grades are extremely good (PD9, 59).

The third issue was the need of additional financial support for students who do not have full funding to finish their degrees. In this study, five students indicated they had sufficient funds to finish their degrees, while the other five students reported that they had funds for just two or three years.

Andrés was one of the students who lacked the funds to finish his Ph.D., and he explained the following:

I only have financial aid for 2 years, and then I have to look for assistantships for my other 2 years, and I fear I won't get it, or I may not be able to find one, so I have to go back home without finishing my degree, it is scary (PD5, 55).

Green said that his degree is a five-year program, and he had the funds for only four years. If he fails to find money for the last year of his program, he has to go back home. He explained it as follows:

The only bad thing is that this program of scholarship covers four years, and the program I am in is at least five years, so I will have to have some money saved or find another assistantship to keep studying and if I cannot find another I have to go back without finishing my degree (PD2, 30).

This theme explained that many Latino/a international students were in need of additional financial support, to alleviate living “like a graduate student.” Students with dependents were the participants who indicated to be in a greater need of additional financial assistance to cover living costs. For single students, the additional financial support was regarding access to scholarships while in graduate school. Additionally, participants reported having a lack of funds to finish their programs. This lack of funds not only result in the student leaving the U.S. and not graduate successfully but may also cause financial stress while in graduate school.

Orientation week

Orientation week is a crucial period to make new friends, make connections, feel welcomed, and learn about available resources. Participants (56.3%) stated that some of the most important aspects of attending orientation week were the chance to get to know peers with a similar background and the networking opportunities. Additionally, participants suggested an orientation week for Latinos only.

Andrés confirmed that the orientation week was crucial, he provided the following explanation:

I think something that was really positive for me was the orientation week for international students; this is something that UGA does for new students. UGA started classes very early so it was a great opportunity to meet people and do networking, and it was very helpful (PD5, 24).

Eduardo mentioned that orientation week was an excellent opportunity to find people who helped him, sharing the following:

As soon as I arrived I started the orientation week for international students, I think that week was really helpful for me, and also, a lot of people helped me, I found great people to help me, to open bank accounts, get cell phone companies (PD3, 19).

Helena suggested that there should be an orientation week for Latinos only. She said:

I think that the orientation week for international students was a good opportunity to meet people. But I think they should do one specifically for Latino and Latina international students (PD1, 50).

This factor suggested that orientation week was a key to Latino/a international students. Not only was helpful for making new friends, but also for networking, and finding a support system. An orientation week for Latinos only was a suggestion that students indicated could be of greater help to their success.

Development services

Fifty percent of participants discussed that some services provided by the university had been central to their success. Among the joint development services mentioned were the Career Center and the Writing Center. The Career Center did an excellent job in aiding students with the essential tasks of developing a strong resume and acquiring the necessary tools and skills to apply for jobs. Second, having English as a second language was challenging, and the Writing Center helped students with their writing skills.

Teresa suggested that the Career Center has been critical to her success.

I like the career center because they do an awesome job to help you with your career options, and your resume. They talk about jobs, and how to get a job, they peer review your applications, your CV, your resume, and even develop professional workshops so you can be ready to go out for an interview and get your job (PD8, 78).

Margarita suggested that the writing center has been a major asset for her:

I use the writing center, and they help me with my mistakes, they have been really helpful actually. I think that resource has been very useful because if not my writing would be very very bad, hahaha, and I would not be successful (PD9, 46).

Additionally, participants suggested that the university should create another type of development services. The development service mentioned was the necessity for a mentoring program specifically geared towards Latino international students.

Helena suggested the following:

A mentoring program for Latinos only or things like tutoring for Latinos. So whenever you have a problem, and if you cannot find the answer with the professors, then someone that is not a faculty, like a peer, can go and sit with you and mentor you (PD1, 90).

The second suggestions to the university was to provide free English courses to Latino/a international students and also for their dependents. Offering free English courses may better help this population succeed in their writing and communication skills, and also their future careers and their dependents.

Gerardo said:

I think it would be helpful if UGA has free introductory English courses to Latinos so we can improve our English skills. They should have open-English courses where we can sit down and learn at no cost, just to improve our English (PD6, 84).

Lisandro mentioned that English courses for dependents may be an excellent opportunity. He expressed this suggestion as follows:

My daughter does pretty well in English but my wife still having some language barriers, she is studying English right now by herself. That is another thing; UGA should provide some kind of scholarships or programs for dependents to improve English (PD7, 61).

This factor addressed two development services provided by the university of great significance while in graduate school, the Career Center and the Writing Center. Fifty percent of participants agreed that these development services were influencing their success. Additionally, participants suggested that the university should implement other services better to help the Latino international student community, such as mentoring programs specifically for Latinos and free English courses for them and their dependents.

Student Constructs

Table 4.3 displays the student constructs regarding the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school. This table is based on the proposed model presented above (See page 45), but the researcher has added the audit trail that specifies the participants that mentioned each factor. Additionally, the table reports the frequency and percentage of participants that mentioned each factor.

Table 4.3

Student Factors Influencing Latino/a International Students in Graduate School, Frequency, Percentage, and ID of Participants Mentioning that Factor.

Student Factors	<i>f</i>	Participant (P)	%
Student Background			
Academic background	11	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16	68.8
Family and friend's support	11	1, 2, 3, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	68.8
Expectations	10	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 15, 16	62.5
Cultural and Academic Transition			
Academic system	12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	75
Language challenges	11	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14	68.8
Cultural differences	12	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14, 15	75
Food differences	10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13	62.5
Resilient Skills			
Coping strategies	14	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16	87.5
Self-efficacy	15	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	93.8
Personal Life Situations			
Family concern	12	1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	75
Financial situation	13	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15	81.3
Social interactions	10	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14	62.5
Professional Development			
Research and publications	16	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	100.0
Career expectations	9	4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 15, 16	56.3
Networking	8	2, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16	50.0

Note: The following pseudonymous corresponded to each participant:

Helena P1, Green P2, Eduardo P3, Alexander P4, Andrés P5, Gerardo P6, Lisandro P7, Teresa P8, Margarita P9, Mariano P10, Maria P11, Daniel Ezekiel P12, Leo P13, Sacarias P14, John P15, Johnny P16.

Student Background

Academic background

The academic background refers to the different academic achievements earned before enrollment in graduate school, but that are crucial foundations for success. Of the sixteen participants, 68.8% indicated that the two academic background factors influencing their success

were the academic advantage and being bilingual. However, of the eleven participants that their academic background was a factor, four indicated having an academic disadvantage because of their undergraduate majors were different areas than their graduate programs.

Leo mentioned that because of his diverse background, he could work in any context or culture:

I have a diverse background than the other students; I can work with different contents so that I can work in Colombia or New York. Either if I go back, or I stay here, I will be able to work in different environments (PD13, 30).

Mariano suggested that being bilingual has helped him to be successful. He said:

I think that being bilingual can help me being successful here in the States. I can provide my Spanish skills and help others, being bilingual opens you many doors, and more companies are now looking for bilingual employees (PD10, 42).

Eduardo said that because of his background he found easy his graduate program. He said:

Because for example all the concepts and all the case studies I see here all of them I saw them before when I was an undergrad student, but for most of all the students, the topics what we see are new for them. They have to catch up, and I just have to remember them (PD3, 44).

Some participants felt that their background was not an advantage. For example, Zacarias presented his situation the following way:

Before coming, I did not study statistics. Here statistics is more mathematical, I think is pretty much what I struggle with because I do not have the same background of the other students (PD14, 36).

Eleven participants stated that the two academic background factors influencing their success were the academic advantage and being bilingual. In the academic background, students stated that all the academic knowledge gained in their home countries was a key to be successful in their graduate programs. However, four participants indicated to have different majors as undergraduate students causing a disadvantage while in graduate school. When discussing being bilingual, students strongly suggested that speaking more than one language has helped them succeed.

Family and Friends' support

Family and friends' support was a factor mentioned by 68.8% of participants to be key while in graduate school. Not only did they help the students with their decision to study abroad, but they also supported them in various ways, such as financially, morally, and socially.

Eduardo shared the following regarding the support he receives from his family:

My family supports me in all ways. They are happy for me to be here, and they were supportive of my decision to study abroad. They do not support me with money because my scholarship pays all. They are really proud of me, I have noticed that (PD3, 53).

Teresa said that all her family was very supportive since the beginning of her journey of studying abroad:

No one is going to question, why are you going to study? It is something that everybody would like to do at some point in the Brazilian context. So everyone was very supported since the beginner (PD8, 72).

Mariano mentioned that his family had taught him how to be successful:

They help me a lot to be successful in my life, because they have shown me the way to be successful. Since I was a kid, my parents taught me the good, and always were pushing me to be successful, to go to school, to learn more, to have life goals (PD10, 35).

Participants stated that their friends were not only supportive, but they were always there for them and were proud of their decision to study abroad to make their future better. Additionally, friends offered support during the initial decision time of whether to study abroad or not.

Daniel Ezekiel suggested that his friends were happy for him to be here:

They are very happy for me to be here they even try to visit me sometimes and every time I go there they visit me, and they get so happy I am down there because we are very close friends, we grew up together, and I think they will always support me (PD12, 41).

