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UNDERSTANDING HOW INSTITUTIONAL AGENTS FOSTER A CULTURALLY ENGAGING CAMPUS ENVIRONMENT TO FACILITATE LATINX COMPLETION: A MULTICASE STUDY AT HISPANIC-SERVING COMMUNITY COLLEGES IN NEW JERSEY

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by
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Dedications

This dissertation is dedicated to my loving family. To my parents and guardian angels, Joe and Dalila, for teaching me compassion, empathy, and the value of a strong work ethic. You never graduated high school, but you were my biggest cheerleaders and constantly motivated me to reach new heights in education. I lost you during this journey, but I know that you are watching from above. To my wife Colleen and son Joshua, thank you for your love, encouragement, and sacrifice over the last several years. Te quiero mucho!

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Lastly, I would like to thank and acknowledge the mentors that have pushed me to overcome the barriers and obstacles that I experienced as a first-generation Latino college student from Perth Amboy, New Jersey. Gracias for believing in me and for challenging me to be better. Through your guidance, I am an advocate for education and social justice for the communities that I serve.

Abstract

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The purpose of this multicase study was to investigate and understand how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. This multicase study focused on institutional agents at two New Jersey community colleges with high completion rates for Latinx students. Through interviews, observations, and analysis of institutional documents, data on institutional capacity, intentionality, and clarity of purpose were collected to identify patterns among the cases. There were six participants interviewed in this study and the research questions were used to guide the study in exploring cultural relevance, cultural responsiveness, and Latinx completion through the perspective of the institutional agents at each New Jersey Hispanic-serving community college.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Nationally, the Latinx population has risen to 60.1 million or 18.4 % of the U.S. population in 2019 (HACU, 2021). In 1980, with a population of 14.8 million, the Latinx population made up just 6.5 % of the total U.S. population (Flores, 2017). The rapid growth of the Latinx student population, the persistent equity gap, and the focus of college completion policy on community colleges and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) presents a challenge to institutional leaders. Latinx students are not only changing the demographics of the United States, but they are rapidly shifting the landscape of higher education, quadrupling their participation rate from 1990 to 2014 (Kena, et al., 2015). As more Latinx students enter college, the percentage of eligible HSIs is also increasing rapidly. While demographics continue to shift and many higher education institutions in the United States are on the verge of an HSI designation, research suggests that becoming an HSI does not guarantee that an institution is ready to support Latinx student success and completion (Contreras et al., 2008). Given the growing number of institutions that are becoming HSIs, there is a growing sense of urgency to demonstrate what type of leadership is necessary in institutions that seek to truly serve the Latinx student population (Cortez, 2015). We also cannot ignore the significant role of institutional leaders in shaping environments that can increase college success for students (Bensimon, 2007; Stanton-Sálazar, 2001). Consequently, future community college leaders will need to prepare and learn how to address the needs of a growing Latinx student population.

The two-year community college sector is therefore poised to expand alongside the unprecedented growth of the Latinx college student population across the nation. The inequalities in college completion rates highlight the need for community college leaders to design initiatives aimed at increasing participation and reducing the Latinx equity gap. Latinx students are fast becoming the largest minority group seeking postsecondary options (Fry & Taylor, 2013), but beyond accessing college, Latinx students are not making sizable strides in postsecondary attainment. The focus on postsecondary completion and the vital role that community colleges play has become an increasingly important part of the national and state higher education agenda. For elected officials and public administrators concerned with promoting social equity in the provision and delivery of public services, community colleges have become important government organizations that offer opportunities to an increasingly diverse public (Gooden & Maritn, 2014). Increasing the educational levels of Latinx students is an important factor in increasing overall U.S. educational attainment goals, as this student population continues to constitute a significant proportion of the college eligible population. Therefore, a better understanding of the dynamics leading to completion for Latinx students attending community colleges requires attention to the factors that influence their aspirations and success (Tovar, 2015).

Community College Sector

The idea of a community college arose from William Rainey Harper's and J. Stanley Brown's collaborative vision of a European general and vocational education model to meet the needs of underprepared students (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). A growing number of academically weak high school students and those who lacked funds for

higher education led to the development of Joliet Junior College in 1901, which became known as the first American community college (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Over time, the purpose of the community college has expanded to include a variety of different missions such as vocational-technical, adult basic education, and lifelong learning. Inherent in the multiple missions is meeting the changing needs of the communities the colleges serve. Community colleges in many areas of the U.S. have encountered a demographic shift in the members of their service area. Today, the community college sector has been the portal of educational opportunity, individual development, economic power, and social mobility (Gooden & Martin, 2014).

Nearly half of all undergraduate students in the U.S. in the 2014-2015 academic year were enrolled in a two-year institution and half of all bachelor's recipients were at one point enrolled at a community college before transferring to a four-year institution (National Student Clearinghouse, 2017). Public community colleges are attractive options for historically underserved populations (first generation, low income, and minority students) because of accessibility and low cost. Despite low tuition costs and the expected economic returns, a large fraction of community college students tend to drop out before earning a credential or degree. The National Student Clearinghouse (2019) also notes that among students who first enrolled full-time at a two-year public institution in 2012, a little over 46 percent had not received any degree or were no longer enrolled in school six years later. Furthermore, Shapiro et al. (2019) found that the completion rate was only 39 percent for those students that began at a public two-year public institution. However, students who complete degrees at community colleges, then enroll in a four-year college program, have a graduation rate of 72% from a bachelor program,

demonstrating the success and preparedness of community college students who actually transfer (Smith, 2015). Those students who transfer out of community colleges before degree attainment, to four-year institutions had a 62% graduation rate (Smith, 2015).

College Completion

Kanter (2012), defines the completion rate as a measure of the number of individuals within a cohort who graduate or complete their program within a certain amount of time. Within the community college sector, transferring to a four-year institution or earning a credential are also considered in the calculations of the completion rate. In this case study, the completion rate refers to the graduation rate plus the transfer rate for the fall 2017 cohort of Latinx students attending the selected New Jersey Hispanic-serving community colleges.

College completion has been framed as an economic necessity to assure international competitiveness and economic prosperity in a rapidly changing knowledge economy that is reliant on a highly educated workforce (Zumeta & Hunt, 2012). This demand for higher college completion rates comes at a time when public community colleges are facing several related issues that require additional resources if goals are to be met. For example, cuts in state appropriations, increased numbers of underprepared and low-income students, decreasing student financial aid, and rising tuition all have an impact on completion (AASCU State Relations and Policy Analysis Team, 2013). As the student success and college completion agenda continues to build momentum across the nation and in New Jersey, community colleges are experiencing increased pressure to respond accordingly. Consequently, community colleges are under increasing scrutiny to

document performance and implement reforms that will increase college completion rates without increasing costs (Bailey, 2012).

Research on college completion for Latinx students (Contreras et al., 2011; Gandara & Contreras, 2009) has primarily focused on the pathway to college, acknowledging the systemic issues that contribute to low academic preparation in P-12 settings and inhibit academic persistence and success (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Furthermore, despite the many researchers who have mentioned that the Latinx population in the United States has and will continue to increase, the percentage of higher degree attainment still falls short (Cerezo & Chang, 2013; Crisp et al., 2015; Kiyama et al., 2015). As a result, the success outcomes for Latinx students attending HSIs remain a challenge since they experience high attrition rates and low college completion rates in two-year and four-year HSIs (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs)

HSIs are receiving national policy attention as a potential valuable area of focus to increase Latinx higher education degree completion. Since HSIs were first recognized by the federal government in the early 1990s, the number of eligible HSIs has more than doubled in the last twenty years bringing the total in 2019 to 539 (Excelencia in Education, 2020; Santiago et al., 2016). The federal government has invested in the development of HSIs to expand and enhance the institutional capacity, quality, and the educational achievement of Latinx students and other low-income students. However, more institutions now find themselves with larger numbers of Latinx students on campus and are now realizing that some degree of institutional change will need to occur (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015).

HSIs are nonprofit postsecondary institutions with a population of at least 25% undergraduate Latinx students that are eligible for federal designation and potentially Title V grant funding (Santiago et al., 2016). Community college HSIs serve disproportionately high numbers of Latinx students who historically have not had access to higher education, but research demonstrates that student characteristics and resources in these institutions still vary widely (Nunez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2015). HSIs represent only 17% of nonprofit colleges and universities in the U.S., but they enroll two-thirds of all Latinx undergraduate students in 2019 (HACU, 2021). Raising Latinx college transfer and completion rates at HSI community colleges is critical for creating economically sustainable Latinx communities (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Although postsecondary institutions must have a full-time Latinx student enrollment of at least 25 percent to federally qualify as an HSI, higher education institutions with a Latinx student enrollment of 15% to 24% are now referred to as "Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institutions" (Santiago et al., 2016). According to *Excelencia* in Education, there are currently 352 emerging HSIs (Excelencia in Education, 2020). Therefore, as more community colleges approach such Latinx student enrollment percentages, the changing demographic presents opportunities and challenges relative to diversity. It will be important to prepare community college leaders and administrators to effectively manage their changing institutions and promote student success. (Gooden & Martin, 2014)

Campus Climate

Campus climate has been found to be related to retention (Hurtado et al., 2012) and Latinx students can experience forms of exclusion in college that interfere with their development of a sense of belonging and decreases social adjustment (Hurtado, 1996;

Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, experiencing academic and interpersonal validation decreases the impact of experiencing bias or discrimination in a chilly campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012). If students have negative feelings or perceptions about their campus, then students of color like Latinx students may be more likely to fail (Gloria et al., 2001). Subsequently, the level of support received enhances the campus climate, making it more conducive to learning and achieving success.

The influence of an inclusive and equitable campus environment on Latinx students' sense of belonging specifically has been highlighted by the findings in the literature that perceptions of a hostile climate (Nuñez, 2009), perceptions of racial-ethnic tensions (Hurtado & Carter, 1997), and perceptions of a negative climate for diversity (Hurtado & Ponjuan, 2005) have been associated with lower levels of sense of belonging for Latinx students. Therefore, a hostile campus environment impacts a Latinx student's sense of belonging and their academic performance. College climates play an important role in student success. Students elect to remain part of college cultures if the environment is seen as welcoming, supportive, and nondiscriminatory (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). Additional studies regarding college completion have explored the role that college climate plays in student motivation, engagement, and persistence (Hurtado, 1994; Nora & Crisp, 2012). As a result, Latinx students who are likely to complete community college feel welcomed and are involved and engaged on campus.

Statement of the Problem

In 2016, 47% of Latinx high school graduates ages 18 to 24 in the United States were enrolled in college, which is up from 32% in 1999 (Gramlich, 2017). Overall, there were 3.6 million Latinx students enrolled in public and private colleges in the United

States in 2016 (Gramlich, 2017). Furthermore, as of 2018, 24% of the Latinx population have at least a bachelor's degree, compared to 46% for non-Hispanic whites (Excelencia in Education, 2020). Although it is important to recognize the disparities in educational attainment by the Latinx population, it is equally critical to recognize the growth in educational attainment that Latinx students have experienced over time. For example, the number of Latinxs that completed at least a bachelor's degree grew from 10% of the population in 1988 to 15% in 2015 (Ryan & Bauman, 2016). It is also important to underscore that the Latinx community is complex, diverse, and non-monolithic. The population is diverse in terms of ethnic identity, citizenship status, parental citizenship status, and family structure. Nationally, college degree attainment for a diverse group of Latinx students continues to be a challenge, despite the increases in the college aged population and college participation numbers.

According to recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Latinx population in New Jersey has experienced a 15% increase between 2010 and 2016 bringing the total to nearly 1.8 million or 20% of New Jersey's total population. New Jersey ranks seventh in the United States in total Latinx population (Flores, 2017). The median age of the Latinx population in New Jersey was 32, as compared to 47 for the White population in 2018 (Excelencia in Education, 2019). The New Jersey equity gap in degree completion for adults 25 and older continues to persist. For example, the percentage of Latinx adults with an associate degree or higher was at 27% as compared to 52% for all adults in the 2015 cohort (Excelencia in Education, 2019), Currently, six of the eighteen community colleges in New Jersey are designated as HSIs, but there are several additional institutions that are classified as emerging HSIs with Latinx enrollment hovering close to

the 25% threshold. Consequently, understanding how New Jersey community colleges that are designated as HSIs are adapting and changing to meet the needs of their growing Latinx student population becomes critical to increasing student success in the state.

