College for All Latinos? The Role of High School Messages in Facing College Challenges

GUADALUPE F. MARTINEZ

University of Arizona

REGINA DEIL-AMEN

University of Arizona

Background: *Differences exist between high schools in their commitment to and efforts toward guiding and aiding students in their postsecondary pathways; however, little is known about how the curricular experiences of high school students, and the related messages they receive, shape their sense of university readiness and postenrollment persistence behaviors and decisions. Although Latino students have struggled to succeed in college, few qualitative studies elaborated their experiences as they transition into universities. This is problematic given that Latino students are not a uniform group and often originate from differing high school contexts. The messages Latino students interpret about college-going while in high school can have bearing on their subjective framings of the challenges they later face that could threaten their university persistence.*

Purpose: *We explore how Latino students originating from various high school types experience the university transition process and their first year at a four-year university. We focus on the extent to which Latino students of different socioeconomic status (SES) levels and curriculum placement report the presence of either "college-for-all" or gatekeeping norms at their high school to understand the influence of such norms on their university persistence. Lori Diane Hill's "college-linking" approaches also serve as a framework for the influence of high school contexts in promoting certain norms for these Latino students.*

Research Design: *This two-part qualitative study includes 131 Latino students attending a broad access university. Data were analyzed from essays and two sets of semistructured interviews. First, we describe how these messages shape their perspectives regarding their university aspirations. Second, we examine how their self-assessment transforms during their first year of university study and its relevance to their persistence decisions and behaviors.*

Results: *Findings indicate that students were differentially exposed to a college-for-all or gatekeeping ideology based on their high school SES and curriculum placement. Once at the university, students reflected on these past high school messages, reinterpreting and applying them to their first-year university experience. Generally, students exposed to college-for-all messages described feeling deceived about their readiness, whereas those exposed to gatekeeping felt inadequate and doubted their ability to persist through first-year challenges.*

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Conclusions: *Recommendations consider the implications that college-linking and high school messages may have on persistence decisions. We reconceptualize notions of university readiness by infusing new subjective components not addressed in prior research.*

Few would argue that high schools have traditionally served a gatekeeping function, discouraging many students from college enrollment (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 1964; Rosenbaum, 1976). In fact, today's high school students continue to hold college aspirations that are consistently higher than actual rates of postsecondary enrollment (Reynolds, Stewart, MacDonald, & Sischo, 2007). However, at the same time, college access has unquestionably increased over the past few decades, with rates of college enrollment rising dramatically (Rosenbaum, Deil-Amen, & Person, 2006). Recent research in the high school and community college setting describes the presence of a "college-for-all" ideology characterized by counselors and teachers reluctant to discourage students from pursuing their college dreams (Deil-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2002; Rosenbaum, 2001; Schneider & Stevenson, 1999). A college-for-all ideology considers all students worthy of college opportunities, and many who had previously not considered it are encouraged to aim for a college degree. Based on his 2001 multi–high school study, Rosenbaum concluded that the reluctance of high school teachers and counselors to "dampen" students' college aspirations may unintentionally jeopardize their ability to assess their chances of success in college. This sentiment is echoed by other researchers (Kirst & Venezia, 2004), and in a national study, Schneider and Stevenson (1999) found student aspirations consistent with this framework.

What role does prior exposure to a gatekeeping ideology or to a college-for-all ideology play in the postenrollment thoughts and persistence behaviors of Latino college students of diverse socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds? Why focus on Latino students? According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011), Latinos are the fastest growing ethnic group in the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, Latinos are also the largest minority group on our nation's college campuses, with the number of 18- to 24-year-old Latino students in college exceeding 2 million, outpacing the growth of other minority groups at four-year universities (Fry & Lopez, 2012). Despite the size and growth of their postsecondary attendance, Latino students are a relatively understudied group. Empirical studies using large-scale databases have not been able to capture the nuance and complexities of the college choice process for Latino students (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Choy, 2001; Hearn, 1984; Orfield, Marin, & Horn, 2005; Perna, 2006; Perna & Titus, 2005). Furthermore, more in-depth qualitative research on underrepresented students tends to examine populations for which race/ethnicity *overlaps* with social class disadvantages (Auerbach, 2002, 2007; Ceja, 2004;

Freeman, 1997; Gándara, 1995; González, Stoner, & Jovel, 2003; O'Connor, 1997, 1999; Valenzuela, 1999). Although such research is valuable, it fails to meaningfully address the diversity of student transition and first-year experiences among Latinos from differing social classes.

Although Latino students are at a distinct disadvantage in the educational process on aggregate, with lower aspirations and college participation (Astin & Oseguera, 2004; Deil-Amen & Turley, 2007; Gándara & Orfield, 2006; Hurtado, Inkelas, Briggs, & Rhee, 1997), they are not a homogenous group. This present study provides a contrast to studies focusing on only the most disadvantaged of the Latino subgroup. We present a more complex understanding that considers variation among Latino students in how their self-perceptions about their ability to pursue a university pathway transform after their first year at the university. Educational research has not yet focused on how Latino undergraduates, originating from diverse high school contexts, assess their university readiness and persistence through their first year at the university.

The present two-part study is one of the first to qualitatively examine the experiences of Latino students from a variety of high school SES types as they transition into college and navigate through their first postsecondary year at a four-year public university. In the first part of this study, Latino students provided a written reflection on their college decision-making process, including their sense of the direct and subtle messages they received about college while in high school. We explore their interpretations of high school messages and describe how these messages shape their self-perception regarding their ability to matriculate into a university. In the second part of this study, we explore the first-year university experiences of the same group of students after completing one semester and concluding their second semester of full-time status. We describe students' initial reflections on their high school messages. We then describe students' reinterpretation of the accuracy of these messages as they attempt to reconcile messages with the actual challenges they encounter during the first year of university study.

Ultimately, this study deepens our understanding of how these students internalize messages from key actors in their high school. We find that messages reflect a college-for-all framework for some students and the traditional gatekeeping function of high schools for others. Although students who enroll at four-year universities have clearly overcome discouragement from pursuing a university pathway, postenrollment consequences become evident, as this study demonstrates. The messages students receive while in high school about their "university readiness" tend to shape their perceptions of their own academic abilities and competence to navigate through the academic challenges encountered during their first year at the university.

RELEVANT LITERATURE

COLLEGE-FOR-ALL: MYTH OR REALITY?

Although some research supports the prevalence of "college-for-all," other research challenges the idea that college-for-all messages are effective in reaching all high school students by detailing how many low-SES and underrepresented minority students suffer the consequences of educational dynamics that limit university information and assistance (Freeman, 1997; González et al., 2003; Hill, 2008; Perna & Jones, 2013; Vargas, 2004) and even push students toward dropping out of high school (Fine, 1991). Such dynamics lead some students toward high school dropout, nonuniversity pathways, or less selective college pathways relative to more advantaged or supported students (Fine, 1991; Hill, 2008; McDonough, 1997; Persell, Catsambis, & Cookson, 1992; Persell & Cookson, 1985).

Clearly, college-for-all messages do not apply to *all* students in *all* high schools; the process of college choice can be very different for first-generation university students and students who populate lower SES schools. For example, first-generation students often struggle to obtain adequate college information within their school environment (Fallon, 1997; Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1999; McDonough, 1998; Pratt & Skaggs, 1989; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; Vargas, 2004; Walpole et al., 2005; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). And under these circumstances, Tierney and Hagedorn (2002) found that low-income and underrepresented students do not perceive their counselors to be sources of support, but as gatekeepers who dictate the courses they will take and obstruct information. Similarly, McDonough (1997) found that the quality and quantity of counseling services matter in terms of adequate academic preparation. In the effort to explain inadequate counseling, Perna and colleagues (2008) investigated how external forces shape such services. Perna and her colleagues concluded that financial constraints, inadequate staffing, and competing responsibilities lead to little time to counsel students.

Other scholars have noted the phenomenon of student placement into either academic or vocational tracks based on various factors—ability, expected achievement, and completion of prerequisites (Ekstrom, Goertz, & Rock, 1998; Oakes, 1985, 1987; Rosenbaum, 1986). Whereas some argue that tracking may assist students with better learning, given that content is perceived to be appropriately suited for their academic abilities, others argue that tracking can force a particular career and limit students' potential (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). Studies considering tracking and college-choice

have yet to closely examine if and how tracking plays a role in students' internalization of high school messages and how their experience within those tracks informs their college self-efficacy. Overall, the present study examines if and how these complex factors intersect to better understand the relevance of high school messages for students' self-efficacy as they develop their disposition to attend a four-year university and manage their first-year experience.