Leo mentioned that his friends always look after him to make sure he is safe:

My friends really care and look up to me because I am the only one who has ever studied abroad, who speaks a foreign language, the only one that went to graduate school, and they really think that I can pursue a lot and achieve a lot (PD13, 30).

Mariano indicated that his friends gave him the emotional support. He said:

My friends support me, in emotional ways, they tell me to do my best “you can do it, you can graduate, don’t worry everything is going to be fine.” (PD10, 61).

Eleven participants stated that their families and friends back home were a crucial factor in their success while in graduate school. Regarding family, participants indicated that they support them in all ways possible, but when economic matters arose, their families were limited to help because their financial situation was limited. Additionally, participants stated that friends were always there for them, giving moral support, and friendship.

Expectations

Despite the family and friends support, expectations back home was a point of discussion mentioned by 62.5%. Participants indicated that their expectations back home were influencing their studies in while in graduate school. These expectations back home were the motivation to be successful but also participants argued that were very demanding when parents, family, and friends expected them to be successful and go back and provide support to the household.

Andrés shared the following:

There is more pressure for me as an international student to meet all these expectations back home, and I do not want to be a disappointment. So it is different I feel there is more pressure on you to succeed than other students or being from here the U.S. (PD5, 75).

Latino and Latina international students stated that the expectations back home were influencing their success. In this study, 62.5% of participants indicated that their expectations back home were their drive, their motto to be successful but at the same time that those expectations were very demanding.

Cultural and Academic Transition

This theme discusses the factors that influence the cultural and academic transitions experienced by Latino international students.

Academic system

Seventy-five percent of participants stated that transitioning from an educational system in Latin America to one in the U.S. was intimidating, exciting, and challenging. First, participants expressed that the U.S. had a better educational system than Latin America. John said that professors back in his home country advised him to choose the U.S. due to the quality of education. He shared:

The reasons of the US specifically it was because my several professors told me that I should think about the US over all the other countries given some funding opportunities and the quality of the teachers and the programs (PD15, 14).

Teresa suggested that her first year was difficult because of her lack of knowledge about the education system. She said:

The teaching and learning systems are different here, and I was not familiar with it and I suffer a lot in my first year because I did not know how to treat American students, I did not know what people expected from me or my professors (PD8, 51).

Participants also discussed the factor of stress due to their school workload. They felt the new educational system and curriculum were overwhelming and were causing academic stress. Green suggested that his new system assigned him more hours of work than the one back in his home country, and he felt behind. He said:

Sometimes I feel I am a little behind compared to the other students because when I was back in (Country of origin) I was one of the smartest ones but here I am average. I think classes give you more hours of study, and that also is negative because you have no time for nothing in grad school, and you feel stress (PD2, 22).

Andrés addressed the same issue but suggested he successfully transitioned:

The first week I got all sort of information, syllabus, readings, projects, it was a lot, I felt overwhelming. At first, I thought I was not going to be able to do all that and adjust to the academic system, but little by little I have been able to adjust and not feel overwhelmed anymore (PD5, 31).

Sventy-five percent of participants stated that the U.S. academic system was intimidating, exciting, and challenging. First, Latino and Latina international students indicated that the U.S. had a better educational system. Second, students felt unprepared and overloaded with homework from the U.S. curriculum and system. Moreover, third, students had a lack of knowledge about the new system.

Language Challenge

Language challenge was a point of discussion among the participants, 68.8% indicated to had language barrier. This challenge was most dire initially and with time their language skills improved considerably. Participants argued that professors knew that international students' English skills were not perfect, but they still treat them as native English speakers.

Green shared the following:

Language is always an initial challenge because it is easy to understand what the professors are saying but when you want to talk or do a presentation that is the real challenge. The professors know your English is not perfect, but they still make you do all this advanced stuff (PD2, 38).

Helena mentioned that her main challenge was not to be embarrassed or afraid of speaking in English. She indicated:

Maybe the language, being confident when you speak to someone in English. Obviously is not my first language so you must learn not to be embarrassed to talk in English and maybe because you are afraid, and you do not have a good accent [...] that for me to have the success, I really need to feel not embarrassed (PD1, 38).

Lisandro suggested that for him, the main challenge was expressing ideas:

Sometimes is difficult for me to express the ideas, even though I know the answers, at times it was difficult to communicate, especially statistical concepts I cannot find the right word to express it (PD7, 41).

Teresa said that because of her level of English, she did not attend conferences. She said:

Language is always a barrier for my academic, or I think that is because for example, I don't go to a conference where I have to present in English because I do not have the level, the language and in the classroom, I assume I am in my comfort zone (PD8, 52).

Mariano suggested that he encountered language challenges when communicating with professors and when discussing homework assignments.

I have problems communicating with professors when discussing stuff or homework. So I guess I have to admit that I have a language English barrier for the moment. I hope I can improve. For me some things, it is hard to understand the hard accent some professors have, and I struggle with that, but I survive (PD10, 59).

Initial language challenge was a factor discussed as influencing student success, 68.8% of participants stated that they suffered initial language challenge. This challenge was because their programs required different competencies for activities such as communicating ideas during class, attending conferences, writing research projects or academic essays and papers, and all the daily tasks performed predominately in English. However, participants indicated that with time their English skills improved considerably.

Cultural differences

Seventy-five percent of participants discussed cultural differences when comparing Latin America and the U.S., specifically pertaining to Athens and the state of Georgia. However, these cultural differences appeared not to be dangerous aspects but rather they were challenging, and was part of the new rich cultural experience. First, participants indicated an initial lack of knowledge and difficulty interacting with other people. This issue made their transition complicated, challenging, and interesting.

Helena indicated having difficulties interacting with people, explaining:

Well I guess the social and cultural side, it was hard for me to interact with people with people from other countries but I did not experience cultural shock I just did not know how to interact with them (PD1, 36).

Teresa confirmed the issue of the initial lack of knowledge about the new culture:

Especially in the beginning, I did not know anything about social relations here or culture Ummm, I would feel very apart from everything because two years ago I would dress differently, I would have a different haircut, I would treat people differently because I did not know how culture here works (PD8, 46).

Not all participants agreed that it was because of the lack of knowledge about the new culture, they indicated the possibility of people being not as friendly as in Latin America. This was the case of Johnny, who also suggested that people in the U.S. were more individualistic than Latin Americans:

US people are more individualistic which is not a bad thing, people they try not to invade your personal space and they are very close like not very open to all people get to know them (PD16, 29).

A central part of the discussion on the cultural differences addressed the “Touching, kissing, and the use of hand and arm gestures” that participants believed to be different in Latin America. Again members felt it was not a problem, just different, and they had to learn to behave according to the new system. In Latin America, the greeting system is a hug, or a kiss from a man to women, or a handshake.

Margarita said it was difficult the first time not to kiss on the cheek or hug someone, and explained:

Yeah, the first time it is hard to meet with, well it’s kind of difficult to meet people because in Latin America you kiss the men and the girls in the cheek, and sometimes you also give them a hug, but when I came here I tried to do the same which was not a good idea (PD5, 28).

Mariano addressed the same issue:

The culture here in the States is different that the culture in Latin America. It is entirely different, in my country we are very touchy, and here it is considered an insult to try to kiss someone on the cheek or hug someone, it affected me at the beginning but not now as much as the first three months (PD10, 67).

Twelve Latino/a international students (75%) stated to encounter cultural differences at the university, Athens-Clark County, and the state of Georgia. The first issue was the initial lack of knowledge about the new culture, which made difficult the interaction between the newcomers (students) and other people. Second, participants suggested that there was the possibility that individuals in the U.S. were not as friendly as in Latin America. Third, there was the touching, kissing, and the use of hand and arm gestures that participants stated to be different in Latin America where the greeting system was a hug, or a kiss from a man to women, or a handshake.

Food differences

Participants stated that in Latin America food is an important piece of culture. Every single country or region from Mexico to the Southern tip of South America have a rich variety of dishes that are considered national identity, 62.5% of Latino/a international students indicated that there was a huge gap in the food culture and food choices when comparing their home countries and the U.S.

These differences would persist the rest of their time in the new culture, so the only way to minimize it was to adapt their diets or cooking choices. The first issue discussed was that participants missed their home country's food, but at the same time because of the food choices, students gained weight.

Ezekiel, for example, explained:

I had a lot of problems with food because I miss (Country of origin) food and the first month when I arrived here I wanted to try the US food all the time, I put a lot of weight on which made me feel bad and comparing myself to others people conditions; and I also felt that I wasn't as healthy as I used to be (PD12, 63).

The second issue was the food choices. Participants indicated that in their countries whether it was because of economic reasons or because of culture or the variety of options and access to fresh food and farmer markets, there was less access to junk food.

Maria suggested that here it was easier to access to junk food:

The food is really bad. And this is an issue I have to discuss with other people, and they really complain. I think we all agree that here is so much easier to access junk food than fresh food, and there is a relation in this between junk and fresh food and being obese (PD11, 87).