Community colleges continue to serve as the primary gateway for Latinx students to higher education (Perna et al., 2008; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010), not merely with the intent to complete short-term occupational certificates or associate degrees, but in preparation to transfer to four-year institutions (Tovar, 2015). Community colleges are recognizing Latinx enrollment increases but have not demonstrated a strong effort to serve this student population (Contreras et al., 2008). Missing from the discourse is how community colleges transition to an organizational framework where the knowledge and experiences brought by culturally diverse students are acknowledged and valued as a component of student learning (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Laden, 2004; Rendon, 1999).

Raising Latinx college transfer and completion rates at HSIs is critical for creating economically sustainable Latinx communities. Increasing the success of Latinx students improves equity and social mobility, democracy, as well as the economy of local communities and the nation at large (Hurtado et al., 2012). Therefore, evidence-based strategies that focus on enhancing the campus environment to improve student success in community colleges that have the HSI designation and serve Latinx students in New Jersey is key to addressing the equity gap and increasing completion. An inclusive and culturally engaging campus environment is where Latinx students, administrators, faculty, and staff feel welcomed and empowered to express their identity without fear of judgement or discrimination. To address the aforementioned climate and culture issues,

higher education leaders can engage frameworks that allow them to design or redesign campus environments that meaningfully engage the cultural identities of Latinx students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this multicase study was to investigate and understand how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. For the purpose of this study, institutional agents refer to individuals who occupy one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority within the institution, and directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued campus resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Through interviews, observations, and analysis of institutional documents, data on institutional capacity, intentionality, and clarity of purpose will be collected to answer the research questions and identify patterns among the cases. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of college success (Museus, 2014) will be used to guide and present the findings.

This multicase study adds to the current literature on HSI community colleges and how they might support Latinx completion through a culturally engaging campus environment. The majority of the research on HSIs has emphasized the potential of the community college sector to raise college access and completion rates for Latinx students in the states with a large proportion of Latinx students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Santiago, 2006). However, few studies have critically examined and challenged community college HSIs to examine their campus environment and how they intentionally engage and

support Latinx students to increase student success and improve academic outcomes. Furthermore, there is dearth of research regarding New Jersey community college HSIs.

Research Questions

The following research questions will help me to further understand the role of institutional agents and the campus environment in supporting Latinx college completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey:

1) How do institutional agents perceive the HSI designation?
2) How do institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment for Latinx students?
    a) What are the strategies for assessing campus climate?
    b) What are the strategies to responding to the perceived needs of Latinx students?
    c) What are the strategies for making the campus environment culturally relevant to Latinx students?
3) How do institutional agents facilitate completion for Latinx community college students?
    a) What are the perceived barriers and obstacles for Latinx students?
    b) What are the strategies to intentionally engage and support Latinx students?
    c) What are the policies and institutional structures that address Latinx student completion?

Significance of the Study

This study has implications for research, policy, and practice as it relates to HSIs, Latinx completion, and the campus environment. It will be important for institutional

leaders and institutional agents to make sense of their HSI status, how they utilize their positions to enact change, and what organizational programs and services they believe are necessary for Latinx students to achieve success and completion in the community college sector in New Jersey. In New Jersey, the percentage of Latinx adults 25 and older with an associate degree or higher was at 27% as compared to 52% for white adults in the 2015 cohort (Excelencia in Education, 2019). In addition, the Latinx population in New Jersey ranks seventh nationally and has experienced a 15% increase between 2010 and 2016 (Flores, 2017). Therefore, the research might infer that as the Latinx student population continues to increase on the community college campuses in New Jersey, evaluating and examining the current student policies, programs, and practices that can foster positive student engagement will be critical to increasing success and addressing the New Jersey equity gap in degree completion for Latinx students.

Practice

Latinx students attending HSIs have greater academic and financial needs (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013; Nuñez et al., 2011). However, few studies have critically examined and challenged HSIs to raise the bar to better serve the large group of Latinx students and improve their academic outcomes (Contreras & Contreras, 2015). The representation of HSIs within the community college sector is growing and demonstrates tremendous contribution of these institutions to the academic success of Latinx students. Although HSI community colleges can provide welcoming environments and transfer pathways for Latinx students, these institutions can further enhance student experiences and academic outcomes for all students through the development of a positive campus climate. This research study can assist institutional agents within HSIs to understand how Latinx

students are perceiving the campus climate and proactively create a more welcoming educational environment that can propel more Latinx students to achieve their academic potential.

Policy

The results of this study have the potential to influence the development of policy in higher education and specifically within the community college sector. From a public policy perspective, there is a need to close the achievement gaps in community college degree completion and transfer rates, if we are to reduce the Latinx student achievement gap and increase the opportunity for social mobility (Chapa & Schink, 2006; Núñez et al., 2013; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). The research could assist community college stakeholders with identifying and enacting policies and practices that are proactive rather than reactive towards the Latinx students on their campuses.

Research

As the youngest and fastest growing population in the United States, Latinx students are entering postsecondary institutions at substantial rates, driving a surge in the number of HSIs. Research focused on better understanding HSIs is essential as these institutions are critical to the access, success, and overall social mobility of the Latinx student population (Flores & Park, 2013; Gasman, 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Lee, 2011). Building a supportive and culturally engaged campus environment and increasing the quality of relationships with other students and institutional agents is integral to increasing Latinx student success. Consequently, it is important to investigate and understand how the campus environment influences student success and college completion for Latinx students attending HSI community colleges in New Jersey.

Unfortunately, the bulk of the research regarding community college HSIs is focused on states like Texas, California, New York, and Florida. Thus, research on gaining an understanding of how institutional agents at community college HSIs support Latinx students may assist policymakers, practitioners, and community college leaders with increasing the completion rate in New Jersey.

Definition of Terms

Completion: Completion rate refers to the graduation rate plus the transfer rate for the fall 2017 cohort of Latinx students at the Hispanic-serving community colleges.

Culturally Engaged Campus Environment: A campus environment that deeply engages the cultural backgrounds and identities of diverse student populations to improve holistic development, sense of belonging, campus engagement, and success outcomes (Museus, 2014).

Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI): As defined by Title V of the U.S. Department of Education 1998 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, HSIs are accredited and degree-granting public or private not-for-profit institutions of higher education with 25% or more total undergraduate Hispanic full-time equivalent student enrollment (Hispanic-Serving Institutions of Higher Education Act of 1989).

Institutional Agents: An institutional agent as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011) refers to an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority within the institution. These individuals manifest the role of an institutional agent when on behalf of the student, he or she acts to directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Latinx: When describing multiple students from Latin American ancestry, I am intentionally using the term Latinx (pronounced La-teen-ex), rather than the masculinized version of the Latinos. I use the term Latinx as a gender-inclusive term for people who self-identify as originating from Latin America, Mexico, the Caribbean, or South America.

Latinx-Enrolling: Latinx-enrolling represents an organizational identity constructed by members to mean that the institution simply enrolls a minimum of 25% Latinx students but does not produce an equitable number of legitimized outcomes for Latinx students and does not have an organizational culture for supporting Latinxs on campus (Garcia, 2017).

Latinx-Serving: Latinx-serving, may be constructed by members at an institution that enrolls the minimum 25% Latinx students, produces an equitable number of legitimized outcomes, and enacts a culture that is educationally enhancing and welcoming (Garcia, 2017).

Organization of the Proposal

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. The first chapter of this dissertation will provide the background, problem statement, purpose, and significance of this case study. Chapter two presents a review of the literature as it pertains to HSIs, Latinx college completion, institutional agents, and campus climate. Furthermore, chapter two presents the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) model, which will guide the findings. The third chapter describes the case study methods including the selected research design and strategies of inquiry, as well as data collection details including sites and sampling. This chapter will also address validity, credibility, and

trustworthy considerations as part of the data analysis process. In addition, the limitations and the ethical considerations for this study will be presented. The fourth chapter will include a review of the data collection results from a cross-case analysis of the cases in the study. Finally, the fifth chapter will answer the research questions, discuss the interpretations of the case study findings, and provide potential implications for future research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Latinx students are the largest and fastest growing minority group in the United States and they tend to enroll in open access two-year colleges, which places them on a trajectory least likely to result in college completion (Zumeta & Hunt, 2012). Recent research has found that Latinx students are also often enrolled in overcrowded and underfunded community colleges with low graduation rates (Carnevale & Fasule, 2017). Nationally, Latinx students comprised the second highest student group enrolled in community colleges during the fall 2013 semester (Snyder & Dillow, 2015) and in the fall 2014, 56 percent of Latinx undergraduates were enrolled at community colleges (Ma & Baum, 2016). Despite the fact that well over 80 percent of Latinx students at two-year community colleges intend to transfer, less than one quarter actually do (Crisp & Nora, 2010). As a result, the literature review begins with a discussion of why it is important to increase community college completion for the Latinx student population.

In the next section, a historical context and current research regarding Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) will be discussed to provide a general understanding of why they were created and the purpose of the federal designation in supporting Latinx college students. Two-year HSIs serve disproportionately high proportions of Latinx students who historically have not had access to higher education, but research demonstrates that student characteristics and resources in these institutions still vary widely (Núñez, Hurtado, & Calderón Galdeano, 2015). In this section, I address the typology of HSIs and discuss the "Latinx-serving" versus the "Latinx-enrolling" organizational identities and how they impact completion.

Latinx students who attend two-year HSIs are more likely to be the first in their families to attend college. Therefore, these students may be less familiar with how to navigate the college environment as compared to their counterparts whose parents have more education, and therefore may rely more on institutional agents within the community college for guidance and support (Bensimon & Dowd, 2009). As a result, in the next section of the literature review I describe the role of institutional agents in shaping the campus environment and how they specifically influence Latinx student completion.

Research studies related to college completion have explored the role that campus climate plays in student motivation, engagement, and persistence (Hurtado, 1994; Nora & Crisp, 2012). These research studies have found that Latinx students will choose to become active members of the college community if the campus environment is perceived to be welcoming, supportive, and nondiscriminatory. Consequently, Latinx students who are likely to be successful and complete a college degree are also involved and engaged on college campuses. Therefore, the final section of the literature review presents an overview of why the campus climate is important for Latinx student success. Furthermore, the Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) model of success is included as the theoretical perspective and framework to guide the findings for this research study.

Educational Attainment and Unemployment

A 2014 Pew survey and report, *The Rising Cost of Not Going to College*, indicates that not only are college graduates more professionally successful than their peers with less education, but there is also a disparity in economic outcomes. For example, among

those ages 25 to 32, 22% with a high school diploma are living in poverty, compared with six percent of today's college-educated young adults (Morin et al., 2014). Furthermore, the median earnings of those ages 25 and older increased with educational attainment for all major race and ethnicity groups, but the Latinx population generally had lower earnings than Whites and Asians at nearly all educational attainment levels (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). In addition, the unemployment rate for the Latinx population was at 5.8 percent in 2016 as compared to the national average of 4.9% (U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Therefore, the employment outlook for the future of Latinx students in the United States will be linked to completing college.

Although Latinx students are members of the largest community of color in the United States, they continue to achieve college degrees at lower rates than other racial and ethnic groups in the United States. According to a recent study, *Latino Education and Economic Progress: Running Faster but Still Behind*, earning college degrees remains a challenge for Latinx students since only 21% of Latinx students have bachelor's degrees compared to 32% of blacks and 45% of whites. The study also reveals that lagging college degree attainment has led Latinx students to become stuck in the middle-wage tiers of the labor market (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017). From 1992 to 2016, Latinx postsecondary degree attainment has only increased from 35% to 45%, which is a 10-percentage point increase, compared to a 16-point increase for whites, and a 22-point increase for blacks during that same time period (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017). Consequently, recent data indicates that Latinx workers are concentrated in occupations that require less education and where wage growth is the slowest. For example, Latinxs

comprise 16% of the workforce in the United States but hold only 20 percent of the jobs that require no more than a high school diploma (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017). Thus, advancing economic and social mobility for Latinx students will depend on a collective focus on degree completion and preparation for graduate and professional school careers, particularly at public community colleges. As a result, educational attainment for Latinx students is critical to reducing unemployment and increasing opportunities to climb the social economic ladder in the United States.