SELF-EFFICACY AND AGENCY

It is important to note the central role of teachers in supporting the college-going agency and self-efficacy of students in their college-going pursuits. Sprinthall, Sprinthall, and Oja (1998) found that teachers send messages to students that inform them of their academic abilities and trajectories—a process that inevitably works to shape students' self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986), the concept of self-efficacy is defined as an individual's belief about his or her own ability to achieve a certain level of performance that would later influence his or her behavior and decisions. Teachers' dispositions toward their students and nonverbal messages impact students' self-efficacy as it relates to their academic abilities and thus their academic outcomes (Sprinthall et al., 1998). Relatedly, Deil-Amen and Tevis (2010) detailed the intersection of self-efficacy and school context and how dominant messages pervasive in a high school can influence the agency students enact in preparing for college and self-assessing their college readiness. Given the challenges of first-generation and underrepresented minority students, and the influence of counselors, teachers, and the high school context as a whole, the present study explores students' beliefs and how their self-perceptions and self-efficacy shape their transition to a university and their response to first-year challenges.

HIGH SCHOOL CONTEXT AND POSTSECONDARY PATHWAYS

Differences exist between high schools in their commitment to and efforts toward aiding students in their postsecondary pathways. In her now classic qualitative study, McDonough (1997) detailed the differences between four high schools in promoting postsecondary attendance, providing information, and allocating resources to such endeavors. In each high school, the values, beliefs, and impressions communicated to students about academic success and postsecondary attendance play a fundamental role in molding student perceptions and actions regarding college. Three out of the four high schools reviewed in McDonough's study—the private, the college preparatory, and a single public high school serving middle- to upper-class students—had the common theme of college

preparation as the overall priority. The assumption that students would continue to four-year postsecondary institutions was embedded in the culture of these schools, and the schools' "college-going" behaviors were intensely promoted. Alternatively, the fourth, a comprehensive public high school serving lower to middle-class students, had a college counseling culture that was reactionary and sparse. Students were primarily expected to join the workforce immediately after high school or attend a local community college at best.

In the present study, we address students' characterization of their high school context. However, we focus specifically on the variation in the messages students report receiving about their personal college-going options. We then extend the study to include how these messages continue to play out and further shape students' beliefs about their academic abilities as they persevere through their first year at the university. We borrow from the work of Fine (1991) by applying her idea that institutional contexts can frame the departure of students from school. Whereas her work examined urban high school contexts and the role that school actors and conditions play in pushing high school students toward dropout, our study considers such dynamics among university students. We expand the discussion to consider how institutional contexts and messages about university enrollment received by students might inform the framing of their decision to stay or leave college. In addition to messages and the actions of school actors, we consider broader institutional strategies, as detailed next.

College-Linking Strategies

High schools serving low-SES students employed college-linking strategies that do not send the college-for-all message. Hill (2008) used quantitative analysis to demonstrate that high schools vary by the specific "college-linking" strategies in which they engage. She identified three types of strategies that emerge nationally: *traditional, clearinghouse*, and *brokering*. High schools using traditional strategies have limited resources and commitment to facilitating access to college. As a result, they function in a way that prepares most students for labor market entry while acting as a channel toward postsecondary studies for a select few. Hill found that students in these schools are most likely to enroll in a community college as their postsecondary option. High schools employing a clearinghouse strategy contain a solid resource structure for college planning but have a limited commitment to the equal resource allocation among students. Therefore, access to resources depends more on the initiative of students and their families, which varies by SES and

parent education. Attending such a school has a positive but nonsignificant effect on four-year college enrollment. Last, the brokering strategy exists in high schools characterized by smaller but sizeable resources for college planning and a strong commitment to assisting all students and their families. Students in these high schools are most likely to attend a four-year college because these schools have a powerful role as negotiators in the college-linking process. Hill's findings uncover a typology of how certain types of schools may be stratifying access to college and college planning in ways that go beyond SES.

The college-linking strategies employed by some high schools are correlated with decreased college-going by Latino students. McDonough (1997), Perna et al. (2008), and Hill (2008) documented that high schools can constrain or enhance students' links to college. However, Hill's research adds a racial/ethnic component that McDonough's research with all-White schools did not offer. While traditional and brokering high schools have no disproportionate effects on college enrollment for underrepresented minority students, Hill did find that in public clearinghouse schools, additional resources for college linking enhance the likelihood that Black and Latino students will enroll in a four-year rather than two-year college. However, such schools were found to have a negative influence on Latino students choosing between a two-year college or no college, in that they are more likely to forgo college altogether.

HILL'S LINKING STRATEGIES AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The present study focuses on the extent to which the reported experiences of Latino students of different SES levels and various curriculum placements intersect with and reflect the presence of college-for-all norms or gatekeeping norms in their high school. The college-linking approaches typologized by Hill (2008) also serve as a framework to understand and explain the influence of high school contexts in promoting either one of these norms for Latino students attending a four-year university. Some of the Latino university students in the present study may have originated from a high school with a traditional college-linking strategy and therefore succeeded in being resilient enough to "make it" to a university despite the odds and the likely presence of a gatekeeping norm. Other students in the present study may have originated in a high school with a brokering college-linking strategy and therefore benefited from a college-for-all norm and strong support for university enrollment. Still other students may have originated from a clearinghouse high school, which could imply that they were either among those Latino students who received extra support to pursue a university education or among those Latino students who

received strong gatekeeping messages to forgo college altogether. Overall, in the present study, we consider simultaneously the norms and messages students report as well as their retrospective accounts of their place within their high school's apparent college-linking process. We then analyze how these prior experiences may be influencing each student's response to the challenges each faces in his or her first at the university. A deeper understanding of these dynamics is highly relevant to better addressing the high rates of departure and nondegree completion among Latino students who do pursue a college degree (Gándara & Contreras, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

Adelman (2002) warned that many prominent college access studies focus on the 15% of students who attend the most selective colleges (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Karabel, 2006; Karen, 1990, 1991, 2002; Massey, Charles, Lundy, & Fischer, 2003; Persell et al., 1992; Stevens, 2007). Instead, this study focuses on students attending a broad-access university in the Southwest. Such moderately selective colleges and universities enroll over 80% of high school graduates who enter postsecondary institutions (Kirst & Venezia, 2004), and the experiences of students whose pathways lead in this direction need to be addressed in all their complexity and diversity.

Recently, a summer bridge program at a southwestern university celebrated its 40th anniversary. Program staff enrolls, instructs, and guides approximately 250–300 incoming freshman for a six-week intensive summer session to help acclimate students to college life. The purpose of this program is to facilitate a smooth transition into students' first year of studies and sensitize them to the academic and campus culture. Historically, this summer bridge program served student populations who tend to have the lowest rates of matriculation (i.e., low-income, racial minority, and first-generation university students). Presently, all first-time, full-time entering freshmen are eligible to participate in this program, and therefore, the diversity of participants in the program extends to other SES categories as well. The present study draws participants from among the self-identified Latinos enrolled in this summer transition program, so the SES and first-generation college status of the research sample is quite diverse.

Overall, we explore how Latino students (from this point forward, simply referred to as students) of various high school types experience the university transition process and first year of enrollment at the university. Supporting questions that further guide and inform our inquiry include the following:

(a) What messages about university pursuits do students describe receiving while in high school? Who are the key school actors, and what messages are they communicating?

(b) How do these students access help in their search and choice endeavors? What college-linking strategies do these experiences reflect?

(c) What relevance do these perceived high school messages appear to have for students as they work through their first-year university challenges?

DATA SOURCES AND DATA COLLECTION

There were three data sources: (1) reflective essays from students regarding the college choice process, (2) first-round interview of students regarding the college choice process, and (3) a second-round interview of students reflecting on the college choice process and transition into college during the first year of university study. Given that validity can be understood as "true" and "certain" in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), data were triangulated by using these three sources to depth and a more clear understanding of internalized messages. Gathering student responses at different points of their transition into college allows for descriptive validity. Revisiting the overall concept through essays and multiple interviews also minimizes distortion of what investigators note in essays and hear in interviews. This particular approach also provides an evolving perspective on the messages students received about college and how they later reinterpreted those messages once enrolled. We present data sources in the following paragraphs and in further detail in Appendix B1-3.

Our study is one of several subinvestigations situated within a broader, longitudinal project to analyze the academic and social development and attainment outcomes of a broader pool of research participants, all drawn from the bridge program. Essay prompts and two interview protocols were scripted by the principal investigator and research team of the broader study that we, as authors, were a part of. To establish reliability, the team utilized the same prompts and questions to gather data (Kirk & Miller, 1986). On collecting written essays, team members began open coding to establish broad categories and collectively define open code meanings. Team members conducting interviews also transcribed first- and second-round interviews verbatim.

All bridge program students were required to complete a written essay assignment that also served as data for the research. It was explained to students that their written reflections and interviews would be deidentified

but would be invaluable and would greatly inform educators about the successes and challenges they face.

During the summer of 2007, a total of 271 bridge program participants (nearly all of them) agreed to participate by giving their consent to have their essays analyzed. A total of 130 of the 271 participants (48%) self-identified as Latino students, with 83 females and 48 males. These 131 students primarily matriculated from high schools within the state, with a handful of students originating from high schools in three other states. Categorized by free and reduced lunch averages of each school, the 70 high schools from which these students originated are stipulated as (a) a public/private low SES, (b) public middle SES, and (c) public/private high SES (see Table A1 in Appendix A). Regionally, these students concentrated disproportionately in the lower SES high schools (Table A2 in Appendix A). Our classification for first-generation college students includes those students for whom neither parent obtained a four-year college degree. The children of a parent who had completed a four-year degree are referred to as continuing-generation.