Alexander explained that the way he handled with the food challenges was by going to the farmers market to buy fresh food:

I buy my food at local farmers markets or food stores where I believe they buy from local farmers, and they offer fresh options. Even though it is more expensive, but sometimes I do not have other option because I really don't like the flavor of everything here (PD4, 50).

Food differences between Latin America and the U.S. was a factor discussed by 62.5% of the participants. The first issue influencing student success was that participants missed their home country's food, but at the same time because of the food choices, students gained weight. Another factor was the easy access to junk food that was less likely to be accessed in the participants' home countries. The last factor discussed was the technique participants used to cope with the food differences; this was by shopping fresh food in farmer markets and adjusting their cooking styles.

Resilient skills

Coping strategies

Coping strategies overview the efforts that participants use to minimize or avoid stressful events. Additionally, coping strategies are all the techniques utilized to be successful while in graduate school. Some of these techniques are developed from the experiences of the students, and some other techniques are learned through observation, and maybe formal training. Coping strategies were factors discussed by 87.5% of the participants to be crucial while in graduate school. The coping strategies mentioned were: Latino friends, being Latino, social and recreational opportunities, stay positive, reflect on the success and mistakes, find a supportive system, family and friends, efficient note-taking, and social media.

The first coping strategy discussed by participants was the importance of having Latino friends. The importance of friends with similar background was essential to be successful while in graduate school but also to socialize.

Leo mentioned that he coped with being away from family with the support of his friends, sharing the following:

But I would say that my Brazilian friends help me cope with all this, we support each other, we hang out together, we go downtown together, we go grocery shopping together. But yes, my friends is a big factor for me to be here and be ok with my family being away (PD13, 33).

Helen also mentioned this coping strategy by stating that her Latina roommate was an essential element in her transition:

I met Latin American students, and I felt supported by them, by my own peers. My former roommate was Latina, and she helped me a lot, she used to take me to do groceries, nights out, and around campus. I would had not survived if not for her (PD1, 70).

Maria said that when cultural differences arose, she had her Latino friends to hug and kiss:

I have my Latino friends that I hug and kiss. We are 8, we are 7 Latinos, we met last year, and we became like best friends. We hang out together we all go together to places, and we support each other so yeah, I cope with this very important cultural difference with Mis Amigos Latinos (PD8, 100).

The second factor discussed as a coping strategy was the “being Latino” identity role.

Participants believed they were hard workers and successful because they were Latinos. Being Latino helped them in succeeding while in graduate school. They stated that identity played a major role, and “being Latino” and working hard were considered useful coping strategies.

Mariano explained:

As a Latino guy, we like to work hard, I work hard, and I guess that is a factor to be a successful student because of my Latino roots, I know I have to work hard, and as a result of it, I will find whatever I want so I guess it can help me to be successful if I work hard (PD3, 51).

Finding different social and recreational opportunities was another factor. Participants found ways to socialize but at the same time be academically successful. Participants firmly believed that playing football, which is called soccer in the U.S., was a crucial factor in their experience. They suggested that every weekend there was a football match where many Latinos gathered and had fun.

Green explained:

Talking about organizations or sports, we even have a soccer team, and it is very diverse, India, Brazil, Mexican, several people play and it is awesome. We play football every weekend. But we are all graduate students; here there are a few organizations for graduate students (PD2, 36).

Maria mentioned that it was not all about playing soccer but to find a hobby as a coping strategy.

Among the most mentioned hobbies were the gym and running. Maria said that she motivated students not to stress about stuff but at the same time her coping strategy was running:

Because I think things do not affect me as other people, I am resilient, am strong enough to survive. Running is one coping strategy I use, and if running did not work, I would use the church (PD11, 99).

Another factor contributing to a resilient personality discussed by participants was to stay positive and to have an adequate behavior. For example, Margarita shared the following:

I have a resilient personality because I always try just to think about that I need to adapt to the place and not to be negative about it, and as I said before that is a process and that I have all the knowledge and tools to manage this change in the best way and stay positive (PD9, 50).

Another factor discussed as a coping strategy was reflecting on the success and mistakes they made in their daily routines, but also finding a supportive system. Zacarias suggested that reflecting on what he did wrong and what he did right during the day was a way to cope:

There is the moment when you need to take a pause, relax and take a mental break. Then you need to reflect on what happened and what can you do to improve the whole project you just did and failed. That is the secret to reflect what you did wrong and what you did not do wrong, I have to give myself some credit (PD14, 88).

Lisandro also addressed this issue by suggesting that he coped with problems and challenges by being surrounded by supportive people:

I had techniques such as a very supportive people surrounding me, even though I was stressed though because it was very overwhelming and I was exhausted, I did not have enough hours of sleep but my supportive system is the key (PD7, 86).

Family and friends. When students face problems they can appeal to their family and parents for help, advice, and guidance. Daniel Ezekiel suggested that when he faced challenges calling home to talk to his parents and friends was a way to overcome almost any difficulty:

I call my friends back home and my friends here. But also, when I am sad I try to have some fun go out, get some drinks, forget for a few hours of all the stuff I have to do or forget about my problems (PD12, 85).

Participants also indicated that improving and having learning techniques was a helpful way to cope, and helped with success. Specifically, efficient note-taking was crucial in graduate school.

Mariano suggested that his coping strategies were note taking, find relaxing times, and meditation:

I would say that I take many notes, and that helps because I can read for my exams and analyze case studies further. I also as a coping strategy I try to relax myself and do meditation, I also do other stuff like watch TV to calm down (PD10, 74).

The last coping strategy discussed was the use of social media to break down barriers of distance, loneliness, fear, and problems. Among the social media were Skype, Facetime, Facebook, and what's app. These were coping strategies because they allowed connecting with their families and friends when needed, and the only cost was the internet bill. Social media also helped students stay connected and aware of the different events around campus and Athens. Andrés, for example, suggested that Skype was his coping strategy, and it contributes to coping with being away from family:

I do skype, facetime, and all that they are great tools to keep with friends and family in (Country of origin), so I haven't felt that I miss them a lot just because I have been in touch with them with the social media (PD5, 48).

John also mentioned social media as a coping strategy, explaining:

I do social media with them like Skype or Facebook or even what's app. I cope with being away from family with social media. I can call them or video call them and see them, we talk for hours and discuss all of my stuff and then kind of give me support and comfort by listening to me (PD15, 85).

One of the most common strategies suggested by participants to be up to date with events on campus was Facebook. Green said:

Well, I know Latinos is a big minority on campus, so there are like different events, Noche Latina, and LACSI but also in the college of education we have a group, and I think Facebook is good for me to know what's going on the campus (PD4, 72).

Participants stated that being resilient was the ability they had to cope with problems and challenges in the best way possible and within their capacity. The coping strategies that the 87.5% of Latino and Latina international students stated to be the ones helping them being

successful were: Latino friends, being Latino, social and recreational opportunities, stay positive, reflect on mistakes and success made in daily routines, supportive people, family and friends, efficient note-taking, and social media.

Self-efficacy

For participants, self-efficacy was their confidence in their ability to succeed in specific situations, problems, and challenges. This ability can play a significant role in how students approach success, goals, tasks, issues, and challenges. Self-efficacy was among the most crucial factors contributing to their success while in graduate school, 93.8% percent of participants stated that their self-efficacy was the key to success.

Although self-efficacy was suggested to be a resilient skill, some participants stated that they suffered an initial lack of self-efficacy causing low self-esteem problems.

For example, Andrés shared the following:

There was one student that his writing was almost perfect as the language they use, the way he creates his sentences it flows really nicely and I felt like my writing was pretty simple, so I felt I was at a disadvantage. When I saw my writing at some point, it put my self-esteem down (PD5, 35).

Another factor discussed as part of the self-efficacy was the self-discipline. Participants argued that there cannot be excellent self-efficacy without self-discipline, they needed to be persistent in performing the daily academic and personal tasks together with the ability to control their feelings and overcome their problems and challenges.

Mariano contributed the following:

My self-discipline is my determination, my ability to make my own choices and my own decisions based on my preferences and my needs to graduate successfully from UGA. To put in a different context, I need to be determined to do things on my own (PD10, 37).

Maria added to this factor by stating that it was the ability to discipline herself to be proactive:

When you come to a graduate program, you have all this freedom, all this time to do your coursework, so you really need to pause yourself and discipline yourself first to organize your schedule and then control your feelings and weaknesses (PD11, 37).

Participants also indicated that another factor of self-efficacy was self-motivation. They stated that without self-motivation to perform the daily tasks, they could not succeed. For them, in graduate school was necessary to have the motivation to achieve their goals and personal and academic task.

John expressed that his own motivation was important. He said:

I think one of the things is how you keep your spirit up. For example, like questioning why am I here? Then your spirit starts going down, and that is going to cost you to fail and not be successful but as long as your spirit is up you will be good (PD15, 43).

Participants also indicated that the third factor of self-efficacy was “Drive.” Latino and Latina international students stated that “Drive” was not only the self-discipline but to make all the efforts to reach or achieve an objective and always perform every task as planned.

Helen argued that for her, drive was about doing stuff and not only planning:

You need to do stuff. Make things done not only plan them or think about them or think that I want to be successful but to do it. As one of my friends from Colombia would say “Hagale hagele Hagale Parce.” (PD1, 50).