Community College Completion

In 2012, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) issued a call to action to increase completion rates by 50% by the year 2020. At the federal level, their proposal aimed to increase the percentage of college graduates from 39% (15.8 million) of all Americans 25 to 34 years of age in 2009 to close to 60% (nearly 27 million) by 2020, representing an increase of approximately 12 million (Shuh, 2011). In 2010 the graduation rate for public 2-year institutions was at the lowest at 21% during the time frame between 2007 and 2018 (Juszkiewicz, 2020). The graduation rate has gradually increased annually culminating in a 28.6% graduation rate in 2018 for the 2015 cohort (Juszkiewicz, 2020). Research has found that college completion has important benefits to individuals and the society at large. These benefits often include job satisfaction, civic engagement, individual labor market access, and the economic growth and global competitiveness of the nation (DeAngelo et al., 2011) While there is broad agreement among higher education leaders to assist more students with completing a college degree, there is limited data on the most effective means to improve completion rates on a national scale (Kelly & Schneider, 2012).

The overall completion rate for students who began their academic careers by attending two-year public community colleges was much higher for white and Asian students (45.1% and 43.8%, respectively) than Latinx and black students (33% and 25.8%, respectively) (Shapiro et al., 2017). In addition, Latinx students demonstrate persistence and rigor toward degree completion. For example, half of all Latinx students from the 2010 cohort who transferred and completed a four four-year degree also completed a two-year degree (48%) (Shapiro et. al, 2017). Furthermore, while 81% of students entering community colleges indicate the desire to earn a bachelor's degree or higher, only 33% of those students actually transfer to a four-year institution within six years (Horn & Skomsvold, 2011; Jenkins & Fink, 2016). Kanter (2012), defines the completion rate as a measure of the number of individuals within a cohort who graduate or complete their program within a certain amount of time. However, within the community college sector, transferring to a four-year institution or earning a credential are also calculated in the completion rate.

Latinx students are more likely than other groups to begin at a community college. For example, half of Latinx students in the 2010 cohort began their college career at a two-year public institution (51%), which is higher than their Black (48%), Asian (38 percent), and White (36%) counterparts (Shapiro et. al, 2017). Additionally, 33% of all students enrolled at community colleges in 2011-12 worked full-time compared to 20% of students at public four-year and 18% at private not-for-profit four-year institutions (Ma & Baum, 2016). As a result, efforts to increase completion rates within the community college sector for Latinx students requires an understanding of the

needs, barriers, and sociopolitical contexts facing students, faculty, and higher education leaders (Kilgore & Wilson, 2017).

Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs)

As the youngest and fastest growing population in the United States, Latinx students are entering postsecondary institutions at substantial rates, which has led to a surge in the number of institutions that are classified as HSIs. For example, the Latinx median age is 30, over a decade younger than the non-Latinx median age of 41 (HACU, 2021). In 2019, 36% of the Latinx population was under 21 years of age, compared to 24.2% of the non-Latinx population. While demographics continue to shift and many higher education institutions in the United States are on the verge of an HSI designation, research suggests that becoming an HSI does not guarantee that an institution is ready to support Latinx student success and completion (Contreras et al., 2008). Two-year HSIs overall serve disproportionately high proportions of students who historically have not had access to higher education, but the student characteristics and resources in these institutions still vary widely (Nunez, Crisp, & Elizondo, 2015). Consequently, empirical studies that are focused on better understanding HSIs are essential as these institutions increasingly are critical to the access, success, and overall social mobility of Latinx students (Flores & Park, 2013; Gasman, 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Lee, 2011). The effective practices and intentionality of HSIs to serve their Latinx students is an example for other institutions that are experiencing an increase in their Latinx student population on campus.

The federal government has invested in the development of HSIs to expand and enhance the institutional capacity, quality, and the educational achievement of Latinx

students and other low-income students. However, more institutions now find themselves with larger numbers of Latinx students on campus and are now realizing that some degree of institutional change will need to occur (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). Considering the full range of contextual factors internal and external to HSIs is critical to understanding how HSIs foster campus environments where Latinx students can thrive (Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015). New Jersey has the seventh largest Latinx population in the country and 21 percent of the population is Latinx, as compared to 27 percent of the K-12 population (Excelencia in Education, 2021). Consequently, understanding how New Jersey community colleges that are designated as HSI's are adapting and changing to meet the needs of their growing Latinx student population becomes critical to increasing student success.

History and Purpose of HSIs

HSIs are defined as non-profit colleges and universities that enroll at least 25% Latinx full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduates (Excelencia in Education, 2019). To become a designated HSI, an institution's undergraduate full-time equivalent enrollment must be at least 25% Hispanic (defined as an individual of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American or other Spanish culture or origin). The institution must also be accredited, degree-granting, and a public or private nonprofit college or university. In contrast to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal Colleges and Universities (TCUs), which are automatically recipients of federal funding due to their institutional missions, HSIs do not automatically receive federal funding, but are eligible to compete for Title V funding where they must propose specific institutional plans to improve services to Latinx and low-income students (Santiago,

2006). Only HSIs that enroll at least half low-income and first-generation college students can apply for Title V funding (Higher Education Act of 1965, 2013). This federal competitive grant program awards the eligible institutions up to five years of funding to expand educational opportunities and improve academic achievement for Latinx students. In addition, the grant expands and enhances the academic offerings, program quality, and institutional stability of institutions that are educating and serving a majority of Latinx students (Excelencia in Education, 2018). Specifically, the grant allows institutions to establish or enhance academic and student support programs that facilitate the transfer of students from two-year to four-year institutions. In addition, institutions can utilize the funding from the grant to increase the resources and courses offered to Latinx students on their respective campus. For example, a significant proportion of Title V funding has been funneled to support curricular and faculty development (Villarreal & Santiago, 2012).

Growth of HSI Community Colleges

The designation of HSIs has continued to experience unprecedented growth in a short time span. For example, in the 2004-2005 academic year, there were 241 HSIs, and by 2018, this figure has increased substantially to 539 (Excelencia in Education, 2020). Of the 539 HSIs in the 2018-2019 academic year, 231 (43%) were public two-year institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2020). Given the enrollment-based definition of HSIs, it is not surprising that HSI community colleges comprise a large percentage of all current HSIs (Santiago et al., 2016). HSIs tend to have a regional orientation and mission to meet local community needs (García, 2013; Vega & Martínez, 2012). Therefore, local community factors such as the share of local residents with a college degree, share of

Latinx population, or unemployment levels can distinguish the characteristics and contributions of HSIs with the community college designation (Vega & Martínez, 2012).

HSIs also appear to have distinctive geographic characteristics. Interestingly, HSI community colleges are largely concentrated in urban enclaves, but are also dispersed in rural areas (Núñez et al., 2016). Because proximity to family continues to be a significant factor in the college choice processes of Latinx students (Contreras, 2011; Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Lopez-Turley, 2006) many HSIs have developed due to their geographical location and the Latinx demographic growth that has occurred throughout the country. However, due to the diffusion of Latinx settlement into new areas, HSIs are emerging in other regions as well (Torres & Zerquera, 2012). Overall, HSIs represent only 17% of colleges and universities in the U.S., but they enroll 67% of all Latinx undergraduate students (Excelencia in Education, 2020). Therefore, research on Latinx students attending a Hispanic-serving community college is important since HSIs within the community college sector will continue to grow.

Persistence, Retention, and Graduation of Latinx Students at HSIs

Latinx students attending two-year HSIs are more likely to persist, transfer, or attain a certificate or associate degree as compared with their counterparts attending non-HSIs (Crisp & Nora, 2010). For example, among two-year HSIs, the Latinx completion rate was 34% and the persistence rate was 24% (Santiago et al., 2016). Furthermore, a review of degrees conferred to Latinx students highlights the critical function that HSIs provide in educating this group of students. For example, during the 2017–2018 academic year, HSIs were responsible for graduating just over 45% of all Latinx graduates in the United States (Exelencia in Education, 2019). Latinx students experience a more positive

campus climate and environment at HSI institutions which can foster success (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Therefore, HSIs can be a tremendous advantage for Latinx students, their families, and the many individuals who are involved deeply with and interested in the students' educational progress (Perrakis & Hagedorn, 2010).

The majority of the research on HSIs has emphasized the potential of the community college sector to raise college access and completion rates for Latinx students in the states with a large proportion of Latinx students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Santiago, 2006). However, few studies have critically examined and challenged community college HSIs to examine their campus environment and how they intentionally engage and support Latinx students to increase student success and improve the academic outcomes. Consequently, institutional leaders of HSIs must be willing to engage institutional members in deep conversations about how the mission, values, and priorities connect to the culture, curriculum, and practices of the institution (Malcom et al., 2010).

HSI Organizational Identity - "Latinx Serving" vs. "Latinx Enrolling"

With the consistent increase in the number of postsecondary institutions that are eligible to be designated as HSIs, scholars continue to grapple with the question about what it means to be "Latinx-serving" (Garcia, 2017). Since 43% of HSIs are two-year institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2020), using traditional, legitimized outcomes to determine a "Latinx-serving" identity can be problematic because they are contrary to the multiple missions of community colleges (Dowd, 2003). In her research, Garcia (2017) found that having a positive campus climate for Latinxs would also be indicative of a Latinx-serving identity (Garcia, 2017).

HSIs' publicly articulated visions of organizational behavior can also signal how institutional leaders and institutional agents prioritize various institutional objectives (Garcia, 2017). Mission statements and strategic plans have been examined as indicators of the extent to which HSIs may "serve" Latinx students (Contreras et al., 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015). Unfortunately, some studies have found that few HSIs explicitly express their status as an HSI in mission statements on their web sites or in strategic planning materials, raising concerns about the extent to which HSIs may authentically "serve" Latinx students (Contreras et al., 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015). However, there is evidence that HSIs make distinctive efforts to "serve" Latinx students, even if these institutions may not publicly or clearly articulate their HSI status. For example, Garcia's (2017) review of several recent studies regarding Latinx student outcomes implies that HSIs are in fact serving Latinx students well. As explained earlier, Latinx students tend to have a more positive, empowering, and community-oriented experiences in HSIs. Furthermore, instructors at HSIs tend to use more "student-centered" pedagogical approaches, which often include class discussions, group projects, reflective writing, and community service as part of their coursework (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2015). The research also indicates that, although HSIs lack a fully representative proportion of Latinx faculty and administrators in relation to Latinx students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Hatch et al., 2015; Santos & Acevedo Gil, 2013), Latinx students are still more likely to encounter Latinx faculty in HSIs as opposed to other institutions (Hatch et al., 2015; Hurtado & Ruiz Alvarado, 2015; Perna et al., 2010). While Latinx faculty and administrators are certainly not the only personnel who can or should be responsible for understanding and supporting Latinx students, they can serve as

particularly critical role models who help Latinx students navigate college, particularly in academic fields where Latinx students are underrepresented (Cortez, 2015; Stanton-Salazar et al., 2010). While HSIs may not have an espoused mission to target Latinx students, personnel at these institutions still serve as critical "institutional agents" (Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015; Stanton-Salazar et al., 2010) who build an organizational culture to advance Latinx student success (García, 2017). Collectively, the research suggests there are multiple ways of defining Latinx student success and organizational commitment when examining how HSIs enact their organizational identities.

Role of Institutional Agents

An institutional agent as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011) refers to an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status and authority within the institution. These individuals manifest the role of an institutional agent when on behalf of the student, he or she acts to directly transmit, or negotiate the transmission of, highly valued resources (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Overall, institutional agents play a significant role in shaping the campus environments that can increase college success for students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Recent studies suggest that institutional agents exercise influence on community college student aspirations and success by providing both psychological and instrumental support (Tovar, 2015). Furthermore, there is a growing body of literature demonstrating the importance of institutional agents in colleges in ensuring educational opportunity and success for students who have traditionally been excluded from higher education (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). For example, Tovar (2015) found the relationships students established with institutional agents and with select

special programs at community colleges, afforded them access to crucial educational resources and information as they contemplated their academic future. They provide system linkage and networking support in communication with students and with other institutional agents to assist students in accessing campus resources (Dowd et al., 2013). In addition, institutional agents like faculty and staff are often in positions of power and influence to guide and create change for students (Bensimon, 2007; Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Overall, academic and general interpersonal validation from institutional agents has a significant positive effect on a student's sense of belonging and significantly diminishes the negative impact of experiences of discrimination or bias in college (Hurtado et. al., 2015).