For the first part of this study, 131 essays were analyzed. Essay prompts focused on the following areas: (a) participants' college choice process, (b) participants' expectations of their college experience, (c) participants' goals and aspirations, and (d) participants' self-perceptions (refer to Appendix B1 for syllabus excerpts/essay prompts). Only excerpts relevant to the essay prompts have been included in analysis and shared in the appendix.

Coupled with the request to analyze essay content, informed consent also offered participants the option to participate in an interview during the six-week summer transition period in order to gain a richer understanding of their transition process. In addition to allowing their essay to be available to researchers, a majority of the 131 students, over 60%, also volunteered to take part in the optional semistructured interview. Twenty-three were chosen to represent diverse demographic characteristics that proportionally reflected the diversity of students in the bridge program—namely gender, parental education, and family income. Females were disproportionately represented in the overall Latino sample, and 16 of the students interviewed were female, and 7 were male. Interviews were approximately 1 hour. The interview protocol asked students to reflect on their postsecondary choices and to explain the various messages they received in high school and their sources. Questions focused on who encouraged and supported their college goals, who or what influenced them to attend college or predisposed them to the idea that they were college-going material, and what inhibited their college-going, such as lack of information, misinformation, discouragement, and limitations on

their aspirations and college choice as imposed by those at school (refer to Appendix B2 for complete listing of interview protocol questions).

As an additional request, at the conclusion of the first interview, the 23 consenting interviewees were solicited for voluntary participation in a second-round interview to be conducted toward the end of their freshman year. The goal of the strategic timing for the second-round interviews was to document students' narratives on how their academic experiences ensued and to examine if students questioned their previous perceptions about college. In an effort to improve participation, those agreeing to participate in the second-round interviews were nominally compensated for their time. Ultimately, 17 of the original 23 returned for a semistructured second-round interview lasting between 45 and 90 minutes (see Table A6 in Appendix A). The interview protocol asked students to articulate the current experience of their first year of college and their feelings about their ability to successfully navigate and persist through their first year. Questions focused on their social and academic experiences and their thoughts about those experiences, including challenges, successes, and future plans and considerations about their classes, major, and staying at or leaving the university (refer to Appendix B3 for a complete listing of interview protocol questions).

With regard to departure, 18 of the 131 students stopped out of the university by the end of their first semester. All those who stopped out came from low- to middle-SES high school categories, and only 2 of the 18 indicated having been in the advanced academic curriculum while in high school (see Tables A3 and A5 in Appendix A). We learned of these students stopping out prior to the completion of their second semester during our efforts to contact them for the second interview. Three of the 18 verbally explained that they had stopped out of the university and declined to participate in the second interview when contacted. The remaining 15 were assumed to have stopped out of the university given two indicators. First, we were unable to reestablish contact using the information provided at their initial interview. Second, their student information and "active" status could no longer be found on the university's enrollment and registration software system. The majority of "possible stop-outs" were first-generation university students originating from low-SES public and low-SES private high schools and disproportionately situated within the "general" curriculum. Furthermore, four continuing-generation students who stopped out were in the "general" curriculum and had originated from mid- to low-SES schools. Unfortunately, whether they reenrolled at a community college or another broad-access university is unknown. As a result, to avoid the assumption that these students did not achieve a degree elsewhere and plan to never return, we use Tinto's (1993) term *possible stop-out.*

ANALYSIS

Because our study was a subinvestigation, the same team of researchers and coinvestigators who conducted first- and second-round interviews also participated in the open coding of essay responses and interviews. Together, we as authors developed nuanced codes for axial coding of the three sources. Generated queries and notes were exchanged, reviewed, and discussed between authors to ensure a similar interpretation and understanding of data and nuance code meanings.

Essay and interview transcriptions were coded using NVivo 8 qualitative software and analyzed inductively (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996; Creswell, 1998) to generate original coding schemes. An open coding technique (Corbin & Strauss, 2007) was used to identify general themes, and axial coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to create a structured organization of concepts and subconcepts. Selective coding helped to identify the main themes used to organize the final stages of the analysis and interpretation of the data (refer to Appendix C for a complete list of codes and data reduction process with raw data examples).

For the first part of the study, reflective essays and first-round interview transcripts were coded for general themes. For example, emergent themes were messages about college and information resources. Subconcepts coded in the "secondary institution influences" nodes were further refined and combined with relevant material in other nodes through a series of axial codes, with positive and negative coding (reflective of university or nonuniversity pathway messages). These positive and negative codes were further subdivided by various sources of messages (i.e., teachers, counselors, school peers). Queries were run to decipher patterns of experiences as they intersected with specific demographic information (refer to Appendix C for expanded list).

For the second part of this study, second-round interview transcripts were similarly coded. Emergent themes were the connection of high school messages to current experience, current first-year academic challenges, and student recommendations for transition improvement. As part of one example, based on the positive/negative theme results of the first analysis, the second analysis links these results and subdivides them into the following themes: "academic capabilities/performance" and "resilience" (refer to Appendix C for expanded codes).

Demographic information and school characteristics were noted for each Latino case (see Tables A1–A5 in Appendix A). Demographics included in analyses were college generational status, high school attended, and high school curriculum placement. School characteristics collected include city to deduce free/reduced lunch average for appropriate

categorization as borrowed from Hamrick and Stage (1998). Additionally, characteristics about the high school environment and influential factors within were collected. Responses were linked back to students' high school types, descriptions of their curricular placement, and generational status through memos and tracking of returning respondents (refer to Appendix C).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the first part of our findings, generated from the initial interviews and essays, students expressed that they evaluated their ability to succeed in college based on messages their high schools had communicated about university pathways. Students discussed the messages they had internalized and then applied to their own university aspiration and transition narrative. These internalized messages appeared to play a prominent role in the development of their college self-efficacy—their self-perceived ability to attend college and their ultimate decision to attend a university. Students deemed themselves "university ready" based on their curricular placement signaling a university pathway and/or their interpretation of messages about their ability to matriculate.

INITIAL INTERPRETATIONS OF HIGH SCHOOL CULTURE AND UNIVERSITY-GOING MESSAGES

Presence of "College-For-All" Messages and Brokering Strategies

We expected the differences among students who received college-for-all messages to align principally with SES and generation of college-going, but we discovered another unexpected factor that affected students in all these categories: curriculum level (or track). College-for-all messages and brokering patterns were most prominent among students in the advanced curriculum—in other words, the students in the college prep or honors track taking the most advanced classes in the school. Across all school types, 100% (52 of 52) of students in the advanced curriculum and 34% (27 of 79) of students in the general curriculum reported receiving such messages and describing their high school as one that fosters a brokering culture. The vast majority of first- and continuing-generation students in this track, regardless of high school type, described a strong college-going culture. According to their descriptions, these students perceived sizeable resources for college planning at their schools, consistent with the brokering strategy described by Hill (2008). These students described their schools' intense promotion of postsecondary attendance, rigorous academic exposure, and positive relationships with teachers. Although

the majority of continuing-generation students in the general curriculum shared similar college-for-all messaging, we focus our examples on students situated in the advanced curriculum track. Next, we describe their perceptions of how the aforementioned elements were key influences in building students' self-confidence about their ability to attend a university. In particular, they noted academic rigor and the role of positive relationships with teachers. Interestingly, the Latino students in high-SES schools who were exposed to an advanced curriculum made assumptions that all students in their school received the same support and encouragement. However, this was not the case. Although students in the general curriculum met university entrance requirements, two thirds of them reported receiving gatekeeping messages.

In both essays and first-round interviews, students in the advanced curriculum tracks described internalizing positive impressions of their high school's commitment to academic preparation and encouragement of postsecondary attendance. Students noted the presence of high academic expectations and a strong emphasis on postsecondary preparation, identifying their high school culture as an influential factor that shaped their self-confidence regarding their academic skill set and ultimate decision to pursue a university pathway. For instance, in her essay, Gertrude, a continuing-generation student attending a high-SES school in an advanced curriculum track, stated,

> The school I attended had a lot of influence on deciding to go to college because it was a college preparatory school. I took AP classes (to) develop skills that I needed for college and I knew that the next step for me after high school was college because that is what my school always made sure we were ready and prepared (for). At graduation, along with saying our name, they said the college we were going to, and almost everyone was going to either a college or university.

Similarly, Sonya, a first-generation student attending a private low-SES high school and in an advanced curriculum track, stated in her essay, "The high school I attended also played its role in my decision to attend college. Although my high school wasn't a 'rich school' it was definitely a great school. They would always speak to us about all the benefits of attending college." This suggests that despite school SES, students who attended high schools that promoted the college-for-all norm and engaged in brokering strategies had the impression that most of their peers were on a university pathway or college-bound at the very least.