Zacarias contributed additional and similar ideas, explaining:

I am very driven, though, so if there are some classes that I struggle with or that I am not doing good I take my own motivation and work even harder to be successful. So because I am very driven, I can do well (PD14, 36).

This theme addressed resilient skills as crucial contributors to success while in graduate school, 93.8% of participants stated that their self-efficacy was key for their success. Self-efficacy, low self-esteem, self-discipline, self-motivation, and drive were the factors influencing their self-efficacy. Participants suffered low self-esteem when comparing their writing abilities

of other graduate students. Self-discipline was the capacity to plan their academic and personal schedules and be persistent. Self-motivation was the impulse to achieve their agendas as planned. The drive appeared to be a key component of student's ability in succeeding. Latino and Latina international students indicated that it was not only about self-discipline where they would plan their agendas and self-motivation when they would keep their spirits up to perform their tasks but to truly execute every assignment of their agendas as scheduled.

Personal Life Situations

Family concern

Family concern was a factor indicated by 75% of participants. The difference between single and students with dependents was one more time present. Students with dependents argued that family concerns was one of the crucial factors influencing their success. Participants who were single at the time of the interview, on the other hand, did not mention this factor as key for them. However, family concern was referred by single students as their concern for parents and loved ones.

Alexander, for example, mentioned that he was always concerned about his family, and that this could end up being a reason for him leaving the university. He explained:

In my case I think that maybe make me change my mind and go back to (Country of origin) is my family situation, if my family are not comfortable, if my family is not feeling good they are my priority, so if I have to go back, I will do it. But if finally they're not adapting and feeling sad, we are going to go back (PD4, 21).

Lisandro shared similar feelings, and indicated that because of the visa his wife held, she was not allowed to do anything at all, and this impediment was influencing his emotional life. He indicated that these worries about his family had academic consequences:

I am concerned about my wife because she holds an F-2 visa and this kind of visa does not allow her to work or do anything, and definitely, this affects also my emotional life. Its affect me in any way emotional because I get sad and scared of her being not able to

do anything at all rather being at home all the time and that I am sure will have at some point some unexpected consequences in my academic success (PD7, 45).

Daniel Ezekiel mentioned how he was concerned about his parents:

I am concerned about my parents, they are getting old and if something get to happen to them I would have to leave UGA (PD12, 45).

This factor suggested that family responsibilities influence students' success while in graduate school. Such concern appeared to be on a greater scale on students with dependents than on single students. For students with dependents, family concern such as the impediment of dependents to access certain benefits or family being uncomfortable was having emotional and academic effects. For single students, their family concern was mostly about the well-being of their parents and loved ones.

Financial situations

The second factor of the personal life situations was that of the frugal financial situation, 81.3% of participants stated that they had a frugal financial situation living “like a graduate student.” Participants referred to their financial situation as having enough money to pay their bills and survive with a minimal budget every month.

The differences regarding the financial situation between single and students with dependents emerged one more time. For students with dependents, the financial support provided was not enough for appropriate “survival.”

Eduardo suggested that his assistantship was adequate for a single person but not for someone who had dependents as him:

My assistantship is pretty good for a single person, but for a family is not good because we have many expenses and for example the insurance for my wife and daughter is not cover for my department and university, and I have to pay for it, every semester is about \$ 1,000 per person, and I cannot do it because if I pay the insurance, I cannot afford the rest of expenses like food, rent, and or whatever other expense may arise (PD3, 45).

Mariano addressed a similar issue and argued that his big concern was finances and if the finances were not stable he happened to experience stress:

The big concern here is not academically because my background gives me the tools to be successful here but the big concern here is the family and financial concern. Because I concern about my family and my finances. And when I am a concern of all this I face stress, I feel very stress (PD10, 155).

Single students indicated that the financial support and assistantships were sufficient enough to live “Like a graduate student.” Among the most common techniques to manage their low budgets were not to buy luxury products, do groceries at cheap grocery stores such as ALDI and Walmart and reduce the times they socialized with friends. Additionally, participants indicated to experience some financial stress regarding that if they could not pay their bills, it could result in leaving the university.

Teresa shared the fear of stressing about finances. She suggested that if she were not able to pay her bills, she would drop out of the University:

I am good, I survive, and if I would be having financial problems to be here then I would think of having some problems such as depression and even leave UGA because if I would not be able to pay my bills this person would kick me out of my place (PD8, 124).

Maria repeated that graduate students have a frugal financial situation. She suggested that the “graduate student” stage is momentary until they find a job, indicating:

I live like a graduate student, it means I have to live in a very small apartment, with a tiny budget, just paying the bills, and not buying expensive or Luxury stuff. You know our life as graduate students the ones we live under monthly stipends, we survive that is all (PD11, 200).

The financial situation was a factor influencing their success while in graduate school, 81.3% of participants indicated that their financial situation was frugal. This factor appeared to interfere in socializing because of the lack of resources. Once again, the differences regarding the financial condition between single and students with dependents emerged. Single students

indicated that their financial support whether from the university or their home country governments was enough to live “Like a graduate student.” For students with dependents, their financial situation was frugal and was causing emotional and academic negative consequences.

Social interactions

Social interactions are key for students’ success, 62.5% of participants stated that their social interactions were influencing their personal lives. Social interactions are important to make friends and let aside school work, but also to build relationships and friendships for life.

The factor discussed was the lack of interaction with others due to busy schedules.

Teresa indicated that she did not have time to socialize which prevents her from making friends.

She shared the following:

Social interactions affect my success because coming to a place where you are new, and you do not know someone is scary and intimidating, and I have not been able to interact first because I do not have time and second because I do not have many friends, but I am trying (PD8, 200).

Furthermore, other students confirmed that social interactions were an important aspect of their academic and personal lives. Lisandro said:

Social life can interfere with your Ph.D. program because it can give you the support to do good just like hanging out with friends, socialize and have a little fun and forget for a few seconds all about the academic work you have; graduate school is hard in general you need a social life to survive (PD14, 72).

This theme has suggested that the factor influencing the success of Latino and Latina international students regarding their social interactions was the lack of interaction due to busy schedules. Of the sixteen participants, 62.5% stated that social interactions were key in their degree completion.

Professional Development

Research and Publications

Although research opportunities and publishing can be a shared responsibility between the institution and the student, participants indicated that they were the ones responsible for making it happen. One hundred percent of participants stated that doing research was the most crucial piece to be successful in their graduate programs. Eight participants indicated that their goal was to publish before graduating, but the other eight argued that it was a requirement of their departments to do research or publish before graduation.

John suggested that he was required to do research and publish before graduation. He said:

We normally have an obligation to do work that can be published or that we can use to go to conferences. And before you graduate you need to have something published, it is just something they put as a requisite (PD15, 210).

Johnny, for example, indicated that publishing was a very crucial factor while in graduate school:

The other little detail is about research and publishing. There are people looking at you every day whether or not you are working on something to publish because when you get into my department's Ph.D. program, they take for granted that you are ready to publish and make yourself famous and the Department famous with a very cool and innovative research topic (PD16, 100).

Additionally, for other students besides being an opportunity, it was a concern. A concern depending on the department and the goals of the research. Funding and timeline were two of the concerns expressed.

Zacarias believed that research in his department started too late:

Here in my department sometimes you start the research early but not here, and I think that is something negative because at the end I do not think I am going to have enough articles published or research done (PD14, 91).

Helena said that the problem was finding the right topic:

My research scares me, try to find the right topic ... I think it is intimidating, but still Ph.D. is more enjoyable than the Master (PD1, 80).

The other factor of concern among the participants was funding. Seven participants indicated to have a concern about whether or not they would have the funding to conduct their research projects.

Margarita indicated that she was scared about finding the money for her research:

In my case is if I get money for my research. I need money because my research involves chemical analysis, and that means money to pay for that. So that is something that can really affect my success in my program (PD9, 24).

One hundred percent of Latino and Latina international students stated that research and publishing was one of the essential aspects of their graduate programs. Students who will remain in academia, for example, reported that this factor was critical for their future careers and professional life. The first factor mentioned was that research and publishing were sometimes required by the students' departments or graduate programs. Second, research and publishing were also a concern. The first concern was that of the timeline where participants indicated a fear of not starting research on time. Furthermore, participants stated that they had the concern of whether or not they would be able to find funding for their research projects.

Career expectations

The career expectations were suggested to be important factors for student success and professional development while in graduate school, 56.3% of participants stated that their career expectations were the drive of their goals and plans of action. Additionally, at the same time, it was a concern due to many reasons such as not knowing what the future had for them, but also the uncertainty of finding a job after graduation.

John suggested that all depended on the progress of his research:

My plans really depend on how my research goes. If my research is successful, then I will go back and continue on that, probably at a university and if not if my research goes not that well then I probably will go back and work like in the government, as an officer or consultant rather than a researcher (PD15, 10).

Mariano implied that his career expectation was to be a representative of his country:

I am a lawyer, my career goals; I want to be diplomatic for whatever country I can be, umm, I want to work as a diplomat because I want to help all the people. Being a diplomat is my career goal or expectation after graduation (PD10, 12).