Institutional agents within HSIs take on the role of assisting students toward degree completion, advocating for students and resources that sometimes must be diverted from other institutional priorities and aspirations (Hurtado et al., 2015). Research by Deil-Amen (2011) in a community college setting found that students identified institutional agents as key to persistence. According to Nunez and Elizondo (2013), institutional faculty, staff, and administrators can give Latinx students the guidance they need to navigate the unfamiliar territory of college. Furthermore, when a mentor relationship is fostered, these students are more likely to successfully transfer from a community college toward a baccalaureate degree (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013). Engagement in mentorship relationships with faculty is also positively associated with Latinx students' intent to persist as well as increased self-efficacy and the ability to define college goals (Santos & Reigadas, 2002; Tovar, 2015). Stanton-Salazar (2011) also expanded upon the concept of institutional agents to that of "empowerment agents,"

focusing on their capacity to also empower students to help them "transform themselves, their communities, and society as a whole" (p. 1068). Empowerment agents enact both positional and personal resources to provide support, encouragement, and access to institutional resources for marginal students on campus (Garcia & Ramirez, 2018). Thus, access to social capital by way of community college counselors increases Latinx students' academic performance and intention to persist (Tovar, 2015).

Unfortunately, there continues to be a lack of Latinx representation among institutional agents in higher education institutions. For example, in the fall 2018, 6% of all faculty at degree-granting postsecondary institutions identified as Latinx, including 3.2% of full-time faculty who have earned the rank of "Professor" (De Brey et al., 2021). In addition, Latinx staff members at these institutions comprise a low percentage of the overall staff population. For example, Latinx student and academic affairs administrators accounted for 12.5% of those working in such positions during the fall 2018, with an even smaller percentage of individuals in higher-level management positions (8.2%) identifying as Latinx (De Brey et al., 2021). Researchers have found that Latinx institutional agents can play a critical role in helping students transition to college and in bridging the gap between campus and home communities (Rendon, 1994; Rendon & Munoz, 2011). This level of validation allows Latinx students to learn from faculty and staff who come from similar backgrounds about how to be a college student while maintaining their relationship to home. Therefore, it is important to increase the representation of Latinx institutional agents to support the Latinx students on campus.

Campus Climate and Latinx Student Success

Campus climate has been found to be related to the retention of Latinx students (Hurtado et al., 2012) and some researchers have found that Latinx students often report an unwelcoming college environment, higher racial hostility, and discrimination (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). Another critical element of creating a welcoming campus environment includes positive experiences within the classroom and in the co-curricular elements of a student's experiences (Hurtado et al., 2012). For example, a supportive campus environment that engages Latinx students in experiential learning activities and provides access to timely academic and career advising, could increase persistence, engagement, and satisfaction. In addition, Latinx students can experience various forms of exclusion in college that interfere with their development of a sense of belonging and decreases social adjustment (Hurtado, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). However, experiencing academic and interpersonal validation decreases the impact of experiencing bias or discrimination in a chilly campus climate (Hurtado et al., 2012). Enrollment, representation, and completion are key issues for Latinx students. However, the campus conditions they encounter throughout their educational experience in also critical to their success.

Improving educational outcomes and student success for Latinx students depends on fostering inclusive campus climates (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Milem et al., 2005). Harper and Hurtado's (2007) synthesis of campus climate research highlighted how racial and ethnic minority college students perceived the climate as more hostile than their White peers. These negative experiences can diminish Latinx students' psychological well-being and academic performance (Crisp et al., 2015), and even academically

talented Latinx colleges students are susceptible to the negative effects of hostile campus climates (Hurtado, 1994). Therefore, an inclusive campus environment that affirms the student's identity, develops their abilities, validates their capabilities, and fosters positive interactions on campus are all vital for promoting Latinx student success.

Research demonstrates that students who perceive a positive campus climate may gain a valuable support system in which they have opportunities to interact with their peers, reach out to faculty and staff, and therefore achieve academically (Booker, 2007; Dayton et al., 2004; Edman & Brazil, 2007). Furthermore, Dayton et al. (2004) noted the importance of community as an important element in Latinx student success, asserting that Latinx students appear to thrive in campus environments where there is continual support and concern for their welfare. Latinx students need to feel that they matter and are valued members of the campus environment. Vibrant communities with other Latinx students aid in creating a supportive campus climate in which students can share similar experiences (Dayton et al., 2004). The support and comfort that Latinx students feel while attending an institution with a positive campus climate can be beneficial to their psychological well-being and their student success (Gloria, Castellanos, & Orozco, 2005). If students have negative feelings or perceptions about their campus, then students of color like Latinx students may be more likely to fail (Gloria et al., 2001). Consequently, the level of support received enhances the campus climate, making it more conducive to learning and achieving student success.

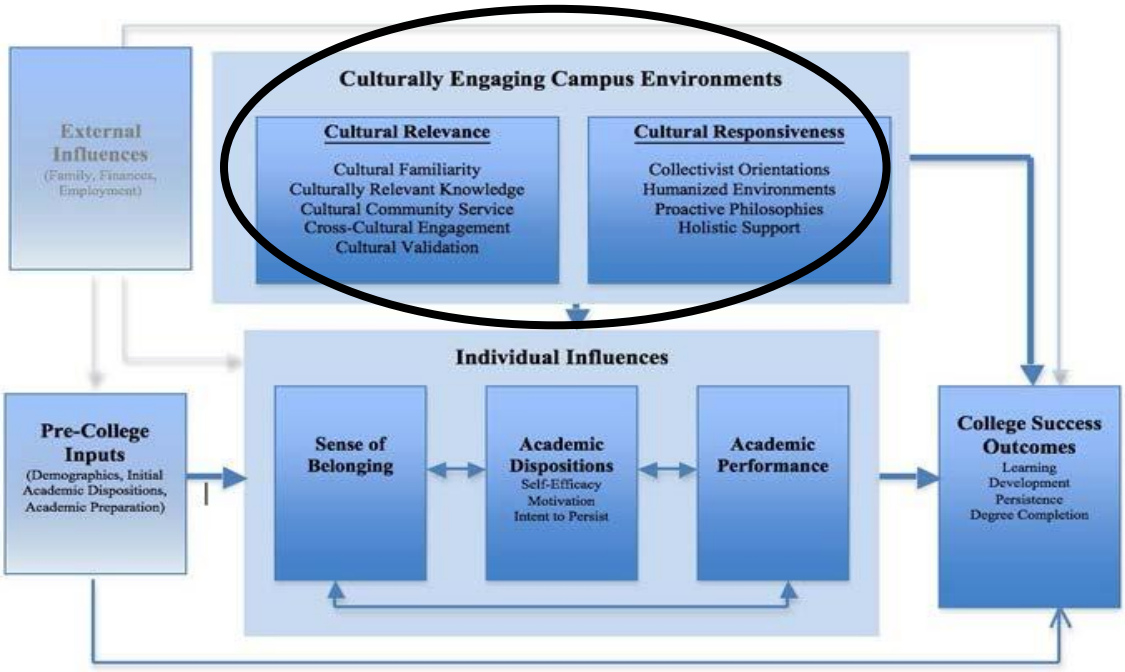
Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model

After reviewing theories and existing research on college student success and motivation, Museus (2014) developed a Culturally Engaging Campus Environments

(CECE) Model of Success that explains the impact of campus environments, acknowledges the role of motivation and success, addresses the limitations of traditional perspectives, and focuses specifically on students of color. Several research studies (Garces & Cogburn, 2015; Turner, 2015) have cited the CECE model as a means for promoting inclusive campus environments. It has the potential to prompt institutional agents to reflect on issues associated with Latinx student success rather than relying on students themselves for the answers. This model also provides a tool for understanding the impact of campus environments on the academic motivation and success of Latinx college students. According to Museus (2014), the CECE model suggests that individual influences are positively linked with a greater likelihood of college persistence and graduation. As depicted in figure 1, this framework suggests that there are nine indicators of culturally engaging environments that function to engage a student's diverse cultural identities and to create conditions for them to thrive. These nine indicators can be separated into two groups: indicators of cultural responsiveness and indicators of cultural relevance.

Figure 1

Culturally Engaging Campus Environments Model



Note. Model is adapted from Museus & Smith (2014).

Cultural Relevance Indicators

The five indicators of cultural relevance focus on the ways that institutional environments are relevant to the cultural backgrounds, communities, and identities of diverse college students. Cultural relevance refers to the degree to which students' campus environments are relevant to their cultural backgrounds and identities and is characterized by five indicators (Museus et al., 2017). According to Kezar et al. (2015), cultural relevancy suggests that classrooms, services, programs, and extra-curricular experiences should reflect the perspectives and characteristics of the different student populations on campus. Institutions like community colleges should identify ways to encourage and provide assistance to institutional agents with ensuring that examples

provided in class are culturally relevant to all students (Cunningham & Leegwater, 2011). As a result, to improve student success for Latinx community college students it is critical for institutional agents to assist with understanding and incorporating cultural relevancy on campus.

Cultural Familiarity. Cultural familiarity is the first indicator that refers to the extent which college students have opportunities to physically connect with faculty, staff, and peers who understand their backgrounds and experiences. According to Museus (2014), students establishing campus connections with individuals who share similar backgrounds is positively related to their success in college. This premise is consistent with existing literature indicating that students who are able to identify with institutional members who come from backgrounds like theirs or have common experiences with them are more motivated to excel in college (Guiffrida, 2005; Hassinger & Plourde, 2005).

Culturally Relevant Knowledge. The CECE Model next proposes that campuses that provide opportunities for students to establish, maintain, and deepen cultural connections to their home communities can positively affect their student experiences and academic success. As defined by Museus (2014), culturally relevant knowledge refers to opportunities for students to learn and exchange knowledge about their own cultures and their communities of origin. This indicator is consistent with existing literature that demonstrates a student's capabilities to learn and share knowledge regarding the needs of their home communities is linked with having higher levels of motivation (Guiffrida, 2005; Museus et al., 2016).

Cultural Community Service. The third culturally relevant indicator is cultural community service indicator. This indicator refers to the extent to which students have opportunities to engage in projects and activities that give back to their cultural communities (Museus, 2014). The CECE Model suggests that cultural connections can positively affect the experiences and academic outcomes of students. These potentially transformational connections are established when institutions provide students with opportunities to positively influence their home communities. Activities that spread and increase awareness about community issues, engagement in service-learning opportunities, and research opportunities that address community problems are some examples of this cultural relevance indicator. Existing research is consistent with the inclusion of these transformational connections in the CECE Model since it demonstrates a positive connection to being more motivated to succeed (Museus et al., 2016).

Meaningful Cross-Cultural Engagement. The fourth culturally relevant indicator under the CECE Model is meaningful cross-cultural engagement. This indicator involves a student's access to opportunities to engage in meaningful interactions with peers from diverse backgrounds to solve real social and political problems (Museus, 2014). It implies that opportunities for meaningful cross-cultural engagement positively affects student success. Particularly, the framework suggests that opportunities to engage in positive purposeful interactions with students of different cultural backgrounds can positively affect their college experiences and academic success. Some scholars have documented that campus environments that foster meaningful cross-cultural engagement are linked with many positive outcomes that are related to motivation (Antonio, 2004).

Culturally Validating Environments. The fifth culturally relevant indicator under the CECE Model refers to culturally validating environments. This indicator proposes that a campus environment that validates a student's cultural knowledge, background, and identity is related to student success (Meseus, 2014). Cultural validation also refers to the degree to which colleges value their students' cultural backgrounds and identities (Meseus, 2014). This indicator is consistent with past literature that suggests that such validation can positively affect students' level of motivation (Gloria, Castellanos, Lopez, & Rosales, 2005; Museus & Quaye, 2009). Furthermore, when institutional agents validate the cultural backgrounds and identities of students, they are more likely to experience the college campus positively and succeed (Museus & Quaye, 2009; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

Cultural Responsiveness Indicators

The cultural responsiveness indicators of the CECE Model gauge the degree to which campus environments respond to the cultural norms and needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations. On a culturally responsive campus, the students should be able to receive assistance from trusted faculty members and access student support services that are both available and visible. The four indicators focus on cultural responsiveness, or the extent to which campus programs and practices effectively respond to the needs of culturally diverse student populations (Museus et al., 2017).

Collective Cultural Orientations. The CECE Model posits that environments with more collective cultural orientations, as opposed to more individualistic ones, are more conducive to positive college experiences and success for students (Museus, 2014). Past research also suggests that students who originate from a more collectivistic cultural

orientations may face unique issues while navigating colleges and universities with individualistic cultural orientations (Dennis et al., 2005; Thompson & Fretz, 1991). Furthermore, existing literature supports the possible impact of collective approaches to motivate students to succeed (Guiffrida, 2006).