In students' essays and initial interviews wherein they described experiencing college-for-all messages, they revealed the high value their high

school placed on university preparation and their perception of teachers as a key mechanism by which rigorous coursework is delivered to prepare students for the university transition. These students reported supportive and close relationships with their teachers. In her essay, Esperanza, a continuing-generation student attending a high-SES school, stated,

> Ms. (Thomas) was not just my teacher, but close friend I could go to if I needed anything. I use to call her my second mother. She helped me with pretty much everything, letter of recommendations, personal problems such as friends, family etc., writing papers, and kept me focused during four years. She reminded me how hard I'd have to work and how it (was) going to pay off, and so far it has.

Teachers also appeared to play the traditional role of counselors for these students in the advanced curriculum track. Students explained how their teachers provide detailed information regarding the college admissions process, college life, college programs of study, and the financial aid process. Jesús found that teachers helped him "explore universities and colleges all across the United States by comparing strengths and weaknesses abroad." In his essay, he went on to say, "Teachers at (my) high school . . . really were an important factor as to why I chose (this university)." First-generation students in particular described ample access to and utilization of information sources because of the personalized guidance from teachers. Students described the teacher influence and information passed on as an aid to their decision to pursue a particular major or postsecondary institution. In his essay, Jose, a first-generation student attending a low-SES school in an advanced curriculum track, stated,

> As far as my teachers were concerned, they encouraged me to go to college since I did pretty well in honors courses throughout high school. To them it was not a question of if I was going to college or not, but rather where I would go. My economics teacher in particular influenced me to choose economics as my major.

According to these students, these close alliances with teachers ensured the help they needed in information gathering, decision making, and confidence building for "university readiness." These findings inform us that within the schools employing a brokering strategy, resources and commitment take shape in the form of relationships between these teachers and students. Additionally, teacher expectations and these students' perceptions of what these expectations entail are also a form of resource and commitment.

On a cautionary note, six of eight students who attended high-SES schools and were in the advanced curriculum track communicated an

awareness of the inequalities among university recruitment and transition practices at their high school and unequal opportunities for assistance with the university search and choice process. Consistent with the brokering strategy, students described perceiving their high school as an institution that typically promoted four-year university attendance at selective institutions while dedicating ample resources to the establishment of networks with such universities. As Iris shared in her interview, she had never considered that college was not an option after high school because she "had always been . . . told, 'Well, you got to get into a good college.'"

However, students like Iris attending high-SES schools also shared their awareness of being a small ethnic minority within their school and being overlooked by some university bridge programs designed to assist historically underrepresented students in their university transition process. For example, Miguel, another student from the same school as Iris, speculated,

> Maybe it's like our background, our location . . . ([low SES] high) school has . . . a (bridge program) representative . . . going there regularly. Never once did I hear or see anything about (this bridge program) at my school. It was never advertised. I went to my Dad's office at (a [low SES]) school, there was like a poster, flyers out everywhere, so that surprised me. OK, there's like none of that at my school. Like (my [high SES] high school) was predominantly White . . . Anglo school.

Such comments suggest that high school and university outreach partnerships trying to increase minority university access may be making the assumption that students like Iris and Miguel who attend high-SES schools may not be interested in or benefit from the transition services that bridge programs offer. Unlike with their high-SES counterparts, knowledge of bridge and other targeted programs to assist with university transitions was mostly accessible to students within low- to middle-SES high schools, where students discussed their schools engaging what can be characterized as clearinghouse and traditional linking strategies. These strategies and the associated messages students reported receiving are reviewed in the following section.

Presence of Gatekeeping Messages and Clearinghouse/Traditional Strategies

Students in the general curriculum track generally heard gatekeeping messages, not college-for-all messages, whether they were within middle- or low-SES high school types or first- and continuing-generation students. Sixty-six percent (52 of 79) of students in the general curriculum track and only 12% (6 of 52) of students in the advanced curriculum track

described experiencing such high school contexts marked by gatekeeping and an extremely limited college-going culture. Their explanations are consistent with Hill's description of the clearinghouse and traditional strategies. Students expressed an awareness of differing curricular tracks promoting a variety of post–high school pursuits. They expressed that noncollege pathways were promoted for some—a gatekeeping message—whereas others were encouraged to pursue college. This was most obvious among what we term "interloper" students—those who, for one reason or another, happened to have exposure to both advanced curriculum classes and general curriculum classes. This inconsistency, coupled with an unequal distribution of information about postsecondary schools, appeared to leave these students to reconcile competing messages about expected educational trajectories for them and their peers. It is important to note that such gatekeeping messages were entirely absent from essays and interviews of students attending high-SES schools, regardless of generational status.

After examining students in the advanced curriculum, we now consider those in the general curriculum. In the following section, students from low- and mid-SES schools describe their rationale for developing a disposition toward attending a university despite messages that limited such goals. These students were guided toward joining the workforce or a community college after graduation. They also discussed lower academic expectations and lack of rigor, along with negative relationships with teachers and counselors. We focus our examples on those situated within the general curriculum because they provide the voice of the majority.

Students from low- and mid-SES high schools, particularly those who were first-generation college students, reported that their school promoted high school graduation as the terminal educational goal rather than postsecondary educational pursuits—a behavioral hallmark of the gatekeeping function. Teachers were described as being minimally concerned with framing high school as a stepping stone to postsecondary studies. These students discussed negative experiences wherein teachers' academic expectations of them were low. According to these students, teachers emphasized the acquisition of blue-collar trade skills and a "Let's get them graduated" rather than a "Let's prepare them for college" mentality, according to Juan Carlos. In his essay, he stated that "(the) emphasis was not getting their students to college. It was just getting their students out the door." Such messages appear to communicate that a postsecondary pathway may not be for everyone, leading students to prepare for or consider a noncollege pathway. Furthermore, in their descriptions of navigating through the general academic curriculum, students elaborated on how school personnel emphasized community college attendance instead of

(or prior to) university attendance. In her interview, Stephanie stated, "I was worried (about getting admitted). The counselors were telling me . . . that it was easier to go to (the local junior college) first than transfer to (the university)." Those students in the general curriculum who were concentrated in vocational classes were encouraged to attend the local community college in order to better prepare for their trade or ease the transition into a four-year college or university.

Students at low-SES high schools in the general curriculum were expected by teachers to enter into the blue-collar workforce after graduation. Anita, a low-SES high school attendee and general curriculum student, elaborated on teachers' low expectations of students, but this time with regard to high school course curriculum and its lack of rigor. Anita happened to be an "interloper," and in her interview, she stated,

> Sometimes I would get angry because I would feel like I would get cheated out of my education because the teachers would take out assignments from the curriculum because they would think that it's too hard for the students. And I would get mad because . . . I would like a challenge, you know?

Students also discussed how teachers doubted their ability to get into a university. For instance, a general curriculum student attending a low-SES high school, Ana Maria, expressed in her essay, "When I started considering the possibility of attending th(is) university, some teachers doubted that I could make it, and encouraged me to attend a small community college." In addition to getting the sense that their teachers doubted their academic abilities, these students interpreted teacher "warnings" about the rigors of postsecondary coursework to be a form of "discouragement." Carlos, who attended a middle-SES school and was situated in the general curriculum, communicated this sentiment in his essay:

> My teachers were people who would stress students out, discouraging them to attend college. Examples are that they would say "when you're in college, you are on your own." This would fear the minorities, to even apply to a university, they would settle for a community college. Personally I felt that teachers would do this because they didn't see potential in the student's academics for higher education.

Besides negative messages from teachers, students in the general curriculum also reported encounters with their counselors that were negative toward college-going and did not communicate the college-for-all message. Students discussed limited access to their counselors, receiving discouraging messages about the possibility of engaging in university pursuits, and

a general inattentiveness to their college choice needs. They expressed frustration with what they perceived to be extremely limited counseling services, which, according to students, caused them to search for other sources to obtain information about postsecondary pursuits. For example, Christina, from a low-SES school and a general curriculum track, stated in her essay,

> My counselor didn't help me very much at all. She was always too busy to see me and when she did make time for me, she always seemed to be patronizing me and indulging me like I was some ignorant and confused child. I had to look for all of the scholarship applications and college information for myself.

Daniel, from a middle-SES school and general curriculum track, perceived his experience with counselors as one in which they were so pressed for time that they devoted little to no time to postsecondary advising. In his essay, Daniel described the counseling center at his high school as one that held low academic expectations for students, and a school divided into two contrasting missions. Following is his articulation of this internalized message:

> As for the counselors they would only focus on the Honor students, and never do one on one with the mediocre kids. The school would also hire the counselors that . . . didn't have much time to focus on the students. When a student would schedule an appointment for guidance, they always had something else to do, and they bailed on the students majority of the time. The counselor would also discourage (students) not to exceed the credits that were required . . . and they would just motivate them for the required credits, to graduate from high school.

Interloper students enrolled simultaneously in both the general and the advanced curriculum had a unique vantage point to observe how the college-for-all message was being communicated unequally by teachers and counselors. It is important to note that 5% of students reporting gatekeeping messages in both tracks (3 of 58) reported their dual curricular enrollment in general and advanced classes; two were first-generation students and one was a continuing-generation student who attended mid-SES high schools. It was because of their presence within two opposing tracks that these students gained awareness of differing postsecondary expectations. These interloper students were struck by the stark contrast between the elevated set of academic expectations in their advanced coursework and the lower set of expectations they experienced while in the general classes. Aida, a continuing-generation interloper student, serves as an example.