Lisandro explained that his dream was to become a faculty in Latin America, or the U.S.:

I would like to become a University professor here in the US or go back and teach in the same university I was teaching. This is one option, but another option is working in industry, in a forest industry, conducting research, forest economics, and finance to identify regions to invest in the forest (PD7, 18).

For the 56.3% of participants, career expectations were key to their success; such expectations were the drive for their goals and plans of action but at the same time, it was a concern regarding the unknown plans of their professional careers. The first factor was research; students indicated that their career expectations were depending on how their research and publishing projects would turn out. The second factor was that of being a faculty member in Latin America, or the U.S

Networking

Fifty percent of participants stated that networking was a factor that could influence their success academically and personally. They argued that networking was an essential part of graduate school not only for future job opportunities but also for their career goals.

Johnny said that one of the most important networking stages was making connections to be successful, and explained:

I believe the environment and the people that I meet, the people I surround myself with, this includes networking because in the world that we live right now we need to make connections we need to know people to be successful (PD16, 106).

Zacarias expressed similar ideas. He indicated that the networking opportunities provided by the university were crucial. He said:

The connections that the universities have with other universities and companies can help you find a job or an internship stuff like that to help you to foster your career which will help me to be successful. All these connections that the professors, the people, and UGA have, are good and important (PD14, 80).

This theme has studied the importance of the factor networking opportunities. Fifty percent of Latino/a international students stated that networking opportunities provided by the university were a critical component for them to be successful while in graduate school.

The Shared Responsibility

Objective 3: determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion. The open-ended question asked to participants was: When talking about the responsibility of your success, whom do you think is more responsible for the success, UGA or you? Moreover, why?

The discussion was rich where participants provided the researcher with their points of view and experiences. Although Latino/a international students perceived a shared responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist, students stated that they had greater responsibility for their success. Of the sixteen participants, fourteen agreed that their responsibility was greater than the university's. The other two participants suggested that the question was hard to answer because they were in an early stage of their graduate programs.

The most mentioned factor of what the university was responsible for was that it should help the student come to the U.S. and provide adequate financial support. From the student perspective, the most mentioned factors of their responsibility were to work hard, their self-efficacy and motivation, and goals to succeed. The researcher has chosen the following quotations to exemplify participants' arguments.

Johnny, for example, mentioned that he was responsible for the 80% of his success, and the university was responsible for only 20%. He argued that the university's job was only to bring him into campus and provide him with all the necessary resources to be successful:

I consider that the University is responsible for 20%, and I am responsible for the 80%. They say that the university needs to do a lot for you to be successful but not, well I think that is the Latino way of thinking, I believe my responsibility, I need to work hard and get what I want and be successful (PD16, 76).

Gerardo said that in the beginning, it was all about the university, the guidance provided was crucial but in the end, it was all about the student:

In the beginning, the university plays a significant role because they give you the financial aid and they give you the condition but we are responsible for more but I think in the beginning, yes, they have some part, but then you are responsible for your success. The university guides you because they have a lot of experience and make sure you can be on a good track. So I think the University is responsible of around the 20% of my success, and I am responsible for the 80% of the success (PD6, 75).

Lisandro mentioned that the responsibility was mostly of the student, and the university was accountable for only 5 percent. He said:

What I think is the student, is the student who is responsible for the success, if I am not the one who works hard, then who will? Well, 95% me and 5% its UGA hahaha because they still have the responsibility to provide me with an assistantship and provide me with 20 hours of work per week so I can get my stipend you know (PD8, 75).

Thus, although participants agreed that there was a shared responsibility between the student to persist in graduate school and the University of Georgia to retain, students accredited the majority of responsibility to themselves. Specifically, 87.5% of participants firmly believed that they are mostly responsible for persisting and graduating successfully, and the university was responsible for only a small percentage. Although there was a greater responsibility on the student to be successful, the small proportion assigned to the university encompass all the institutional factors found in objectives one, two, and three.

Chapter Summary

Lisandro, Teresa, Margarita, Mariano, Maria, Daniel Ezekiel, Leo, Sacarias, John, Johnny, Helena, Green, Eduardo, Alexander, Andrés, and Gerardo shared their experiences during the fall of 2015 and spring of 2016. The goal of this study was to examine, describe, and develop a framework of the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school. The following objectives helped the researcher in accomplishing the study's purpose: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

The major constructs that emerged regarding objectives one, two, and three were: campus setting, the racist rhetoric, academic environment, recruitment techniques, retention techniques, background, cultural and academic transition, resilient skills, personal life situations, and professional development.

Results for objective four, regarding the shared responsibility, indicated that students accredited the majority of responsibility to themselves. Although participants stated a greater responsibility on the student to be successful, the small proportion assigned to the university encompass all the factors found in objectives one, two, and three.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, the following components are discussed: (1) introduction and summary of the study, (2) discussion of the results in relationship to the literature reviewed, conclusions and recommendations (3) limitations and future research, and (4) chapter summary.

Introduction and Summary of the Study

The following objectives helped the researcher in accomplishing the study's purpose: 1) determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school, 2) determine helpful recruitment techniques, 3) determine beneficial retention techniques, and 4) determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion.

Discussion of Results in Relationship to the Literature Reviewed, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Objective One

Tables 5.1 and 5.2 represents the results for objective one: to determine the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school. While contributions from participants that helped with this objective were found throughout the interviews, the researcher focused part of the interview on the factors that influenced the success of the interviewee, asking the following open-ended question: What are the factors influencing your success in graduate school?

Table 5.1

Synthesis of Findings on the Institutional Factors Influencing the Success of Latino/a International Students in Graduate School.

Major findings	Conclusion	Recommendations
Campus setting: (1) campus infrastructure, (2) lack of diversity, and (3) safety concerns.	(1) Family and Graduate Housing apartments were perceived as appropriate and convenient. The car-dependent culture and the unstable transportation system were negative aspects. (2) There was a perceived lack of Latino and Latina international students. (3) Participants had concerns about their safety, specifically regarding perceived risk of rape on campus, danger of gun violence, and lack of appropriate communication with law enforcement.	(1) Help students identify existing and alternative transportation methods on weekends and holidays, and study opportunities and need for complementary options. Greater promotion of bicycling could be cheaper than building more parking facilities. (2) Make more partnerships with Latin American governments. Additionally, focus on retention programs directed specifically to the needs of students from targeted countries. (3) Provide more Police presence during nights, ensure full disclosure when safety issues occur, educate international students (and all students) and UGA police department on strategies for increasing students' safety on campus, and offer awareness programs and training on rape prevention and rape culture change.
Racist Rhetoric: (1) racism, and (2) discrimination.	(1) Participants reported receiving racist comments while speaking Spanish or Portuguese, and reported different experiences in places in Northern and Western states, such as New York and California, where they felt more welcomed and comfortable than in Southern states such as Georgia. (2) Participants noted concern about the limited access to education that the U.S. education system imposes to undocumented Latinos.	(1) Promote at a greater scale "diversity" not only inside the university but in Athens-Clark County.

Academic Environment: (1) faculty pedagogy, (2) class size and interaction, and (3) relationships and opportunities.	(1) Participants indicated that professors were approachable, professional, had organized syllabus, and had the necessary content knowledge. However, they also noted inadequate teaching methods at the graduate level and that the teaching methods varied from one department to another. Students indicated that some faculty did not motivate students to be successful, rather, scared them. They also commented on the lack of leadership skills in young professors. (2) Classes of about 8-20 students increased interaction among teachers and students resulting in better learning outcomes. For participants, the two most relevant issues of class size and interaction were the “SIT-LISTEN-GO” system, and the mixing of graduate students with undergraduate students in the same course (3) Relationships and opportunities such as assistantships, supportive advisors, and bosses with similar background influenced students’ success. Participants indicated that it was not only that such advisors and bosses are needed to be supportive but also to have similar background and knowledge about Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin America.	(1) The university (maybe through the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL)) should provide workshop opportunities for faculty regarding motivation of students and leadership skills. Additionally, CTL should aid departments in developing adequate teaching methods. (3) Provide Latino and Latina international students access to advisors and bosses that speak Spanish or Portuguese and have knowledge about the Latin American culture.
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Table 5.2

Synthesis of Findings on the Student Factors Influencing the Success of Latino/a International Students in Graduate School.