Humanized Educational Environments. The second aspect of the culturally responsive environment suggests that the degree to which students encounter some humanized educational environments is positively related to postsecondary experiences and success for students. Extant literature demonstrates that such humanization supports the motivation of college students (Guiffrida, 2003; Nora et al., 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Overall, humanized educational environments are campus environments that are distinguished by caring, commitment, and meaningful connections with students.

Proactive Philosophies. In the next indicator, the CECE Model implies that the degree to which proactive philosophies exist on a postsecondary campus can partially influence the likelihood of success among students on those campuses. Furthermore, the model suggests that when faculty and staff go beyond making information and support available to students, there is a likelihood to maximize and increase success. This indicator is consistent with past research that emphasizes the positive effects of such proactive philosophies and practices on college student motivation (Guiffrida, 2005; Jenkins, 2006).

Holistic Support. The fourth component of the culturally responsive environment is the availability of holistic support. This indicator refers to the degree to which students have access to a faculty or staff member that they believe will provide the information

that they require, offer the assistance they seek, or connect them with the information or support that they need. The CECE Model and its supporting literature demonstrate that higher educational institutions can establish an environment that is conducive for the motivation and success of their underrepresented student populations (Museus, 2014). While the research regarding the significance of holistic support is limited, the studies in this area demonstrate that such holistic approaches foster motivation among students (Jenkins et al., 2006). Overall, this construct refers to the degree to which students have access to an institutional agent like a faculty or staff member that they believe will provide the information and guidance they need to succeed in college.

These culturally relevant indicators guided me in employing a holistic approach to assessing how adopting a culturally relevant campus environment can support Latinx students and increase their college completion and student success while attending an HSI community college. Overall, these nine indicators suggest that a culturally relevant environment should allow racialized and ethnic students to interact with people from similar and different cultural backgrounds to learn about topics that cultivate and sustain their own cultural background. In a culturally relevant environment, the students on the campus will have the opportunity to give back to their communities through activism, civic engagement, and service-learning activities (Museus, 2014). Furthermore, the campus environment should validate students as cultural beings, allow them to interact with institutional agents who empower them, and support them holistically (Museus, 2014). By integrating an understanding of the CECE Model and Latinx culture into the campus environment, institutional agents can be better equipped to develop and

implement policies and programs that increase Latinx student success outcomes in the public community college sector.

Chapter Summary

An inclusive and culturally engaging campus environment is where Latinx students and institutional agents feel welcomed and empowered to express their identity without fear of judgement or discrimination. The research might infer that as the Latinx student population increases on community college campuses, examining the current student policies, programs, and practices that can foster positive campus environment will be crucial for college completion. From the literature review, the outcomes for Latinx students attending HSIs remains a challenge with Latinx students experiencing low college completion rates in two-year HSIs. The underperformance of Latinx students in higher education has been a point of contention among scholars who often perpetuate a deficit perspective and do not hold institutions accountable for failing to meet the needs of this growing student population (Garcia & Solorzano, 2018). Consequently, raising Latinx college transfer and completion rates at HSIs is critical for creating economically sustainable Latinx communities (Contreras & Contreras, 2015).

The representation of HSIs within the community college sector is growing, and points to the tremendous contribution of these institutions to the academic success of Latinx students. Although HSI community colleges can provide welcoming environments and transfer pathways for Latinx students, these institutions can further enhance student experiences and academic outcomes for all students through the development of a positive campus climate. A qualitative approach can assist these institutions in understanding how Latinx students are perceiving the campus climate and how

institutional agents proactively create more welcoming educational environments that can propel more Latinx students to achieve their academic potential.

Museus' Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model identifies factors that enhance cross-cultural engagement and promotes student success (Chun & Evans, 2016). The CECE model primarily emphasizes the environmental effects on educational achievement and the degree to which the environment of the educational institution is culturally relevant and engaging. The CECE Model of college success is based on the notion that institutions can construct campus cultures that meaningfully reflect and respond to the diverse backgrounds of their students in order to create the conditions for diverse student bodies to thrive (Museus, 2014). It also provides an important tool that can prompt institutional agents to reflect on issues associated with Latinx student success outcomes rather than relying on students themselves for the answers. The model is designed to encourage postsecondary institutions to engage the cultural communities, backgrounds, and identities of diverse populations in the cultivation and enhancement of their curricula, programs, and practices. The nine elements of optimal campus environments are not mutually exclusive, but several of them can be integrated into specific spaces, curricula, programs, and or practices on college campuses. Culturally relevant practices and the institutionalization of student support services are especially important at HSIs (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Ultimately, the CECE framework is useful in understanding how institutions might transform or restructure their campuses and create optimal environmental conditions for Latinx students to thrive.

As this student population increases on the community college campus, evaluating and examining the current student policies, programs, and practices that can foster a positive student engagement will be crucial. For example, it will be interesting to provide a description of how changes were implemented to improve outcomes for Latinx students at the community college and looking at the shared values and institutional structures that have changed or clashed as the institution enacts or embraces an HSI mission. In addition, addressing the accessibility, physical space, and the diversity of the faculty and staff can also potentially impact the quality of engagement with Latinx students on a community college campus. Latinx students' underperformance in education has been a point of contention among scholars who often perpetuate deficit perspectives and do not hold institutions accountable for failing to meet the needs of this student population.

The New Jersey equity gap in degree completion for adults 25 and older continues to persist. For example, statewide, only 27 percent of Latinx adults have an associate degree or higher, compared to 52 percent of White non-Latinx adults in 2018 (Excelencia in Education, 2020). There are also gaps in graduation rates between Latinx and White students, especially at two-year institutions, where many Latinx students enroll in New Jersey. At two-year institutions that gap is 15 percentage points (Excelencia in Education 2020). In addition, six of the eighteen community colleges in New Jersey are currently classified as HSIs, but there are several additional institutions that are emerging HSI's with Latinx enrollment hovering close to the 25% threshold. Unfortunately, the body of literature specific to New Jersey community colleges with the HSI designation is relatively small. Therefore, additional research in this sector will greatly benefit

community college policymakers and practitioners as they consider ways to establish and cultivate an inclusive campus environment that positively affect the experiences of all students.

By better understanding the experiences of institutional agents while working with Latinx students, New Jersey community colleges can structure their operations to more effectively promote Latinx student success. It is the hope that the findings of this dissertation will help contribute to this area of scholarship. As a result, an exploration of the institutional structures and practices that are critical to creating a culturally engaging campus environment at a Hispanic-serving community college will occur through the guidance and use of the CECE model.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter, I describe the methods that were used for this research study. I present the purpose of this multicase study and discuss why I decided to use this qualitative strategy of inquiry for this research study. I conducted a multicase study on how institutional agents at two federally designated Hispanic-Serving community colleges in New Jersey foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate college completion for Latinx students. The goal of this research study was to gain a better understanding of the research phenomenon or quintain (Stake, 2006), which in this research study is the culturally engaged campus environment and Latinx college completion at New Jersey HSI community colleges. In a multicase study, the quintain binds the cases and helps highlight the particular details of each case (Stake, 2006).

In this research study, I used the Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of Success (Museus 2014), which is a tool for understanding the impact of campus environments on the academic motivation and success of students of color. The CECE model assisted in guiding the collection of the data and helped me to answer the research questions. I collected data using documentation, interviews, and a researcher's journal to gain an understanding of the campus environment for Latinx students and how institutional agents support this student population to completion.

I used a cross-case analysis to help me interpret the data collected from the institutional agents at the HSI community colleges in New Jersey. The cross-case analysis allowed me to identify the similarities and differences between the three HSI's in this research study (Stake, 2006). In addition, the cross-case analysis helped me to gain

an in-depth understanding of the role of institutional agents at HSI community colleges in creating a welcoming campus environment and in supporting completion for Latinx students on campus. Furthermore, it answers the research questions and allows me to make assertions about the quintain (Stake, 2006).

Purpose Statement

According to Stake (2006), in a multicase study the single case is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases and these individual cases share a common characteristic or condition. As a result, the purpose of this multicase study was to investigate and understand how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. Through interviews, observations, and analysis of institutional documents, data on institutional capacity, intentionality, and clarity of purpose were collected to answer the research questions and identify patterns among the cases.

This case study adds to the current literature on HSI community colleges and how they might support Latinx completion through a culturally engaging campus environment. From the literature review, I found that the majority of the research on HSIs has emphasized the potential of the community college sector to raise college access and completion rates for Latinx students in the states with a large proportion of Latinx students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Santiago, 2006). However, few studies have critically examined and challenged community college HSIs to examine their campus environment and how they intentionally engage and support Latinx students to increase student success and improve academic outcomes. Furthermore, the literature review

demonstrated that there is dearth of research regarding New Jersey community college HSIs.

Research Questions

The following research questions help me to further understand the role of institutional agents and the campus environment in supporting Latinx college completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey:

1) How do institutional agents perceive the HSI designation?
2) How do institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment for Latinx students?
    a) What are the strategies for assessing campus climate?
    b) What are the strategies for responding to the perceived cultural needs of Latinx students?
    c) What are the strategies for making the campus environment culturally relevant to Latinx students?
3) How do institutional agents facilitate completion for Latinx community college students?
    a) What are the perceived barriers and obstacles for Latinx students?
    b) What are the strategies to intentionally engage and support Latinx students?
    c) What are the policies and institutional structures that address Latinx student completion?

Research Design

Qualitative research is a process of inquiry that explores a social or human problem in a natural setting (Creswell, 2013). This research study employs a case study

approach in examining the participant descriptions of their perceptions and experiences through a constructivist lens (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The constructivist paradigm has guided the methodological choices, particularly with the use of interviews as they provide insight to the individual meaning participants make of the quintain or research phenomenon. Qualitative research enables a researcher to become a key instrument in the research process through interviewing participants and becoming a participant observer (Creswell, 2007). The multiple sources of data can also be used in qualitative research to help me better understand the meaning of what the participants describe (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006).

My role as a constructivist is to become an interpreter (Stake, 1995) and to generate meaning from the data that is collected during the research process (Creswell, 2013). My philosophical worldview will give readers some insight into why I chose the qualitative approach for this study (Creswell, 2013). Philosophical worldviews are the beliefs that I have about the world as a researcher and my beliefs are based on life and research experiences (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 1995). The constructivist approach to qualitative case study research supports a transactional method of inquiry, where I have a personal interaction with the case. As a constructivist, I used a qualitative research approach to create meaning as a result of the interactions with the study participants in their own campus environment at a Hispanic-serving community college (Creswell, 2013).

The multicase study is designed to contribute to current research that exists on Hispanic-serving community colleges and Latinx completion. I used a multicase study to ascertain patterns, identify the possibility for replication, and to draw more powerful

conclusions than in a single case study. A multicase study has been chosen because it allows description of a common characteristic shared by individual cases at Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. Furthermore, it allows the study of multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon, the campus environment and Latinx student completion at New Jersey Hispanic-serving community colleges.

Case Study Method

The qualitative strategy of inquiry that was used was a case study. A qualitative case study was developed to study the experience of real cases operating in real situations and to gain an understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2006). The goal of case study research is to understand a group, category, or phenomenon, which Stake (2006) refers to as "quintain." The quintain is a common thread that runs through all the cases and is the condition of interest that is being studied (Stake, 2006). The rationale for using case study methods as the strategy of inquiry was because I was able to gain a comprehensive understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2006), which in this study is the culturally engaging campus environment and Latinx college completion at New Jersey HSI community colleges. In case study research, there is a focus on each particular case while maintaining the interest of the collection of cases (Stake, 2006).

The multicase study method was chosen for this study to make comparisons, note emerging themes or patterns, and gain insight into the role of intuitional agents and the campus environment in supporting Latinx completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey (Stake, 2006). A reason for conducting a multicase study is to examine how the phenomenon performs in the different environments (Stake, 2006). I was also interested in this particular qualitative strategy of inquiry because the data collection procedures in

this approach would help me gather information from the institutional agents who understand the campus environment and Latinx students at Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey (Stake, 1995).