When asked in her interview to discuss her experience in "general" courses versus "advanced," she stated,

> The (general classes) were really different! We hardly did any rigorous work. There was hardly any work from the text book and I was kind of sad. . . . It was just such a dramatic change that I couldn't believe that we had classes like that at the school. . . . I was in shock.

Similarly, first-generation student Guillermo observed the stratified set of expectations for students participating in dissimilar curriculum tracks. He discussed his experience and perception of the differing goals counselors encouraged different types of students, stating,

> They're keeping kids from . . . going to a university. One day (the head counselor) went into my regular social justice class and she was saying that (the local community college) was a great college and (we) should go there . . . and then when she did (the college presentation) in (my) next class . . . which was my AP class, she didn't mention (the local community college) not even once. She talked more about the honors college at the (university). I told her that I was mad. I said, "How come you didn't talk about this in my other class? You just came from the social justice class and you didn't even mention the (university). You were just talking about (local community college) and you come here offering letters of recommendation for the honors college at the (university)! What's up with that?"

From such examples, we can deduce that in any given low- to mid-SES high school engaging in traditional college linking strategies, students can sample the curriculum offerings in stratified ways despite the postsecondary aspirations of the majority. As a result, mixed messages could be at play in, and at odds with, some students' educational aspirations.

We consider Hill's prior findings to be particularly true for our sample of Latino students who attended low-SES high schools and were situated within the general curriculum. Hill found that schools engaging in traditional college-linking strategies tend to have low rates of college enrollment because these schools have limited resource structures and commitment toward college planning. In addition, students who attended middle-SES schools (and some low-SES) described cultures and messages with a limited organizational commitment to equally distributing access to college resources and messages among students that appear to reflect clearinghouse strategies. In addition, there is an approach that is highly dependent on the individual initiative of the student. The experiences of

continuing-generation students who attended these schools highlight the dynamics that can occur under such conditions. First-generation students in our study reported less access to such support within the same high school contexts. The present study adds a dimension to Hill's typology by illustrating that, in addition to distinctly different messages about post-secondary pathways, students' curricular placement may be an additional mechanism by which high schools stratify college-linking efforts and, ultimately, shape their college choice process. This complex dynamic appears to further contour students' perceptions about their ability to attend a four-year university.

Now we examine how students reinterpreted those college-going messages they received in high school after a semester/year of college. The findings from the second part of our study are generated from the follow-up interviews, highlighting what happens to these students academically once enrolled full time in a university. We find that they experienced a disturbance of their prior mindset as students and therefore reinterpreted high school messages about college attendance and their ability to persist successfully through their first year at the university.

REINTERPRETATIONS OF UNIVERSITY-GOING MESSAGES DURING FRESHMAN YEAR

In follow-up interviews, students expressed that as they faced challenges in their first semester of college, college-going messages that they received in high school came to mind and affected them negatively. A total of 17 of the 23 students who were initially interviewed also participated in the first-year follow-up interviews after the first semester. All but one articulated facing an academic struggle regardless of the high school type and their position within the curriculum. Overall, as students reflected on past high school messages, they appeared to reinterpret those messages and apply them to their first-year university experience. Among the 16 students reporting an academic struggle, 12 recalled receiving college-for-all messages, and 4 recall receiving gatekeeping messages during high school (see Table 6). As they shared reinterpretations of first-year challenges, they highlighted the following: (a) an underestimation of the workload, (b) poor self-confidence regarding their academic performance in the first year, (c) underpreparedness, and (d) a misconception about advising and faculty accessibility at the university level.

The vast majority of students discussed struggling academically despite having concluded for themselves that they were "university ready." Interestingly, however, certain types of students responded differently to this situation, and this is elaborated next. On the one hand, those who had

been in the advanced curriculum exposed to a college-for-all high school culture that had engaged in brokering strategies felt deceived about their actual readiness. On the other hand, those who had been in the general curriculum and interlopers from gatekeeping high school cultures marked by traditional or clearinghouse strategies felt that perhaps their readiness may be inadequate—they doubted themselves. In addition, students emphasized their realizations about faculty and how their prior assumptions, shaped by their high school messages, contradicted their actual experiences with university faculty. At first, these students resisted seeking help but soon realized that faculty were willing to meet and assist them. The relevance of high school messages regarding these students' academic abilities, how they interpret their academic struggles in the first year of university study, and reconcile preconceptions about university faculty is considered in more depth next.

Perceived Deception About "Readiness" Among Those Who Received "College-For-All" Messages

Nearly all the students (11 of 12 students) in the advanced curriculum track who received college-for-all messages in high school described feeling as though their university academic experience was not what they anticipated, and they felt deceived. For instance, Patricia frustratingly said in her interview,

> I took honors and . . . AP courses and no, my high school didn't prepare me. I had to withdraw from lecture because my professor told me there was no way I was going to dig myself out my hole. I mean . . . I have a 1.5 (GPA). Here you actually have to take school seriously . . . and open a book. In my (honors courses) they just gave you the points for attending and . . . doing the (home)work with some three exams. I thought that was how it was going to be, but . . . it's different. . . my old high school doesn't prepare you for college . . . my [study] habits had to change.

Although they received positive college-for-all messages in high school, these students also discussed having grossly underestimated the difficulty of university-level coursework. These students reported struggling with C and D grades at the university when they were used to As and Bs in high school. Julian recalled in his interview,

> For the course load, I underestimated it. I was one of those people that thought . . . I'm going to come to the university and get a 4.0 GPA and all that. . . . It's not that way, it's not high school anymore and it's really more difficult.

Students had particular expectations regarding the level of difficulty in coursework and the associated homework load. These students also reported disappointment with their overall grades. Seven of 12 students expressed the need to retake courses in science or math because of poor academic performance. One student from a high-SES school shared, "Biology's really hard. I got a D in it. My classes are like really hard, and I'm wondering whether I'll get through with good grades." Unfortunately, these internalized feelings of deception left them questioning their ability to succeed. Students appear to go back to high school messages about their academic ability, compare their current performance, and reassess the validity of those messages as it relates to their context. Such findings suggest that perhaps the brokering strategy and advanced curriculum can connect students to four-year universities, but the strategy and curriculum rigor may not be enough to serve as tools for academic success.

Perceived Inadequacy About "Readiness" Among Those Who Received Gatekeeping Messages

A running theme among all the students interviewed from the general curriculum who received gatekeeping messages in high school (four of the four students) was their extreme apprehension about grades and their ability to stay academically afloat. Students discussed feeling a shift from high to low self-confidence about their ability to academically thrive once they were full-time university students. In her interview, Cecilia acknowledged, "It's definitely been more challenging (than high school). I find myself questioning . . . whether I can do this still." Similarly, Imelda stated in her interview, "I think when I started (at the university) I actually (felt) like I didn't belong here. I didn't think I was smart enough to be here compared to other people." These students appeared to second-guess their university attendance and ability to compete academically with their peers.

Three of these four students discussed their decision to dual enroll at the university and the local community college just to remain in good academic standing. For instance, Monique stated in her interview, "(I) took math here (at the university), and I actually ended up dropping because I was failing. So I looked into (the local community college)'s eight-week class, and ended up finding one over (there) so. . . I'm (con-) currently enrolled . . . to . . . get through." Students like Monique turned toward dual enrollment as a means to persist given her insufficient academic preparation.

It is important to note that all three students from the low-SES high schools who had been in the general curriculum and recalled receiving gatekeeping messages demonstrated resilience in overcoming the

stereotypes associated with their ethnic identity and/or high school reputation. For instance, in her essay, Crystal wrote,

> The school I attended played a role in my decision to go to college because it's not thought of as high achieving. It has the reputation of pregnant students, and gang affiliated teenagers. As a former (student) I feel like it's my responsibility to give a new light to (this school) . . . to let (the school) know that people who come from (this school) are not people with low performing abilities . . . and can go to college.

Here, Crystal shows resilience in the face of discouragement and a curricular placement not conducive to a university pathway. Surprisingly, however, such students dropped this resilient approach in the face of the unexpected academic challenges at the university. Instead, they were among those most likely to question if they belonged at the university, recalling past high school messages that favored a nonuniversity pathway. Some contemplated stopping out, and they reported apprehension about future grade outcomes.