Major findings	Conclusion	Recommendations
Student Background: (1) academic background, (2) family and friend's support, and (3) expectations.	(1) The factors influencing success were the academic background advantage and being bilingual. (2) Family and friend's support influenced participants' success. (3) Expectations back home played a significant role in participants' success.	(1) When developing and implementing recruitment and retention techniques, institutions should consider student background factors.
Cultural and Academic Transition: (1) academic system, (2) language challenges, (3) cultural differences, and (4) food differences.	(1) Participants considered that the educational system in U.S. was better and more demanding than in Latin America, and they suffered stress due to school workload. (2) Participants indicated that the language was a barrier only at the beginning of their graduate school journey. (3) Participants encountered cultural differences; the initial lack of knowledge and difficulty interacting with other people; the possibility of people being not as friendly as in Latin America; and the cultural differences with touching, kissing, and the use of hand and arm gestures. (4) Students gained weight and claimed that in the U.S. it is easy to access to junk food. They explained they struggle with finding fresh food or farmers markets.	(1) UGA should offer a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) about the academic system and culture at UGA for prospective students to take before their arrival. UGA should provide workshops that can help students with tips to manage school workload and to deal with stress. (3) Latino and Latina international students should immerse themselves into the new culture and system, and look for opportunities to experience the new environment with as much detail as possible.
Resilient Skills: (1) coping strategies, and (2) Self-efficacy.	(1) Participants indicated that the following were important coping strategies: having Latino friends, be a hard worker, find different social and recreational opportunities, stay positive, have an excellent behavior, reflect on the success and mistakes, find a supportive system, remain in contact	It is of high importance to advise students about developing resilient skills such as coping strategies and self-efficacy. Retention techniques should include workshops regarding self-efficacy and coping strategies.

	with family and friends, improve learning techniques, and use social media. (2) Participants explained that the following were important components of self-efficacy: self-discipline, self-motivation, and the drive.	
Personal Life Situations: (1) family concern, (2) financial situation, and (3) social interactions.	(1) The weight of family responsibilities appeared to impact students with dependents at a much greater level than single students. (2) Single students indicated that their financial support, whether from the university or their home country governments, was enough to live “like a graduate student.” In the case of students with dependents, their financial situation was frugal and was causing emotional and academic negative consequences. (3) Students reported lack of interactions with other students, and a dismal social life, due to busy schedules.	(1) Universities and colleges need to assess possible culturally-appropriate avenues to help Latino and Latina international students with family responsibilities, personal life, and stress situations, such as counseling and advising services (2) Education institutions should consider additional financial assistance or income opportunities for students with dependents.
Professional Development: (1) research and publications, (2) career expectations, and (3) networking.	(1) Research and publishing are an essential aspect of students’ success. However, participants stated a fear of not starting research on time and whether or not they would be able to find funding for their research projects. (2) Career expectations (research and publishing, be a professor in Latin America or the U.S.) were the drive for participants’ goals and plans of action. (3) Networking opportunities provided by the university were a critical component for students to be successful while in graduate school.	(1) Universities and colleges need to aid students in the search for the necessary funds to carry out research and publish. Additionally, faculty in these education institutions need to advise students so they can start research on time. (3) Education institutions should prepare and guide students to set up their career goals to succeed. Similarly, they should develop and engage students in campus events for networking purposes.

Similarities with the literature reviewed

Campus setting. The similarity with the literature studied was centered on safety concerns. When discussing safety concerns, the literature studied did not address specifically the issue of safety concerns but does address aspects such as the creation of friendly campuses (HRC, 2011) that may serve as a technique students feel safer.

Racist rhetoric. Another similarity with the literature studied was that of discrimination. The Nora (2006) student engagement model addressed discrimination for Latino (domestic) students.

Academic environment. Another similarity between the study's results and the literature reviewed was the academic environment. Factors of the academic environment were classroom dynamics, class size, academic integration, teacher effectiveness, learning with peers, and experience with faculty (Creighton, 2007; CHEPA, 2006; Kieffer, 2012; NSSE, 2014; Peterson, 2012). The class size and interaction also has similarities with the literature studied. For the inadequate class size and interaction, the literature suggested that motivation and participation were techniques for adequate classroom dynamics (Peterson, 2012). Relationships and Opportunities also share similarities with the literature. The presence of Latino faculty and staff on campuses has confirmed to have a positive effect on student persistence and retention (Oseguera, 2009).

Student background. As stated by participants, their student background influences the success in pursuing a degree in higher education. In the literature, country of origin, socio-cultural-economic characteristics, and identity and religion were some of the student background characteristics that influence success (Creighton, 2007; Coy-Ogan, 2009; Flores, 2010; Hernandez, 2005; Mbuva, 2011; Torres, 2014). Additionally, another similarity was that of the

family and friends support. The literature suggested that students may be influenced by the people in their surroundings, such as parents, siblings, family, and friends (Eichler & Martinez, 2012; Gilroy, 2010; Mondragon, 2010; McCarron, & Inkelas, 2006; Ong, Phinney & Dennis, 2006; Zybala, 2012).

Cultural and Academic Transition. Cultural differences influencing participants' success encompassed issues ranging from changes in academic system and tradition, language challenges, and food differences. This factors also share similarities with the literature studied. Culture shock (HRC, 2010), language barriers (Nguyen, 2013; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), sociocultural stressors (HRC, 2010; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), and emotional stress (Pariat, Rynjah & Kharjana, 2014) were factors presented in the literature.

Resilient skills. This theme shares similarity with the literature examined. In this study, the coping strategies and the self-efficacy were the factors influencing participants' success. In the literature, the determination to succeed (Sandoval-Lucero, Maes & Klingsmith, 2014), values (Creighton, 2007), and behavior (Mbuva, 2011; Perna & Thomas, 2006; Storlie et al., 2013) were presented as resilient skills.

Personal life situations. One of the factors influencing participants was the frugal financial situation. The frugal financial situation has similarities with the literature. Montalvo, (2012) and Nora (2009) suggested that the financial condition of students plays a major role in their success.

Professional development. This construct shares one similarity with the literature studied regarding research. In the literature, a student was less likely to be successful if he or she did not become interested and immersed in research while pursuing an advanced degree (Tate et al., 2015).

Objective two

Table 5.3 details the major findings and conclusions for objective two to determine helpful recruitment techniques. While contributions from participants that helped with this objective were found throughout the interviews, the researcher focused part of the interview on recruitment, asking the following open-ended question: What recruitment techniques did you consider helpful in the application process? Table 5.3 reports the key findings on the recruitment techniques influencing the success of Latino and Latina international students in graduate school.

Table 5.3

Synthesis of Findings on the Recruitment Techniques Influencing the Success of Latino/a International Students in Graduate School.

Major findings	Conclusion	Recommendations
Recruitment Techniques: (1) application process, (2) offering of financial aid, and (3) recommendations.	(1) Participants suggested bilingual documentation for parents of prospective students. Participants explained that selection criteria were confusing and overwhelming, and indicated that communication from the university about acceptance and financial support was slow (and late) and not well coordinated. (2) Financial support remains the primary factor in making the decision to study abroad. Participants described their financial situation as “I live like a graduate student.” (3) One recommendation to UGA from participants was to diversify the population of Latino international students. One recommendation from participants to other students was to practice a lot of English before coming to the U.S., find a good mentor, have a clear goal, ask for help when needed, and learn time management skills.	(1) UGA should provide bilingual documentation for parents and family members to aid in recruitment of Latino and Latina international students. (2) Better communication channels should be conveyed to avoid lack or late communication with students regarding their application status that may influence not only their plans, but also their future. (3) Successful recruitment is not only about recruitment. Recruitment efforts need to go along with retention efforts that can secure or provide funding for students so they can be successful.

Similarities with the literature reviewed

Recruitment techniques. This theme shares many similarities with the literature studied in one of the most important factors for Latino students (domestic and international): the need for financial aid. Many scholars report that one of the most influential factors in the recruitment of Latino and Latina (domestic) students is to offer low tuition and financial aid (Abood et al., 2012; Creighton, 2007; Morales, 2010; Mbuva, 2011; Oseguera, 2009; Sandoval et al., 2014).

Objective Three

Table 5.4 reports the results for objective three that aimed to determine beneficial retention techniques. While contributions from participants that helped with this objective were found throughout the interviews, the researcher focused part of the interview on retention, asking the following open-ended question What retention techniques did you consider to be beneficial for your success? Table 5.4 reports the key findings on the retention techniques influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school.

Table 5.4

Synthesis of Findings on the Retention Techniques Influencing the Success of Latino/a International Students in Graduate School.

Major findings	Conclusion	Recommendations
Retention Techniques: (1) welcoming environment, (2) additional financial aid, (3) orientation week, and (4) development services.	(1) Welcoming and generous people received students. (2) A graduate assistantship from UGA or the home country is not enough for students with dependents. Participants stated that as international students, they lack either access to scholarship opportunities or have limited access to them, which often	(1) It is critical to address financial struggles of students with dependents, by either providing additional funding or avenues to find other income or funding sources. Otherwise, many of them might not be able to complete their programs. (2) To provide Latino and Latina international students with access to different scholarships.

	translates into lack of funding to finish their degrees. (3) The orientation week that UGA held for international students was key for many of the participants. (4) The Career Center and the Writing Center had been central to participants' success.	(3) Orientation week for Latino and Latina international students only. (4) To promote in greater scale the Career Center and the Writing Center so Latino and Latina international students can use these services.
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Similarities with the literature reviewed

Retention techniques. Among the recruitment techniques described in the literature were supportive and caring staff, advising, tutoring and mentoring, communication strategies, incentives and benefits, full-time employment, and orientation programs (Baltimore, 1995; Benavides & Keyes, 2016; Crisp, Taggart & Nora, 2015; Curtin, Stewart, & Ostrove, 2013; Gilroy, 2010 Allan & Roland, 2011; Mbuva, 2011; Montalvo, 2012; Peterson, 2012; Santicola, 2013; Torres & Hernandez, 2007). In this study, the orientation week shares similarities with the literature review. Orientation programs inform students about institutional and personal expectations, thereby improving student retention and making them feel supported and welcomed (Benavides & Keyes, 2016).