Qualitative case studies will usually draw on a purposeful sampling of cases that are tailored to the particular study (Stake, 2006). Therefore, this case study method enabled me to focus on the intentions of institutional agents who work at the selected HSI community colleges in New Jersey and helped me investigate how they foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate Latinx completion. This type of research is a way to identify the unique and common characteristics about the HSI community colleges and the role of the institutional agents within the campus environment (Stake, 1995). The similarities and differences in the cases were closely examined in order to better understand the phenomenon being studied (Stake, 2006). Furthermore, this case study approach gave me additional insight into the strategies that are being used by institutional agents to foster a culturally engaging campus environment that facilitates completion for Latinx students at the community colleges.

Case Selection

In a multicase study, each case is given attention in analysis, but it revolves around developing an understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2006). To ensure strength within a case study, it is important to choose multiple cases with the intention to learn about the quintain (Stake, 1995). Therefore, the cases should be selected based on what they can reveal about the quintain (Stake, 2006). Researchers will usually draw a purposive sample of cases, with each sample tailored to build in variety and create opportunities for an intensive study (Stake, 2006). A purposeful-sampling method

allowed me to select sites that would yield the most useful information (Merriam, 1998). In this case study, purposeful sampling was used to help me identify the cases and to understand the problem of the study from the point of view of the institutional agents who have experience with the problem (Creswell, 2013). Each case was picked with a purpose, but the variety of each institution allowed me to acquire an in-depth understanding of the quintain for this research study (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006).

Each case was studied in its own context and was selected based on the binding concept as a way to place parameters on the cases, which is based on the quintain and allowed me to stay focused on the scope of the research (Stake, 2006). Criterion sampling was used to review and study the cases that met the predetermined criteria of being classified as a New Jersey community college with the federal HSI designation (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this multicase study was confined to the six community colleges in New Jersey that currently have the HSI designation. However, after reviewing Latinx completion data from the 2021 institutional profiles on the State of New Jersey website and reviewing the federal listings of HSI Title V grant recipients since 2009, I selected the top two HSI community colleges from New Jersey with the highest completion rates for Latinx students to become the cases for this multicase study. For the purpose of this case study, the completion rate refers to the graduation rate plus the transfer rate for the fall 2017 cohort of Latinx students at the Hispanic-serving community colleges.

Table 1 provides an overview of the completion data from the cases selected for this multicase study.

Table 1

Fall 2017 Latinx Cohort Completion Data from Selected Cases

New Jersey HSI Community College	2017 Cohort (N)	Latinx Graduation Rate	Latinx Transfer Rate	Completion Rate (Graduation + Transfer)
Aventura Community College	672	19%	13%	32%
Bandera Community College	554	33%	8%	41%

Source: Annual Institutional Profile 2021

Each of the cases selected is relevant to the quintain of understanding the culturally engaged campus environment and Latinx completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey, and the variety of each case will provide an opportunity to help me understand the quintain (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2006). Aventura Community College (ACC) had the second-best completion rate for the 2017 cohort of Latinx students at 32 percent, but has never received a Title V grant. The second case selected was Bandera Community College (BCC) since it had the best completion rate at 41 percent and received Title V grants in 2012 and in 2015. The selection of cases for this multicase study was purposeful and I believe studying these selected cases captured the details necessary to understand the quintain.

Participant Selection

In this multicase study, cases were bounded to institutional agents at the HSI community college. Stake (2006) explained that multicase studies are distinct from case studies in that, "The ultimate question shifts from 'What helps us understand the case?'

toward ‘What helps us understand the quintain?” (p. 6). Therefore, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the phenomenon of interest, participant sampling was conducted intentionally through a purposeful sampling process to increase variation among the cases (Creswell, 2012). Purposeful sampling allowed the selection of the sample that would provide the most information to discover, understand, and gain insight into the quintain (Merriam, 1998).

According to Fink (2013), prior to selecting a sample, a researcher must consider who the key participants are in their research study. As a result, non-probabilistic, purposeful sampling was used to identify the key institutional agents at the two HSI community colleges in New Jersey selected for this multicase study. I began by seeking to interview institutional agents at each HSI community college who were directly responsible for overseeing the campus environment and implementing initiatives or programs that enhance the student campus experience. Some of the initial participant titles included, Vice-President of Student Affairs, Dean of Students, or Director of Student Activities. Next, snowball sampling was used to develop a pool of key frontline institutional agents at each community college that were engaged with Latinx students on campus and could provide rich information about the quintain (Patton, 1990).

Data Collection

The use of multiple sources of data, rich in real-life situations, has been described as a distinguishing characteristic of case study methodology (Stake, 1995). Qualitative case study research encourages the researcher to collect data from multiple sources (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013). As previously described, the purpose of a multicase study research approach is to gain a complex understanding of the quintain or

phenomenon of interest (Stake, 2006). Therefore, interviews, observations, and documentation review are the recommended data sources to use in a case study design (Stake, 1995).

According to Stake (1995), varied sources of data are collected and analyzed to obtain multiple perspectives and points of view to generate a holistic understanding of the phenomenon being researched. Institutional documents, participant interviews, and observations do not individually provide a complete picture, and their sole use might be misleading. Therefore, institutional documents were used in comparison to the perspectives learned from the observations and interviews with institutional agents at the Hispanic-serving community colleges. In addition, it is understood that an institution's published documents on the website may not capture the entire phenomenon and those facets not captured in formal documentation require further probing through interviews or observations. The use of these multiple sources of data enabled me to cover a broader range of issues and to develop converging lines of inquiry by the process of triangulation. Due to my constructivist paradigm and belief in individually constructed realities, the primary form of data collection for this study was a series of interviews with the institutional agents at the selected HSI community colleges.

Interviews

Qualitative interviews provide researchers with the ability to explore in detail the experiences, motives, and perspective of others and the researcher learns to see the world outside their own self-view (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In-depth interviewing was the primary tool used for this qualitative research study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A semi-structured interview helped to narrow the focus of the research questions and to gain

more in-depth information about the quintain (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Semi-structured interview questions were used to capture the narratives of all participants in this research study. The benefit of semi-structured interviews lies in the flexibility to explore the participant's answers with probing questions (Creswell, 2014). Conducting interviews with the institutional agents at the Hispanic-serving community colleges informed me about their descriptions and interpretations of the campus environment (Stake, 1995). Thus, the interviews assisted in answering the research questions and provided insight into the quintain through the eyes of the research participants (Stake, 2006).

Interview Protocol

The primary instrument that was used in this study was a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). The semi-structured interview protocol gathered data to answer the research questions and helped me to gain a better understanding of the culturally engaging campus environment at Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. The interview protocol was developed for the institutional agents at each community college in this research study. Each of the participants were initially asked the same questions, but the structure of the interview protocol allowed me to ask additional probing questions to better understand their experience (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). With the permission of each participant, each interview session lasted about an hour and the interviews were digitally recorded and then transcribed to ensure accurate transcription (Merriam, 1998). Follow up questions were used for clarification as well as to elicit additional depth and detail in participant responses (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). In order to guarantee confidentiality for their responses, pseudonyms are used to identify the research participants (Creswell, 2014). Additional observations, feelings, and other visual

cues not accounted for in the recordings were added to the typed transcription for each of the participants.

Document Review

In case study research, researchers use documents as a source of contextual information about events that cannot be directly observed; documents are also used by researchers to confirm or question information from other sources (Stake, 1995). According to Creswell (2014), documents can also be a good source for word data in a qualitative study since the documents provide a rich source of information. Document review allowed me to identify formal policies and programs currently in place to promote Latinx student completion and highlights the HSI status of the community college. For example, examining admissions, financial aid, academic advisement, and attendance policies, along with college missions and goals with respect to Latinx student retention and completion provided insight into the priorities of the cases as they related to the research questions. The documents collected were communicative and representational of the campus environment and how each HSI community college supports completion for their Latinx students (Hodder, 2012).

Qualitative document analysis relies on the researcher's interaction and involvement with documents selected for their relevance to a research topic (Altheide, 2011). Therefore, the primary documents collected and reviewed in this research study are the current strategic plan, the 2021 Institutional Profile report, and the most recent Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) survey report at each of the HSI community colleges. The current strategic plan shed light on whether the selected case had established goals and objectives to foster a culturally engaging campus

environment to support completion for Latinx students. The Institutional Profile report is submitted to the New Jersey Department of Education on an annual basis and follows a prescriptive format in reporting institutional demographic and academic outcome data. Therefore, from this document I was able gather consistent institutional data across each case. The final document that was collected was the CCSSE survey report, which provides the community college with information regarding student engagement. The CCSSE survey is administered to community college students and asks questions that assess institutional practices and student behaviors that are correlated with student learning and student retention. The survey is administered every three years at the community college, so the most recent CCSSE survey report was included in this study. In addition, institutional documents or plans referred to by the institutional agents during the interview process were reviewed, categorized, and included in this case study.

The study of this material culture is important in this qualitative research study since it explores the multiple and conflicting voices that may be present at each HSI community college (Hodder, 2012). The material culture provided me with insight into the actions of the institutional agents and their meaning in this particular setting (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Furthermore, analyzing the material culture helped me to understand if "what people say" they do, matches with "what they do" (Hodder, 2012). As a result, comparing the material culture collected with the interview data from institutional agents was critical in the data analysis process.

Document Collection Protocol

The document collection protocol is a list of questions, items, categories, or variables that guide data collection from the collected documents (Altheide, 2011). To

ensure consistency in the document collection process and in preparation for the analysis process, a document collection protocol was developed (See Appendix B). The protocol assisted with the organization of the data and provided space to record analytical notes during the document review process (Creswell, 2014). Once a document was collected from the case, I followed the steps outlined in the protocol. Through the first steps in the protocol, I presented the source of the document, provided a brief description, and classified the document as primary, secondary, or auxiliary. Primary documents are the most relevant to the quintain, secondary documents are records or objects about the primary documents collected, and auxiliary documents are supplemental items that can contribute to this research study (Altheide, 2011). In the next steps of the protocol, I determined if the document was intended for internal or external use and pulled the pertinent and critical information as it related to the quintain from each of the documents collected. The protocol also includes a column to capture questions and analytical notes for consideration as part of the research process in the section labeled. After the protocol was completed, each of the documents collected and a copy of the protocol were scanned and uploaded into NVivo 12.

The collected documents were used in conjunction with the data collected from the interviews to organize the data into categories and themes. This process is critical in identifying if there is enough evidence to support each of the initial themes or if more evidence is required to draw stronger conclusions (Creswell, 2014). The data collection matrix (see Appendix C) demonstrates how the research questions were addressed by the specific data collection techniques.

Researcher's Journal

The researcher's journal is another important qualitative research technique that was used as a data source to explore the quintain of this case study. A research journal is a tool to capture reflections of the researcher's engagement in the act of research (Janesick, 1999). The researcher documents rich descriptions and explanations of their role in the study and the research process and self-reflects in an open-ended way (Janesick, 1999). Most importantly, the journal provided me with a means to reflect on emergent patterns, similarities, and differences across factors and the cases and make interpretations or challenge assumptions (Janesick, 1999). The research journal captured reflections, observations, field notes, research updates, and preliminary analysis and was used to complement the data collected from the interviews and relevant documentation. All of the case notes were transferred to the NVivo 12 qualitative database to properly store it during the data collection process and prior to data analysis. Using a journal as part of this multicase study was important to capture my background, personal experiences, and potential bias with the study's topic and help to ensure data integrity. In addition, the research journal was used to document the entire case study process and any changes that I made to the study over time.

Data Analysis

In this multicase study, the goal was to understand the quintain (Stake, 2006). The quintain in this case study is the culturally engaged campus environment and Latinx completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey. According to Stake (2006), the first step in assisting with the data analysis process is to bind the cases together with the quintain (Stake, 2006). As a result, the cases are bounded together through the use of the

Culturally Engaging Campus Environment (CECE) model and the research questions related to the role of the institutional agent in fostering a culturally engaged campus environment to support completion for Latinx students at the HSI community college. Utilizing Stake's (2006) *Worksheet #1: Graphic Design of a Multicase Study*, I documented the entire plan of data collection, and the data analysis processes (see Appendix D). This multicase study graphic was used to help me complete the sequential data analysis worksheets suggested by Stake (2006) for a multicase study. Following Stake's (2006) advice to focus on one case at a time, yet remaining aware of the quintain, I made notes of prominent experiences or perspectives that were used to conduct the sequential analysis. Specifically, I looked at the notion of how these community colleges construct campus cultures that meaningfully reflect and respond to Latinx students and create the conditions for this student group to thrive and become successful (Museus, 2014).