Resistance to Engaging in Help-Seeking Behavior

These aforementioned four students who felt inadequate and originated from low- and mid-SES high schools characterized by gatekeeping messages and traditional college-linking practices possessed a preconceived idea that faculty would not assist them with academic planning and mentoring. Three of these four students voiced having an initial fear of interacting with faculty with regard to advising. When high school teachers' informed students that, "in college, no one was going to care and no one was going to chase them to get the work done," this appeared to translate into a warning for some students. These students appeared to anticipate that professors would not be accessible or willing to work with them as they encountered academic challenges, so they resisted seeking help from them. We suspect that perhaps high school teachers could have meant that university faculty would not engage in customary high school oversight, such as reminding them of assignments or providing make-up exam opportunities or real-time progress reports. Instead, these students discussed finding faculty accessible and engaging upon being asked for assistance. These students may have persisted in college because they did choose to seek help despite their fears, and they talked about how they were relieved that they had an apparent misconception regarding university faculty. For example, Yvonne stated in her interview, "It actually went really well. I didn't expect professors to be so willing to

meet up with the students just to explain certain aspects of the whole or just talk about how we were doing in class." Students had to rethink their initial perception about the faculty–student relationship. This suggests that those without self-initiative to question prior conceptions about faculty may be more susceptible to forgoing assistance from them and instead may limit their sources of support to teacher assistants or peers, or not seek help at all. This could further their relative vulnerability to failing courses and eventually stopping out.

We move now from examining students' behavior to considering students' recommendations and advice about how high school and university actors could improve the college transition process for them. Next, we highlight students' sentiments about the shocking and drastic change lecture hall classes represented. They also discussed their experience of the realization that they lacked the necessary scholastic skills required at the university level.

STUDENT-VOICED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR UNIVERSITY TRANSITION IMPROVEMENT

The top two recommendations stated by students in the second portion of our study are: (a) for high school teachers, counselors, and bridge program instructors to help students improve their study habits in preparation for a full-time university workload, and (b) for high school teachers and bridge program instructors to modify the delivery of instruction to more closely align it with that of the postsecondary setting.

With regard to study habits, students in both the general and advanced curriculum from across all high school SES types, and regardless of generational status, recommended that high school and bridge program teachers place a greater emphasis on teaching specific study habits that would include time management and note-taking skills. Miguel, from a high-SES high school, noted, "When I got here, I noticed that how I took notes (in high school) was not working here in my new classes. I think we need way more help taking notes . . . they tell us here (in the summer bridge program), time management, time management, time management." Revisiting Monique experience, from a low-SES high school and general curriculum track, stated, "My teachers, they never taught me to be fast you know, taking notes, writing what they say . . . I still don't know."

Finally, the majority of students stated a dislike for the incongruence between their high school and university classroom settings. Students experienced an awkward adjustment to the impersonal nature of large lecture halls. Students suggested that high schools consider adopting a teaching approach that closely mirrors college lecture formats in order to prepare

them for university-level instructional delivery. We revisit Iris's interview; this honor student stated,

> It's not like high school because it's hard when you have 200 other people in a room. (It) was a really big adjustment for me not having that personal connection, one-on-one time and they don't care if you show up. . . . Maybe my old school should change the expectation or college classes can be cut into smaller one. We have discussion group, but . . . it's not the same.

In support of Kirst and Venezia (2004)'s call for an improved partnership between K–12 and four-year universities, we highlight students' suggestions about improving their transition and success experience. Their recommendation suggests a belief that such an approach could better prepare them and students like them as they navigate through university coursework and mitigate university classroom culture shock.

LIMITATIONS

The present study has several limitations. First, the scope of this study requires students to interpret messages about their academic capabilities as they relate to college matriculation while in high school without an actual investigation of the actual high school contexts. Therefore, only prominent actors that emerged as key school influencers of college attendance (i.e., counselors, teachers) in students' retrospective accounts were considered. We acknowledge the existence and importance of other key factors that shape students' college choice and aspirations, such as school administrators, tutors, independent educational counselors, family members, neighborhoods, and extracurricular activity figures such as coaches, musical directors, and so on. The design of the study cast a wide net, allowing for the inclusion of such factors. However, our analyses were dominated by the two most prominent actors that saturated students' essay responses and interview discussions.

A second limitation is that only traditional-age Latino students immediately transitioning into a four-year college are considered. The scope of this article does not consider the experiences of those Latinos delaying matriculation or matriculating into a two-year college. Third, the demographics collected did not require students to identify specific subgroups and immigration status (e.g., Mexican American, Cuban immigrant). It is possible to infer that the vast majority are of Mexican heritage, given the discussion in their essays. However, there are no concrete numbers on subgroups given that such data collection was not included in the research design. Similarly, it is difficult to identify if Latinos in this study are recent

immigrants. Fourth, analysis for this particular article did not disaggregate by gender because the themes that emerged on these topics did not indicate marked variation along this dimension. Each of these limitations presents an opportunity for further investigation.

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, findings suggest that different and even competing messages appear to coexist both across and within certain high school types. The messages emphasized within certain curricular tracks seemed to shape students' self-perceptions regarding their ability to attend the university and be successful once there. Our study builds on the work of McDonough (1997), Perna et al. (2008), and Hill (2008), in that high schools and associated internalized messages appear to not only constrain or enhance students' postsecondary transition experiences but also shape their response to the academic challenges encountered in their first year of university study.

When discussing high school context, we need to consider the relevance of high school messages in how students internalize those messages, and include the influence that curriculum placement may have in students' university transition experience, first-year persistence behavior, and, ultimately, self-efficacy. From the findings, we can infer that all these aspects may inform their pre-university self-efficacy, where students return to those messages and experiences to reassess their academic abilities. Perhaps, in addition to thinking about school resources as a form of counselor time, knowledge, negotiating, and assistance, another factor to be considered in college linking is how it intersects with curriculum placement and the relationships and experiences students have with teachers and counselors in these curricular tracks. Somewhat similar to McDonough's (1997) findings that quality in counseling matters, our findings demonstrate that in addition to counseling, the quality of teacher interaction and tone of those relationships matter as well. From the second part of our study, we see how students reference and draw on those interactions when reassessing their self-confidence and ability to cope with academic challenges.

Similar to the idea of framing introduced by Fine (1991), all these factors combine over the course of a student's trajectory into college to frame his or her interpretations of, and responses to, his or her challenging first-year circumstances. Although we did not interview students who stopped out of the university, we can speculate that the contextual features, messages, and student understandings discussed earlier may have played a role in their decisions to depart. Without active and direct interventions to dispel students' assumptions and support their academic success and

persistence, the challenges presented by their organizational contexts combine with prior messages to frame student interpretations of themselves as potentially noncompetent students. An accumulation of these experiences and circumstances operates as a structural force, systematically pushing them toward dropout behavior. Nearly all the students in the study revealed prior messages that led them to either doubt themselves and question their decisions to enroll at the university, or jeopardize their own persistence through hesitation to seek help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Our study is a careful exploration of students who have taken a university pathway and what happens when messages about university readiness and ability are interpreted at one point in time (the summer right after high school graduation) and how these messages are reinterpreted and recalibrated at another point in time (post–freshman year) to inform their college self-efficacy. What makes this article unique is that we are able to see these interpretations play out among the same sample of students over time. What is also interesting is that the majority of students entering with the same "university ready" mindset and confidence but within different curricular tracks end up with their academic confidence deflated following a full-time semester. Even though some schools promote university pathways, once students are at the university, their ability to be successful becomes problematic.

Increase Academic Rigor and Expectations Across the Board

Several ways of improving "university readiness" involve fostering academic capital—by implementing intense workloads, increasing exam difficulty, and refining academic skill sets to lessen the rate of university remediation and aid academic adjustment (Attinasi, 1989; Kirst & Venezia, 2004). Academic capital is the level and intensity of experienced academic rigor (McDonough, 1997; Walpole, 2003). The multifaceted concept of academic rigor includes course content and instruction that challenges students to operate above their grade level, incorporates an extensive and demanding workload, and overall, calls for high expectations from all school actors. It is important that high school and bridge program educators continually teach and review important academic skill sets such as note-taking, study skills, and time management. Noted by previous research and further supported by our findings, exposure to academic rigor is the single most important factor in college readiness, college-going behaviors, and success (Adelman, 2006; Attinasi, 1989; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005;

Perna, 2004). Such readiness expands academic capital to give students the adequate tools to persist through first-year challenges and ultimately through university graduation (Attinasi, 1989). According to Gándara (1995), students from low-SES backgrounds typically do not have access to a curriculum that provides them with appropriate courses to gain university admission or to develop the academic habits necessary to facilitate university success. Findings in the present study reveal that students from high-SES schools with positive messages about their ability to succeed at the university share difficulties in academic performance during their first year similar to those of their lower SES peers. It is strongly suggested that high schools and university bridge programs elevate the bar on academic rigor and expectations.

The Role Universities Can Play to Improve Transitions and First-Year Academic Challenges

It appears as though students in our study attending high-SES schools may be a group toward which college bridge programming and other university retention efforts are not targeted. Outreach programs may be forgetting to especially target continuing-generation Latino students attending high-SES schools. These students also described struggling upon enrollment in the university, particularly given that they were not among the very highest achieving in their high-SES high school. We can only infer that existing assumptions about privilege within these types of high schools could be a contributing factor in their relative neglect. Findings reveal that students were only able to acquire information about transition programs when it was divulged through chance meetings or exposure to other academic settings or social networks with ties to other schools to which such programs were targeted. Given that students attending high-SES high schools in general curricular tracks also reported academic struggles in their first year, we encourage bridge programs to reconsider the inclusion of this particular group in their recruitment strategies because these types of students within these types of schools could also benefit from college bridge programs.