Objective Four

Objective four was to determine determine if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion. While contributions from participants that helped with this objective were found throughout the interviews, the researcher focused part of the interview on the issue of responsibility, asking the following open-ended question: When talking about the responsibility of your success, whom do you think is more responsible for the success, UGA or you?

Moreover, why? The results of this objective are that students do perceive a shared responsibility.

Recommendations for practice and similarities with the literature reviewed

The shared responsibility. This objective has a strong similarity with the literature examined. The Nora (2006) Student Engagement Model and Vincent Tinto (1975) suggests a shared responsibility between the student to persist and the institution to retain. In the research reported here, participants stated that there was, in fact, a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion. However, Latino/a international students reported that although the university had a role to play, they had a much higher responsibility in their own success than anyone else. The small proportion assigned to the University of Georgia encompassed all the institutional factors found in objectives one, two, and three. One of the most important roles in the university is providing the necessary support to minimize stress (offering of additional financial support and access to scholarships; counseling, academic advising, and mentoring programs; and advisors and mentors with similar background).

Limitations and Future Research

To better understand this population, future research should take different paths. First, Latino international graduate students who have dependents need to be studied separately from single students. In this study, there was a clear difference between the factors that influenced single students and students with dependents. Second, students from different regions of Latin America (Central America, South America, the Caribbean, and Mexico) need to be studied separately. In fact, the cultural, economic, and geographical diversity between these regions is considerable, thus, might influence students in various ways, justifying separate analysis or

comparisons between regions. Also, it might be important to study separately Brazilian students and the rest of students from South America given that most Latino international students at UGA are from Brazil and they are not as impacted by the lack of “country peers” as other Latino international students.

The researcher believes that the interviews could be richer and could yield more in-depth and heartfelt comments and insights if the interviews were conducted in the native language of the participants. While the students interviewed had proficiency in English, language is an important factor in communication between people, and culturally-laden. Personal topics like some of the ones that were dealt with in the interviews (racism, feelings of isolation, self-efficacy, expectations, worries, and financial concerns) are always better expressed in one’s language of “feelings” and rapport is built easier when language makes the participant feel like at “home.” Welch and Piekkari (2006) interviewed researchers about issues involved with qualitative interviewing in foreign/English languages and found that regarding language use, researchers had concerns about the accuracy of data, response authenticity, the building of trust, and the shared understanding of meanings.

Future research should expand data collection to other methods and use more triangulation in the same study. While the researcher found saturation after the 16 interviews, the topics of discussion and the quality and depth of data could be different depending on the data collection method. For example, one additional data collection method could include focus groups, grouping students for example according to whether or not they had dependents and elicit data through discussions among the participants. A quantitative approach could use the factors listed in this thesis to build a quantitative instrument to elicit responses from a large number of students. Additional research should also focus on other stakeholders, including the

dependents, faculty, advisors, administrators (department, college, and university level), and staff of support units. Also, this research was done at UGA, which is a Research I university in the South East of the United States. Other research could focus on similar universities in the South, or change regions. Additionally, as recruitment and retention techniques are developed for Latino and Latina international students, research needs to be conducted and published to assess the effectiveness of these techniques. After carefully consideration and analysis of the results, the researcher also recommends using the following theoretical perspectives to study this population: Latino/a Critical Race Theory (Latcrit) and Symbolic Interactionism.

Latino Critical Race Theory (LatCrit)

LatCrit derives from Critical Race Theory (CRT) which centers race, class, gender, sexuality and other forms of oppression in the educational experiences of people of color (Perez, 2010). Solorano & Delgado reported that Latino/a Critical Race Theory (LatCrit) explores the experiences of Latino/as in education including immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture (as cited in Perez, 2010). The researcher recommends to place race at the center of analysis to study Latino and Latina international students. Participants believed that “being Latino” played a major role in their success in graduate school. Therefore, LatCrit may serve as a better way of analyzing in-depth the meaning of being a Latino international graduate student. Aspects such as language, immigration, ethnicity, country of origin, and culture, as well as their interaction, may lead to identifying distinct details on how being Latino influence success in graduate school.

Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism suggests that individuals make sense of the world through their interpretation of their daily interaction with other objects and people, within the context in which

the interaction takes place (Machin, Harding, & Derbyshire, 2009). Human society lives in a world of objects and is guided in its orientation and action by the meaning of these objects (Blumer, 1969). By building on meaning making as a fundamental premise, Symbolic Interactionism provides an analytic depiction that can guide increasingly refined understandings of various aspects of human society (Handberg et al. 2015). Symbolic Interactionism as a theoretical framework may get in-depth into the way Latino international students interact with objects around them. Instead of going with one already set up methodology or approach, Symbolic Interactionism offers an opportunity to understand the interactions of a target audience and how they make meaning of such interactions.

Chapter Summary

Findings from the objective one suggested the following key constructs: campus setting; racist rhetoric; academic environment; student background; cultural and academic transition; resilient skills; personal life situations; and professional development. Findings from objective two on helpful recruitment techniques suggested the following recruitment aspects: application process; the offering of financial aid; and recommendations. Findings from objective three on the beneficial retention techniques suggested the following retention aspects: welcoming environment; additional financial aid; orientation week; and development services. Findings from objective four on examining if Latino/a international students perceive a joint responsibility between the institution to retain and the student to persist in their degree completion suggested that indeed there is a shared responsibility. Latino/a international students, however, accredited to themselves a higher responsibility in their own success than the one they attributed to the university.

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APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Approval

Office of the Vice President for Research
Institutional Review Board

APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

November 6, 2015

Dear

On 11/6/2015, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	Factors affecting the success in college of Latino International students
Investigator:	
IRB ID:	STUDY00002559
Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None

The IRB approved the protocol from 11/6/2015.

In conducting this study, you are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103).

Sincerely,

University of Georgia
Institutional Review Board Chairperson

APPENDIX B

Research Project Flyer

**ARE YOU A LATINO INTERNATIONAL STUDENT?****Join us!****Latino International Student Research**

The purpose of this research is to gain understanding on the Factors Affecting the Success in College of Latino International Students

You are valued!

Your experiences and feedback will help shape valuable tools to help future Latino International Students succeed in U.S. Colleges and Universities.

Facilitators!

The research will be conducted by Hugo Alexander Moran Chavez from El Salvador and Dr. Maria Navarro from Spain.

How to join

Please email, text or call: Hugo Moran at:

hugo.moran@uga.edu

678-818-5282



Factors Affecting the Success in College of Latino International Students

APPENDIX C

Interview Recruitment Flyer

**INTERVIEWS****Join us!****You are valued!**

Your experiences and feedback will help shape valuable tools to help future Latino International Students succeed in U.S. Colleges and Universities.

Facilitators!

The research will be conducted by Hugo Alexander Moran Chavez from El Salvador and Dr. Maria Navarro from Spain.

What?

1 hour interview

Where?

Four Towers Building Conference Room

When?

To be agreed with the students

Please email, text or call: Hugo Moran at:

hugo.moran@uga.edu 678-818-5282



APPENDIX D

Preliminary Interview Protocol

Part 1: ICEBREAKER/ INTRODUCTIONS (3 minutes)

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (i.e., where is home?)
2. What is your country of origin?
3. What are your career expectations?
4. Are you from a rural or urban area?
5. Are you a master or Ph.D. student?

Part 2: Open-ended questions (12 minutes)

Question: What are the reasons why you decided to come to the US to study?

Question: Tell me a little bit about your experience in College so far

_____ Probing: What are the most positive things about attending College?

_____ Probing: What are the most negative things about attending College?

Question: What are the factors that you believe have affected, are affecting, or may affect your success in graduate school?

Question: What recruitment techniques do you consider were helpful in the application process?

Question: What retention techniques do you consider to be beneficial for your success?

Question: When talking about the responsibility of your success, whom do you think is more responsible for the success, UGA or you? Moreover, why?

Part 3: Semi-structured interview (20 minutes) (probing questions addressing factors discussed or not discussed as a result of the open-ended questions).

Impacts – examples of probing questions (may change depending on the answers to the first open-ended questions.

Probing question: You have mentioned that the support of your family was a factor that affected your decision to come and is affecting your success in College. Would you like to expand on this?

Probing question: You have mentioned that the bus system is unstable, would you like to expand on this? Why is it that the bus system affects you?

Probing question: You have mentioned that the support of your peers is factor affecting your success, would you like to expand on this? How are they helping you in succeeding?

Probing question: You have said that your economic background is having a negative impact on your success. Would you like to expand? Do you think retention techniques such as financial incentives can have an impact on your success?

Probing question: You have said that social interactions are having a negative impact on your success. Would you like to expand? Why are social interactions influencing your success?

Probing question: You have said that the advisor provided by your department is key, would you like to expand? Why is your advisor crucial for your success?

Probing question: The literature says that the pre-college education is very important. Do you think this was a factor in your case?