Data analysis is an ongoing process that begins at the start of the data collection process. Data analysis begins with preparing and organizing the data, which involves transcription, reviewing collected materials and documents, and typing field notes (Creswell, 2014). After the completion of the interviews, I used Rev.com, which is a professional transcription service to transcribe all of the digital recordings from the interviews. All of the data collected from semi-structured interviews, review of documents, and the researcher's journal were entered into a Computer-Aided Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) to assist with keeping the three data sources organized (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Saldana, 2009; Stake, 1995). NVivo 12 is a comprehensive data software database and allowed me to upload unstructured data for

analysis. Utilizing a case study database for the data I collected allowed me to keep the data organized and increase the reliability of the case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). Once all of the data was collected, the process of coding began, which enabled me as the researcher to organize diverse observations, statements, and other collected data by common themes and patterns (Creswell, 2007; Saldana, 2009). I entered the codes yielded from the interview transcripts, summaries from the documents collected, and field notes from the researcher's journal into NVivo 12. The coding process helped me to develop a list of themes to enter into the data analysis *Worksheet #2: The Themes of the Multicase Study* (Stake, 2006).

First Cycle Coding

Rubin and Rubin (2012) describe coding as an early analysis process that assists in recognizing and identifying concepts and themes in the text. Saldaña (2009) divides coding into two cycles and the coding process was used to build patterns and categories by organizing the data into more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2007). The data from the interview transcripts, documents, and researcher's journal were initially coded manually using the *In Vivo* method (Saldaña, 2009). *In Vivo* coding was applied using words and phrases directly from participant's language which honors the participant's voice (Miles et al., 2014). This initial process assisted me in identifying patterns of cultural relevancy and cultural responsiveness in participant language across the case sites.

As part of the first cycle of coding, descriptive coding was applied to summarize and categorize the qualitative data (Saldaña, 2009). In this context, descriptive coding assisted me in developing a categorized inventory of the culturally relevant and culturally

responsiveness indicators of the CECE model (Saldaña, 2009). This process provided the vital groundwork for second cycle coding and further analysis (Saldaña, 2009).

Second Cycle Coding

Pattern coding was used as a second cycle technique and began the process of data reduction (Saldaña, 2009). Pattern coding was appropriate as a second cycle technique to code the actions, strategies, and perceptions of the institutional agents regarding the campus environment (Saldaña, 2009). Pattern coding also assisted in illuminating common themes and processes since second cycle coding grouped the data into categories, themes, and constructs (Miles et al., 2014). In this context, the use of pattern coding found repetitive patterns of action that describes how the institutional agents foster a culturally engaged campus environment to support Latinx completion at each HSI community college (Saldaña, 2009). Using observational notes from the interview transcripts and the analytical notes from document review, the data analysis was refined several times to ensure that all the data collected was coded properly in NVivo 12. Finally, through the use of worksheet #2, I outlined the themes of the quintain and connected them to the culturally relevant and culturally responsiveness indicators of the CECE model.

Case Reports

In the next step of the data analysis process, the data collected, observational notes, and the themes generated from the coding process were used to generate individual case reports (Stake, 2006). The case reports addressed the environmental effects on educational achievement and the degree to which the campus environment of these institutions is culturally relevant and engaging for Latinx students. The information from

the case reports was utilized to complete *Worksheet #3: Analyst's Notes While Reading the HSI Community College Case Report* for each of the HSI community colleges in this research study (Stake, 2006). The use of worksheet #3 in the data analysis process assisted me with identifying the situational constraints and provided particular insight into each of the HSI community colleges (Stake, 2006). Additionally, completing worksheet #3 allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of each case (Stake, 2006). Furthermore, through this process I was able to analyze each case individually and begin the preparations for the cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006).

Cross-Case Analysis

The final step of the data analysis focused on a cross-case synthesis of the HSI community colleges in this multicase study. This was a strategic and organized approach designed to better understand each case (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006). The cross-case analysis focused on the triangulation of the data collected at each HSI community college setting to identify patterns and relationships between each case and the role of the institutional agent in fostering a culturally engaged campus environment that supports completion for Latinx students. The main activity of the cross-case analysis was to apply the situated findings from the case reports to the research questions and the quintain (Stake, 2006). The rationale for using the cross-case analysis was to identify the similarities and differences among each of the HSI community college cases and to gather the information that allowed me to gain a better understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2006).

The cross-case data analysis approach utilized Stake's (2006) pre-designed matrices to guide the analysis of each case before completing the final case report. In the

first step of the cross-case analysis, I completed *Worksheet #4: Ratings of Expected Utility of Each Case for Each Theme* (Stake, 2006). I listed each of the HSI community colleges and added the generated themes of the case study to this worksheet. I used worksheet #4 to create a ranking for each of the two cases. The cases were ranked on a low utility, medium utility, and high utility scale, to determine the usefulness of each case in developing the themes of this multicase study (Stake, 2006).

The next step in the cross-case analysis was the use of *Worksheet #5: A Matrix for Generating Theme-Based Assertions* (Stake, 2006). Worksheet #5 was used to gain a comprehensive review of the culturally engaged campus environment at each HSI community college. This particular matrix allowed me to rate each of the findings in relation to the generated themes. Stake (2006) recommends utilizing worksheets #2 and #3 at this point in the data analysis to assist with the completion of worksheet #5 and to generate theme-related assertions of each case (Stake, 2006).

In the next step of the data analysis process, I created finding strips from the list of findings in NVivo 12 and used the strips to outline the findings from each case (Stake, 2006). The finding strips assisted me in fully completing worksheet #5 and ranking the findings with a low, middle, or high importance to the research themes in this study (Stake, 2006). The finding strips and worksheet #5 were used to understand the quintain and generate assertions of each case (Stake, 2006). In this step of the analysis, I used the culturally relevant and culturally responsive indicators of the CECE model to frame the findings. Overall, this step of the data analysis process allowed me to use the findings of the cases and generate assertions to better understand the quintain and to answer the research questions (Stake, 2006).

The researcher's role in a multicase study is to interpret the meaning of the description of the quintain provided by the participants and to gain an understanding of the particular as it is situated in the context of each case (Stake, 2006). In the final step of the data analysis process, *Worksheet #6: Multicase Assertions for the Final Case Report, was* used to draft assertions about the quintain (Stake, 2006). As a result of the cross-case analysis process, I had the opportunity to understand the similarities and differences among the themes of each case (Stake, 2006). Furthermore, the process allowed me to generate assertions regarding each case and to gain and understanding of the quintain (Stake, 2006). Worksheet #6 displays the generated assertions that allows me and the readers of this multicase study to better understand the quintain (Stake, 2006) and how institutional agents foster a culturally engaged campus environment for Latinx students.

Validity

This multicase research study follows the appropriate qualitative case study procedures outlined by Stake (2006) to ensure validity. Validity of interpretations from qualitative research is addressed through diverse strategies to ensure the findings accurately reflect the cased studied (Creswell, 2003; Merriam, 1998). As a qualitative researcher, I used strategies that demonstrate the standards of rigor and I was conscientious of qualitative conclusions that reflected existing preconceptions and goals for this multicase study (Maxwell, 2013). Strategies that assisted me in ensuring validity, trustworthiness, and credibility were member checks and triangulation (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Trustworthiness

This multicase study ensured trustworthiness through triangulation. Triangulation is an effort to assure that the right information and interpretations have been obtained by

the researcher. Triangulation also serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case can be seen. According to Stake (2006), "Triangulation is mostly the process of repetitious data gathering and critical review of what is being said" (p. 34). The collection of three sources, including semi-structured interviews, documentation, and a research journal enhanced the quality of the data and enabled a convergence of the findings (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The convergence of all the findings supported a thorough cross-case analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 2006). The use of the multiple methods such as interviews, document analyses, and the researcher's journal assisted in clarifying the meaning of the data and verifying its repeatability and interpretation (Stake, 2006).

Credibility

This multicase study established credibility by using specific qualitative procedures to ensure the data is believable (Stake, 1995). The NVivo 12 electronic database, researcher's journal, and case study protocol was used to establish credibility. The interviews were conducted systematically to increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Furthermore, credibility was increased by managing and organizing data systematically through the use of a database to store data sources in one central location (Stake, 1995; Yazan, 2015). I solicited feedback about the data and assertions from the participants in the study, which is considered to be an important tactic to minimizing the misinterpretation of what is said in the interviews (Maxwell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). These member checks allowed the participants an opportunity to elaborate, correct, extend, or dispute the conclusions that were made (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Furthermore, research decisions and case study procedures were tracked in the researcher's journal, which was critical in

conducting a multiple-case study and helped ensure credibility during the data analysis process (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995).

Role of the Researcher

I have worked at an HSI community college for seven years as an administrator and I categorize myself as a member of the Latinx community. I have firsthand experience in addressing the campus environment for Latinx students beginning with my satellite center leadership, which primarily served the Latinx student population. Furthermore, the interest in this topic stems from my experience as a first generation Latinx student at a predominately white institution. Witnessing firsthand how the campus environment and key institutional agents supported me to graduation, has influenced the interest in this research topic. Some of the participants in the research study were colleagues with similar job functions. As a result, I assured each of the participants in the study that my role was as an observer and interviewer and that all of the information shared would be kept confidential (Stake, 1995).

I also worked on my own personal researcher bias by ensuring that my bias did not play a role in how I interpreted the data that I collected. I acknowledged biases and practiced being reflective through the use of the researcher's journal (Stake, 1995). A limitation of qualitative case studies is the sensitivity and integrity of the investigator (Merriam, 1998). As the primary instrument of the collection and analysis of the data it was important that I had an awareness of any potential bias during this research process (Merriam, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns are a consideration in all facets of this study's design (Maxwell, 2013). As I have previously articulated, it was my responsibility as a researcher to remain reflexive concerning positionality, role as an insider-outsider, and overall influence on the research process. An awareness of these dynamics was critical in the design of this multicase study, but it played an even greater role during data collection and analysis. Engaging in reflexivity helped ensure that I did not misrepresent the experiences of the participants or the study findings (Maxwell, 2013). I also worked on personal researcher bias by making sure that my bias did not play a role in how I interpreted the collected data. I acknowledged the biases and practiced being reflexive through the use of the researcher's journal (Stake, 1995).

I completed the *Protection of Human Research Subjects* course through The Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), which discusses ethics in research. I addressed ethical issues pertaining to participant information by allowing all participants to select a pseudonym for use during the data analysis process and in all reported findings (Creswell, 2013). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and I ensured that the participants understood what their agreement to participate in the study entailed (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Consent was obtained willingly and it was made clear that the participants could withdraw from the study at any time without prejudice (Rossman & Rallis, 2012)

Institutional Review Board

Prior to collecting any data, I submitted a research proposal to the Rowan University Institutional Review Board (IRB) to seek approval for data collection in this

research study. In addition, I submitted a research proposal to the IRB board of each of the HSI community colleges in this study since it is a requirement for anyone who is conducting research on their campuses. I identified the institutional agents at each HSI community college via the contact information listed on the website and via the student affairs affinity group for New Jersey community colleges. Once I identified the institutional agents at each location, I began to make initial contact with potential participants via electronic mail. The final case study participants were also given a research study consent form to read and confirm their understanding of the purpose and participation in this research study. Once I received IRB approval from the two HSI community colleges and from the Rowan University IRB, I began conducting the study.

Limitations

The limitations of this study are related to the HSI organizational identity, the racial campus climate experience, and the student perspective. This study did not explore how institutional leaders make sense of their HSI organizational identity. In addition, the racial campus climate experience for other racial and ethnic students on the community college campus were not explored in this study and might be a limitation in understanding the campus climate. Finally, this study was limited by the lack of a Latinx student perspective. The Latinx student perspective was included through the use of the CCSSE survey.

Chapter Summary

This qualitative multicase study was designed to gain a better understanding of how institutional agents foster a culturally engaged campus environment that facilitates completion for Latinx students at HSI community colleges in New Jersey. In this third

chapter, a description of the methodology for conducting this multicase study and the research questions that guided the study are provided. Furthermore, the rationale for adopting a multicase study design and my constructivist worldview is presented. In addition, how cases were selected along with the data collection and the data analysis procedures were described in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a description of how I ensured the validity, trustworthiness, and credibility of the research study and how ethical issues were addressed.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this study was to understand how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. The study used a comparative qualitative case study design (Stake, 2006). The participants in this research study were institutional agents who were responsible for the campus environment and Latinx student completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey. The data from this study was collected from two separate cases. The intent of this chapter is to present the findings of this study, specifically how institutional agents foster a culturally engaged environment at the two New Jersey HSI community college cases. By better understanding the experiences of institutional agents while working with Latinx students, New Jersey community colleges can structure their operations to effectively promote and enhance Latinx student success.