Although this study is not a review of bridge programs, given the stated academic challenges students faced within their first-year experience, we bring into question the effectiveness of such programs. In response to Tierney and Hagedorn's (2002) call for additional empirical research on such programs, some researchers have engaged in a longitudinal study evaluating summer development programs at eight Texas community colleges and one four-year university as in 2009 (Wathington et al., 2011). They quantitatively examined the impact and effectiveness of summer

developmental programs on participating students. In their early findings regarding the impact on student outcomes during the summer program, Wathington et al. (2011) found that participants were more likely to pass college-level math and writing classes within the summer program and more likely to attempt to enroll in higher level coursework in writing and reading during the subsequent regular semester. In their next report, the authors intend to share findings of student outcomes after the completion of their entire first year of college and persistence into their second. Although the preliminary results inform our knowledge about program implementation, the report does not consider if and how the high school experience relates to the overall development and transition of students attending four-year universities.

In contrast, our study explores the relevance of high school messages in shaping how Latino university students respond to the high school-to-university transition and first-year challenges. Given our rather sobering first-year findings—with 16 of 17 students stating that they faced intense academic challenges—process- and outcomes-based studies like that of Wathington et al. (2011) could be beneficial in improving the transitional experiences of students. Future research that attends to such evidence while noting the differences within Latino subgroups and between Latinos and Latinas, as well as considering their high school origins, can complement and build on our research.

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APPENDIX A

Table A1. High School Categorization

Category	School SES (free/reduced lunch average %)
Public High SES (17 schools)	4%–23%
Public Middle SES (18 schools)	25%–49%
Public Low SES (27 schools)	50%–85%
Total Publics	62
Private High SES (2 schools)	6%
Private Low SES (6 schools)	49%–95%
Total Privates	8

Source: NCES Common Data of Core 2007-2008 cohorts for lunch program rates for Ill., Or., Tx. schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2007–2008)*; March 2007 Arizona Department of Education: Health and Nutrition Services, free and reduce lunch reports* (Arizona Department of Education, 2007).

Table A2. Curriculum Placement and Message by College Generational Status and High School SES

Continuing-Generation	Advanced Curriculum N/131 (%)	General Curriculum N/131(%)	Total Number of Students N/131 (%)	Advanced Curriculum Received CFA* Message	Advanced Curriculum Receiving GK** Message	General Curriculum Receiving CFA* Message	General Curriculum Receiving GK** Message
High SES	4 (3%)	8 (6%)	12 (9%)	4 (3%)	0	8 (6%)	0
Mid SES	3 (2%)	5 (4%)	8 (6%)	3 (2%)	1 (1***) (1%)	5 (4%)	0
Low SES	10 (8%)	13 (10%)	23 (18%)	9 (7%)	0	3 (2%)	10 (8%)
Continuing-Generation Total	*17 (13%)*	*26 (20%)*	*43(33%)*	*16 (12%)*	*1(1%)*	*16 (12%)*	*10 (8%)*
First-Generation	**Advanced Curriculum N/131 (%)**	**General Curriculum N/131 (%)**	**Total Number of Students N/131 (%)**				
High SES	4 (3%)	7 (5%)	11 (8%)	4 (3%)	0	7 (5%)	0
Mid SES	5 (4%)	10 (8%)	15 (11%)	5 (4%)	3 (2***) (2%2%)	2 (2%)	8 (6%)
Low SES	26 (20%)	36 (27%)	62 (47%)	21 (16%)	2 (2%)	2 (2%)	34 (26%)
First-Generation Total	*35 (27%)*	*53(40%)*	*88 (67%)*	*30 (23%)*	*5(4%)*	*11(8%)*	*42(32%)*
Grand Total	52 (40%)	79 (60%)	131 (100%)	46 (35%)	6 (5%)	27 (21%)	52 (40%)

*CFA=college-for-all
**GK=gatekeeping
***Interloper within

Table A3. Possible Stop-Out Snapshot: Curriculum Placement by College Generational Status and High School SES

Continuing-Generation	Advanced Curriculum Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)	General Curriculum Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)	Total Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)
High SES	0	0	0
Mid SES	0	2 (11%)	2 (11%)
Low SES	0	2 (11%)	2 (11%)
Continuing-Generation Possible Stop-Out Total	*0*	*4 (100%)*	*4 (22%)*
First-Generation	**Advanced Curriculum Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)**	**General Curriculum Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)**	**Total Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)**
High SES	0	0	0
Mid SES	1 (6%)	5 (28%)	6 (34%)
Low SES	1 (6%)	7 (39%)	8 (44%)
First-Generation Possible Stop-Out Total	*2 (11%0*	*12 (67%)*	*14 (78%)*
Grand Total Students	2	16	18 (100%)

Table A4. Curriculum Placement by High School Type

School Type	Number of Students in Advanced Curriculum N/131 (%)	Number of Students in General Curriculum N/131 (%)	Total Number of Students N/131 (%)
Enrolled at high-SES high school	8 (6 %)	15 (11%)	23 (18%)
Enrolled at mid-SES high school	8 (6 %)	15 (11%)	23 (18%)
Enrolled at low-SES school	36 (27 %)	49 (38 %)	85 (65%)
Total Number of Students	52 (40 %)	79 (60%)	131 (100%)

Table A5. Possible Stop-Out Snapshot: Curriculum Placement by High School Type

School Type	Number of Students in Advanced Curriculum Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)	Number of Students in General Curriculum Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)	Total Number of Possible Stop-Outs N/18 (%)
Enrolled at high-SES high school	0	0	0
Enrolled at mid-SES high school	0	7 (39 %)	7 (39%)
Enrolled at low-SES school	2 (11%)	9 (50 %)	11 (61%)
Total Number of Students	2 (11%)	16 (89 %)	18 (100%)

Table A6. First-Year Sentiments About Academic Performance

School Type	Total Students in Follow-up Interview N=17	Students Reporting Difficulties in First Year N/17 (%)	Type of High School Messages	Students Reporting Feeling Deceived N/16	Students Reporting Feeling Inadequate N/16 (%)	Students From Advanced Curriculum N/17 (%)	Students From General Curriculum N/17 (%)
High-SES high school	12 (71%)	11 (65%)	CFA*	11 (69%)	0	12 (71%)	0
Mid-SES high school	2 (12%)	2 (12%)	CFA*/GK**	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)	1 (6%)
Low-SES high school	3 (18%)	3 (18%)	GK**	0	3 (19%)	0	3 (18%)
Total	17 (100%)	16 (94 %)	-	12 (75%)	4 (25%)	13 (76%)	4 (24 %)

*CFA=college-for-all

**GK=gatekeeping

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APPENDIX B1

Excerpts From Bridge Program Syllabus

Purpose of the Course

The purpose of this course is to provide students with the academic skills, success strategies and resources necessary to navigate the university system. Students will receive a comprehensive orientation in an environment of high expectations, supportive faculty, staff and peers, and a caring community. Additionally, the course will challenge students to begin reflecting on their own academic choices and path to college. The course is designed to cover the following areas: academic skills, effective student management, diversity and multiculturalism, involvement, and health and wellness.

Course Objectives

- To enhance students' academic and success skills in a supportive, yet challenging environment.
- To provide students with a comprehensive orientation to the university.
- To allow students to begin to develop their own definitions of individual identity and multiculturalism.
- To challenge students to begin reflecting on their academic choices.
- To provide students with an overview of involvement opportunities.
- To set students on a path of success at the university.

Course Outline

PROMPT 1:

Journal Reading and Questions:

Rhoades, G., Kiyama, J. M., McCormick, R., & Quiroz, M. (2006). Local cosmopolitans and cosmopolitan locals: Toward new models of professionals in the academy. (Under review at the time of data collection.)

Please submit a 2-page response to the following questions. Papers should be typed, double-spaced with 12-point font. Papers should be submitted by Friday, June 15 at 5 pm through D2L©.

Essay Prompt

You have just read about three former [Bridge Program] students' path to college.

- What did your path to college look like?
- Who or what influenced your decision to attend the university?
- What are your educational goals for the university?

PROMPT 2:

Journal Reading and Questions:
Choose *at least* one of the following:

Fann, A. (2002). Native college pathways in California: A look at college access for American Indian high school students. Paper presented at the Association for the Study of Higher Education Annual Meeting. Sacramento, CA.

Perna, L. W. (2000). Differences in the decision to attend college among African Americans, Hispanics, and Whites. *The Journal of Higher Education.* 71(2): 117-141.

Teranishi, R., Ceja, M., Antonio, A., Allen, W., & McDonough, P. (2004). The college-choice process for Asian Pacific Americans: Ethnicity and socioeconomic class in context. *The Review of Higher Education.* 27(4): 527-551.

Please submit a 2-page response to the following question. Papers should be typed, double-spaced with 12-point font. Papers should be submitted by: Friday, June 29 at 5 pm through D2L©.