Probing question: The literature says that coping strategies is very important. Do you think this was a factor in your case?

Probing question: You have indicated that it has been helpful to be in XX student organization. What other things are there going on at UGA that have been helpful? What things are affecting you negatively? Positively? For example, do you have mentors? Would you want them? Are your classes large or small? How does this affect you? Are your professors approachable? Is this important for you?

Probing question: OK, so if you had to tell me now what is the most relevant factor affecting your success in College, what would you say?

Recommendations (12 minutes)

Probing question: what would you do to help Latino International Students?
Alternatively, what would you suggest to UGA to do differently regarding Latino and Latina international students success?

Conclusion and Summary of Session (10 minutes)

Have we missed anything or are there any other comments you would like to make at this time?
Researcher summary:

(I will try to summarize what I have understood from our discussion). Example:

“Ok... I have understood that you believe the financial situation is affecting your success, which some retention techniques could be...

Is there anything you would like to change or add to the summary I just did?

Is there anything else you would like me to know? “

Thank you very much for volunteering to participate in this study. If you have any questions about the study, now or in the future, please feel free to contact me at any time via phone or email. I also may potentially contact you shortly for a short, 10-minute follow-up for clarification purposes only, if needed. Thank you again

APPENDIX E

Adjusted Interview Protocol**Interview Questions:****Part 1: ICEBREAKER/ INTRODUCTIONS (3 minutes)**

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself? (i.e., where is home?)
2. What is your country of origin?
3. What are your career expectations?
4. Are you from a rural or urban area?
5. Are you a master or Ph.D. student?

Part 2: Open-ended question (12 minutes)**Question: What are the reasons why you decided to come to the US to study?**

_____ Probing: What are the reasons why you decided to come to UGA study?

Question: Tell me a little bit about your experience in graduate school so far

_____ Probing: What are the most positive things about attending Graduate school?

_____ Probing: What are the most negative things about attending Graduate school?

Question: What are the factors that you believe have affected, are affecting, or may affect your success in graduate school?

_____ Probing: What has been the most challenging part for you?

Question: Tell me, what recruitment techniques do you consider were helpful in the application process?

_____ Probing: What would you suggest to UGA to do differently?

Question: Tell me, what retention techniques do you consider to be beneficial for your success?

_____ Probing: What would you suggest to UGA to do differently?

_____ Probing: What is UGA doing well that is helping you remain here?

Question: When talking about the responsibility of your success, whom do you think is more responsible for the success, UGA or you? Moreover, why??

_____ Probing: What about if we say from a scale of 1-100%?

_____ Probing: Why do you credit more responsibility to you than UGA?

_____ Probing: So you mentioned that UGA is responsible of only help you come here and provide you with an assistantship, can you expand more on this?

Part 3: Semi-structured interview (20 minutes) (probing questions addressing factors discussed or not discussed as a result of the open-ended questions; and the preliminary analysis of the first series of interviews)

Question: You mentioned that your family supports you, in what form they support you?

_____ Probing: What impact did family have on your enrollment?

Probing question: You have mentioned that the support of your family was a factor that affected your decision to come and is affecting your success in Graduate school. Would you like to expand on this?

Question: You mentioned that you like the campus infrastructure, can you explain a little bit more about it?

_____ Probing: What impact did this car-culture had on your success?

Question: You mentioned that your friends back home are happy for you to be here, in what form they help you be successful?

_____ Probing: Are your friends back home crucial for your success?

Question: You mentioned that the research is a concern, why is it a concern?

_____ Probing: Do you believe that doing research is part of being successful in your program?

Question: You mentioned that publishing your research is important, why is it important?

_____ Probing: What would happen if you would not be able to publish before graduation day?

_____ Probing: Is research part of your future career expectations?

_____ Probing: Does your department supports in doing research?

_____ Probing: you mentioned that your department does not give you money for research, can you expand on this? Why do you think your department does not provide you with money for research?

_____ Probing: you mentioned that in your department you start the research late and this affects you, can you expand a little more on this? What would happen if you would start research earlier?

Question: You mentioned that the culture here is different, tell me what's different?

_____ Probing: Have these differences affect your success?

_____ Probing: How do you cope with these differences?

_____ Probing: Do you believe the US culture is different from Latin America or your country of Origin?

Question: You mentioned that you experienced decimation and that some people were racist, can you expand on this?

_____ Probing: Do you think people see you different because you are Latino?

Question: You mentioned that you miss the food, tell me what's different from the food here and back home?

_____ Probing: Have these food differences affect your health?

Question: You mentioned that you have safety concerns, what are those safety concerns?

_____ Probing: Do you feel unsafe just outside UGA or also inside UGA?

_____ Probing: Why massive shooting in other US universities concern you?

_____ Probing: Why gun violence in the US concern you?

Question: You mentioned that you feel poor class interaction, what do you think is the reason of it?

_____ Probing: what would you suggest to UGA or your department to do differently to change this poor class interaction?

Question: You mentioned that your advisor plays a major role in your success, what does him/her do for you to say that?

_____ Probing: Is him/her a good advisor?

Question: You mentioned that you would like to see more Latino and Latina international students and that you see more Asian students?

_____ Probing: What do you think about their interactions?

_____ Probing: you said the struggle with English more than Latinos?

Question: You mentioned that your economic background has an impact, what do you mean by that?

Probing question: Would you like to expand? Do you think retention techniques such as financial incentives can have an impact on your success?

Question: OK, so if you had to tell me now what is the most relevant factor affecting your success in graduate school, what would you say?

Probing question: Based on what you just said, how can UGA help you?

Probing question: Based on what you just said, what retention technique can UGA develop to better help future Latino/a international students?

Recommendations (6 minutes)

Probing question: what would you do to help future Latino/a international Students?

Probing question: what would you recommend them to do differently?

Probing question: what would you recommend to UGA to do differently?

Probing question: what would you recommend to UGA to do differently?

Conclusion and Summary of Session (5 minutes)

Have we missed anything or are there any other comments you would like to make at this time?

Researcher summary:

(I will try to summarize what I have understood from our discussion). Example:

“Ok... I have understood that you believe the financial situation is affecting your success that some retention techniques could be...

Is there anything you would like to change or add to the summary I just did?

Is there anything else you would like me to know? “

Thank you very much for volunteering to participate in this study. If you have any questions about the study, now or in the future, please feel free to contact me at any time via phone or email. I also may potentially contact you in the near future for a short, 10-minute follow-up for clarification purposes only, if needed. Thank you again.

APPENDIX F

Interviews Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

CONSENT FORM – Interview

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUCCESS OF LATINO AND LATINA INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN GRADUATE SCHOOL

Researcher's Statement

My name is Hugo Alexander Moran Chavez, and I am working on a research study about the factors affecting the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school for my Master degree under the direction of Dr. Maria Navarro (Department of Agricultural Leadership, Education, and Communication, University of Georgia).

We are asking you to take part in this research study. Before you decide to participate, it is important you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information.

Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to participate in the study or not. This process is called “informed consent.” A copy of this form will be given to you.

To be eligible, you must be at least 18 years old.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine and understand the factors influencing the success of Latino/a international students in graduate school. As the demand to address solutions for food security, environmental degradation, and economic and social sustainability in the world increases, it is crucial to support research and education everywhere.

Specifically, the success in graduate school of Latino/a international students may have a significant impact on meeting the food demands in the Americas in the years to come. This study will develop a framework of the factors affecting the success in graduate school of Latino/a international students. Colleges and Universities around the U.S. and the world will be able to use this framework to increase and foster student success among all international students, and specifically Latino/a international students.

Procedures

This interview will take approximately one hour. The place and time of the interview will be agreed upon between the researcher and you. You might be contacted again for a 10-minute follow-up for clarification purposes only. With your consent, the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Once transcription is completed, the audio recording will be destroyed.

Risks and discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits for participants in this study.

Findings from this study will be used to develop a framework of factors affecting the success in graduate school of Latino/a international students that Colleges and Universities can use to increase and foster success among all international students, and specifically Latino/a international students.

Confidentiality

Your identity will be kept confidential to the extent provided by law. The results of this study may be published, but your name or any identifying information will not be used. In fact, the published results will be presented in summary form only. The information will be secured in a locked cabinet in a locked room, or in a password protected file. Only the researchers will have access to the data and your personal information, and they will strip all documents of individually-identifiable data after the study is completed.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation is completely voluntary, but would be greatly appreciated; You can refuse to participate or stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request to remove, return, or destroy the data that can be identified with you.

If you have questions or concerns

The researchers conducting this study are Dr. Maria Navarro, an associate professor at the University of Georgia; and Hugo Alexander Moran Chavez, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now.

If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Navarro at mnavarro@uga.edu or at (706)-583-0225, and Hugo Alexander Moran Chavez at hugo.moran@uga.edu or at (678) 818-5282. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Consent to Participate in Research:

Your signature below indicates that the researchers have answered all of your questions to your satisfaction and that you consent to volunteer for this study and participate in the interview. You have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

- a) I give my permission for the researchers to use an audio-recording device to record the interview.

Circle one: YES / NO. Initial _____

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.