Essay Prompt

What role did each of the following play in your decision to attend college (please provide details)?

- Teachers
- Counselors
- Friends
- The school you attended
- Parents
- Siblings and other family members
- Media
- Any other factors that were influential for you

PROMPT 3:

Journal Reading and Questions:

Davidson, A.L. (1997). Marbella Sanchez: On Marginalization and Silencing. In M. Seller and L. Weis (Eds.) *Beyond Black and White: New Faces and Voices in U.S. Schools.* Albany, NY: State University of New York Press. 15–44.

Johnson, A.G. (1997). The Trouble We're In: Privilege, Power and Difference. In *Privilege, Power, and Difference.* New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Companies. 15–39.

Please submit a 2-page response to the following questions. Papers should be typed, double-spaced with 12-point font. Papers should be submitted by: Friday, July 6 at 5 pm through D2L©.

Essay Prompt

- How do you describe your identity?
- What do you wish people knew about you that you typically don't share?
- One of the readings talked about a student's experiences feeling marginalized. When have you felt marginalized or silenced? When have you felt like you really mattered? Please describe those situations.

PROMPT 4:

Journal Reading and Questions:

Haycock, K. (2006). Promise abandoned: How policy choices and institutional practices restrict college opportunities. *The Education Trust.* 1-27.

Please submit a 2-page response to the following questions. Papers should be typed, double-spaced with 12-point font. Papers should be submitted by: Thursday, July 19 at 5pm through D2L©.

Essay Prompt

This week's article talked about the responsibility that colleges and universities have in getting students to college and keeping them in college.

1. What role did the university play in getting you to college?
2. What role should the university play in keeping you in college and helping you to graduate?
3. What role will you play in staying in college and graduating?
4. Would there be anything that would stop you from completing college? Please describe.

APPENDIX B2

First Round Interview Protocol

1. As a child, what were your early recollections about college?
2. When did you realize that college was something that you can pursue?
3. Who were the people giving you messages about attending college? Please describe the type of messages you were given.
4. Who encouraged you to pursue college? Who did not? Why?
5. What was the role of your parents; friends; counselors, teachers, others at this stage?
6. Can you provide a time line (by year) of what you did in high school to prepare for college? (ex. Started looking at schools my 9th, PSAT the 10th, apply to schools 12th)
7. When it came time to exploring colleges, how many schools were you considering? Which was your dream school?
8. How many schools did you apply to? Which ones? Why?
9. What was the status for each institution: admit or denied; financial aid packages?
10. How did you decide to attend this particular school? Explain your decision-making process.
11. As you were thinking about and deciding to attend college, who were the individuals who helped you in the process?
12. When did you start forming expectations about your college experience? What are/were they?
13. Did you participate in any precollege programs to help you prepare for college?
14. Please describe your community and high school environment: demographics, who attends higher education; values, etc.
15. What types of things did you do in high school to learn about your college opportunities? What sources did you rely on?
16. Did you experience any obstacles or barriers to attend college?
17. Are you happy with your decision to attend this university?
18. Please explain how you utilized the Internet to learn and about apply to colleges.

19. What do you plan to do after college? (i.e., graduate school, career, work, etc.)
20. Please talk about your experiences with peers from other racial and ethnic diversity groups since entering the bridge program. Are they similar or different than before coming to the university?
21. What did you expect your experiences with people from different racial and ethnic groups would be like, what were your expectations based on? How will these experiences affect the rest of your education here?
23. Has your outlook on any social issues changed since your participation in the bridge program?
24. Do you think you've become more comfortable or less comfortable in dealing with others who are different than you?
25. Overall, how do you think your bridge program experience has affected you academically?

APPENDIX B3

Second-Round Interview Protocol

Transition process

1. Talk with me about how your experience at the university been so far? How do you feel about your decision to attend the university? Do you feel like you are a part of the university community? What has been your most challenging experience? Your best experience?
2. Is college life or the classroom course load what you expected?
3. How have your classes been? What's been your most challenging? Your favorite?
4. Please describe the nature of your interactions with professors or classmates in your classes.
5. What do you do when you are not in class? Describe a typical day for you.
6. Describe the group of friends that you usually hang out with. How did you meet these people?
7. What clubs/organizations/programs have you become involved in? What made you decide to get involved in these activities?
8. What sources of support have you found at the university? (probe for financial support—are they working, do they have loans, grants, academic support, etc.?)
9. What has been the biggest lesson that you've learned about yourself so far at the university?
10. How do your experiences differ from your friends from high school who did not attend college?
11. Has your relationship with your family changed since coming to the university? If so, how? What is life like living away from home? Or, living at home but now in college?

College-choice process

12. When you were applying to college(s), who helped you get information about the following topics?
    a. Applications/deadlines
    b. FAFSA
    c. Scholarships
    d. Taking tests
    e. Logistics—getting transcripts, letters of recommendation

13. How would you describe the role that your family has played in getting you to college? What role do they play now? (if they say supportive, motivated, sacrifice, probe for more information)
14. How are you paying for college?
15. What advice would you give a middle school student who is starting to think about attending college?
16. What advice would you give high school counselors to help their students be prepared for college?

APPENDIX C

Analysis Plan

Full List of Codes and Data Reduction Process

Interpretations of High School Culture and University-going Messages
Precollege experiences
Data Sources: Precollege essay; Precollege first-round interview

Open Codes/ Parent Nodes →		**Axial Codes/Child Nodes**
College Choice →	College Types →	• In-state/out-of-state • Community college/university/trade • Applications

The counselors were telling me . . . that it was easier to go to (the local junior college) first than transfer to (the university)." – Stephanie/Interview

	College Information→	• Timing • Sources -Counselor -Teachers - Family -Recruitment officer -Coaches/other instructors -Online • Barriers/facilitators

"I had to look for all of the scholarship applications and college information for myself." – Christina/Essay

Secondary Environment →	• Precollege programs →	• Honors • General classes • Clubs/arts/athletics
	• Recruitment • Teaching • Counseling	• Location • History
	• Local Community→	• College-for-all/encouragement • Gatekeeping/barriers/discouragement
	• Secondary influences →	• Sources -Counselor -Teachers - Family -Recruitment officer - Coaches/other instructors

"I took AP classes (to) develop skills that I needed for college and I knew that the next step for me after high school was college because that is what my school always made sure we were ready and prepared (for)." – Gertrude/essay

Open Codes/ Parent Nodes →	**Axial Codes/Child Nodes**	
College Expectations →	• Academics • Occupational Goal	

"Becoming an educator has always been a dream of mine so deciding on being an education major was not that challenging." – Jesus/Essay

College Aspirations →	• Motivation → • Self-efficacy → • Desired College	• Sources - Self - Others • Academic capabilities • Locus of control

"It is up to me to be successful and no one else."– Geraldo/Essay

Demographics →	• Gender • City • Ethnicity • Generation status→ • High school→	• First/continuing • Low SES • Middle SES • High SES

↕ Linking of Sources↕
Reinterpretations of University-going Messages
College experiences
Data Source: Second-round interview

Open Codes/ Parent Nodes →	**Axial Codes/Child Nodes**	
Reflection on high school experience →	• Classroom setting • Relationship with teachers • Comparison of grade performance • College choice • Honors/general curriculum →	• Academic rigor -Deception/inadequacy

"I thought that was how it was going to be, but . . . it's different . . . my old high school doesn't prepare you for college . . . my [study] habits had to change." - Patricia

First-year academic experience →	• Challenges → • Accessing help → • Resilience	• Grades/workload/preparedness • Faculty • Teachers' assistants • Peers

Open Codes/ Parent Nodes →	**Axial Codes/Child Nodes**	
"I didn't expect professors to be so willing to meet up with the students just to explain certain aspects of the whole or just talk about how we were doing in class." – Yvonne		
Advice/recommendations to prepare for college →	• Message to high school/ university actors →	• Study habits • Instructional delivery
"Maybe my old school should change the expectation or college classes can be cut into smaller one." – Iris		
Demographics →	• Gender • City • Ethnicity • Generation status→ • High school→	• First/continuing • Low SES • Middle SES • High SES

GUADALUPE F. MARTINEZ was a doctoral student at the time of this research and is currently assistant professor of medicine in the Department of Medicine at the University of Arizona. Research interests include college choice and organizational leadership. A recent publication is "Giving it the ol' college try: Understanding degree commitment among Division I FBS NFL aspirants."

REGINA DEIL-AMEN is an associate professor at the University of Arizona's Center for the Study of Higher Education, with expertise in community colleges. Her recent research explores strategies, challenges, and success among lower income students, including the social networks and career decisions of Latino university students as reflected in this article: Rios-Aguilar, Cecilia & Regina Deil-Amen. 2012. Beyond getting in and fitting in: Leveraging a trajectory of educational success through professionally-relevant social networks. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 11*, 179–196. She has also published extensively on community college students, including this recent article: Deil-Amen, Regina. 2011. Socio-academic integrative moments: Rethinking academic and social integration among two-year college students in career-related programs. *Journal of Higher Education, 82*(1): 54–91.