Summary of Cases

After reviewing Latinx completion data from the 2020 institutional profiles, I selected the top two HSI community colleges from New Jersey with the highest completion rates for Latinx students. The cases picked for this study are two HSI community colleges in New Jersey: Case 1: Aventura Community College (ACC) and Case 2: Bandera Community College (BCC). Each of the community colleges in this research study have a full-time equivalent enrollment of Latinx students of over 25%. In the first case, ACC became an HSI in 2013 and in the fall of 2020 had a Latinx enrollment of 33.3%. The second case, BCC became an HSI in 2008 and had an

enrollment of 39.7% during the Fall 2020 semester. Table 2 provides an overview of student outcomes based on the Fall 2017 Latinx student cohort.

Table 2

New Jersey HSI Community College Student Outcomes

	Case 1 – Aventura Community College	Case 2 – Bandera Community College
Fall 2017 Latinx Cohort	672 Students	554 Students
Latinx Graduates in 3 Years	19.3%	32.9%
Latinx Students Transferred	12.6%	8.3%

Source: Annual Institutional Profile 2021

Institutional agents within HSIs take on the role of assisting students toward degree completion, advocating for students and resources that sometimes must be diverted from other institutional priorities and aspirations (Hurtado et al., 2015). The participants in this study are all institutional agents who work at the HSI community colleges in this study. Each are responsible for the institutional structures and practices that are critical to creating a culturally engaging campus environment at each HSI community college. Additionally, each of the participants play a critical role in facilitating efforts to support Latinx students to completion. For example, each of the institutional agents interviewed have a leadership role in student affairs at their community college and are directly involved with the student life cycle. They lead or manage critical student support services in the areas of student life, enrollment services,

career and transfer services, and academic advising. The selected participants all directly provide Latinx students with mentorship, guidance, and assistance with navigating the community college experience. I interviewed six participants in this study, three in each case, and a pseudonym was selected for each participant. Table 3 presents the professional title of each participant and length of service at the each HSI community college.

Table 3

Description of New Jersey HSI Institutional Agents

Name	Case	Title	Years at the HSI
Omar	Aventura	Director	8 Years
Clara	Aventura	Director	13 Years
Maria	Aventura	Dean	25 Years
Manny	Bandera	Dean	10 Years
Diego	Bandera	Associate Director	3 Years
Sofia	Bandera	Associate Director	4 Years

Case I: Aventura Community College

Aventura Community College (ACC) is the third largest public community college in the state. The College was established in 1964 on nearly 200 acres and classes began in September 1966 (ACC Annual Institutional Report, 2020). In the Fall 2020 semester, the College enrolled 10,084 students in credit programs; 44% of students were enrolled full-time and 56% were enrolled part-time (ACC Annual Institutional Report,

2021). ACC is located within one of the most diverse counties in the state of New Jersey and enrolls a diverse population reflective of the communities served at their three campus locations in the county. In the Fall 2020 semester, 32% (3,267) students identified as Latinx (ACC Annual Institutional Report, 2021). According to the Annual Institutional Report (2021), ACC has one Latinx Board Member, does not list any intentional "Latinx" programming, and does not mention or acknowledge their HSI status in any of their web publications.

Institutional Agents' Perceptions of the HSI Designation

In the ACC case, the HSI designation was not clearly apparent to the external community based on a review of their current institutional publications, website, and physical space. However, the institutional agents interviewed at ACC were aware of the federal designation and expressed an appreciation for the HSI designation along with a strong desire to intentionally support the Latinx students at their institution. The institutional agents believed that as an HSI they should demonstrate an authentic effort to support Latinx students, be a culturally supportive campus for Latinx students, and have a diverse, visible, and accessible representation. These were the themes that emerged from the data collected regarding the perception of the HSI designation on campus.

Authentic Effort to Support Latinx Students. Authentic effort to support Latinx students at the community college emerged as one of the themes of the HSI perception on campus, where the HSI identity is tied to the genuine effort by institutional agents to publicly highlight, acknowledge, promote, and embrace the HSI designation. According to Omar, being an HSI "doesn't seem forced…It's natural. It's embedded in your programming, and the way you program, and how you program". While ACC does

not publicly acknowledge their HSI status, on campus there is a belief that the community college promotes and embraces the HSI status and provides genuine support for the Latinx students on campus. Omar states "I feel like that's what an HSI has, where it's just in the DNA to address their Hispanic students." Clara shared that as an HSI it is important to actively engage Latinx students and provide them with resources that can help them become successful. For example, Clara states "so I try to keep myself knowledgeable in all opportunities that could come to our [Latinx] students." Clara also believes that as an HSI community college it is important to utilize and promote the services and resources that an institution can access as a member of the Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities (HACU). Clara explains, "I have been involved in HACU deliberately in order to have access to the resources, but also the opportunities for students that they offer." Overall, the institutional agents in this case have deliberately and genuinely attempted to increase their knowledge of the services available to HSIs and their Latinx students. As a result, the institutional agents at ACC believe that as an HSI it is important to demonstrate an authentic effort to embrace, support, and promote the HSI designation at the community college.

Culturally Supportive Campus for Latinx Students. Being a culturally supportive campus emerged as the second theme under how institutional agents at ACC perceive their HSI designation. The HSI perception is associated with how culturally supportive the campus is towards Latinx students. Clara believes that being an HSI "means being culturally supportive and understanding that we have a large subset of our student population that deserves special attention." Clara further describes the importance of having cultural awareness to support Latinx students as an HSI "So the

onus is on us to be culturally aware, to understand where they [Latinx students] are, research points us to differences between how students react and engage with the college based on their own personal background."

Being culturally supportive of Latinx students is viewed as a necessity of being designated an HSI. According to Omar, "upper administration has always encouraged us to make attempts to satisfy the requirement [HSI designation] to address our students who are Latinx." The encouragement from the executive leadership at ACC allows the institutional agents in this case to embrace the HSI designation and focus on being innovative and intentional in programming and support for their Latinx students, through a cultural lens.

Diverse, Visible, and Accessible Institutional Representation. In this theme, the perception of the HSI designation is associated with the importance of having a diverse, visible, and accessible group of institutional agents who identify with the Latinx culture and represents the Latinx campus community. Based on 2020 IPEDS data, ACC's Latinx faculty, management, and professional staff comprised 17.3% of their total employee pool, with professional staff containing the largest numbers of Latinx employees. At ACC, there is a belief that having a visibly diverse representation of institutional agents is important as an HSI community college to support Latinx students on campus. Maria stated**:**

> We don't have a lot of diversity in terms of faculty teaching our students. I forget the ratio, but it's dwindling, which is shameful, and we as an institution need to do something about that. We need to make sure that we have representation in every aspect of the institution, and that also means in the executive chamber.

Maria further explains that faculty and staff at an HSI should have a responsibility to make themselves visible and accessible to Latinx and other black and indigenous students of color, especially if they identify as a member of a community of color.

> I make myself visible as best I can. I try to make sure that I take part in all of the student programming that we have so students get to know who I am…If I'm in a room and I can identify students as being Latinx or African-American, I'm going to approach them. I'm going to give them my business card and I'm going to say, I'm here.

Omar believes that as an HSI it is important to have a diverse group of administrators and staff members that can identify with the Latinx culture. However, Omar thinks that it is a small group of institutional agents that have supported and embraced the HSI designation. Omar states, "I feel like we have certain administrators and staff members who helped that [embrace of HSI designation] along…because they identified with the culture and identify with those [Latinx] students." From Omar's perspective, having a group of institutional agents that can identify with the Latinx culture is critical to shaping the HSI identity. As a result, in this case the institutional agents believe that an element of embracing the HSI designation means having a visible, diverse, and accessible group of faculty and staff to positively engage Latinx students and support student success.

Fostering a Culturally Engaged Campus Environment

An inclusive and culturally engaging campus environment is where Latinx institutional agents and Latinx students feel welcomed and empowered to express their identity without fear of judgement or discrimination. In this case, there were several themes that emerged as examples and indicators of cultural relevance and cultural

responsiveness to the Latinx students on campus. Intentional cultural programming, external community engagement, holistic approach, and building cultural competence were the indicators that emerged from the data collected at ACC. However, there was no indication of how ACC assesses the campus climate. All three institutional agents interviewed mentioned there is no systemic college-wide initiative to assess the campus climate for Latinx students. For example, according to Omar, “I don’t think we address that at all on our surveys.” In addition, the document review did not yield any results regarding the assessment of the campus climate.

Latinx Intentional Cultural Programming. In the ACC case, intentional cultural programming for Latinx students emerged as the first theme of how institutional agents foster a culturally engaged campus environment. Intentional cultural programming is intentional, inclusive, and focuses on addressing the Latinx community on campus. At ACC, student programming is an essential strategy to engaging with Latinx students. According to Omar, “Naturally our programming is just very inclusive. It's intentional for certain demographics such as our own Hispanic population.” Omar further explains:

> Currently we have our annual Hispanic heritage month calendar of events, and those have varied over the years. And they've consisted of events that highlighted the different cultures under that umbrella, whether it is in different parts of the culture, art, politics, entertainment, different things, and even lectures to educate students on things such as Latinx term.

Maria also referred to the intentional programming during Hispanic Heritage month that not only occurs on the main campus but also occurs at their satellite locations. However, according to Maria the programming at the satellite locations tend to be more consistent

as compared to the main campus. Maria states, “the programs at the [satellite location] of course are fabulous and are ongoing throughout both semesters.”

From the data collected, there is a concern about the consistency of intentional programming for Latinx students on each of their campus locations. Several of the institutional agents interviewed expressed a concern about Latinx programming only occurring during Hispanic Heritage month. According to Omar, “we haven't been consistent, at least not full year-round, but when we do have Hispanic heritage month, we want to make sure we're doing some programming for it.” Clara believes that programming should go beyond Hispanic Heritage month, “I know there's programming during Hispanic Heritage Month, but I think we can do more for Latinx students.” Maria also believes in expanding programming beyond the thematic month. According to Maria, “there is programming for Hispanic Heritage Month, but outside of Hispanic Heritage Month, there are no other opportunities for programming throughout the year.” Therefore, institutional agents believe expanding Latinx intentional programming for the campus community beyond Hispanic Heritage Month is critical to enhancing an inclusive campus environment that supports Latinx students.

External Community Engagement for Latinx Students. The next theme to emerge under a culturally engaged campus environment is engagement with the community. This theme describes how student programming intentionally engages with the local external community to support Latinx student engagement. At ACC, service learning and civic engagement have become integral to Latinx student engagement. According to Clara, “the service-learning courses are growing, and there are more of

them being offered because of student demand." Omar further explains ACC's increased focus on service learning and civic engagement:

> And with the college moving towards really promoting the whole civic engagement aspect and integrating into the classroom now. That is another avenue that [Latinx] students can take advantage of to give back to their community or to just learn more about their community.

ACC relies on their community connections via the satellite locations and relationships established by institutional agents. Omar explains how he seeks to partner with community representatives to enhance programming for Latinx students:

> There are community partners who are ingrained in that community, and they can also help me from my area bring programming that will be beneficial, programming that will be relevant, and programs that will educate our students as well as our staff.

Omar shared an example of a program that engaged with the local community, "I think some of the events that we've had, whether it was a benefit concert that we had several years ago, or two or three years ago, to benefit the hurricane victims of the hurricane. [Hurricane Maria]." There is also a strong belief that the ACC satellite locations are in a better position to provide student and community programming that intentionally engages the Latinx students. Omar explains:

> I know at our [satellite locations] there's been more like an ongoing programming that addresses Latinx students. And I think that that has a lot to do with the fact that the leadership consists of people of the community.

From the data collected at ACC, engagement with the community via their satellite locations has been essential to connecting Latinx students to the external community. In addition, institutional agents at ACC actively seek to cultivate community partnerships to increase Latinx student engagement with the external community.

Embracing a Holistic Approach for Latinx Students. The next theme to emerge at ACC regarding the culturally engaged campus environment is the holistic approach to supporting Latinx students. The holistic approach is one of the nine indicators of a culturally engaged campus environment. This theme refers to how the institutional agents in this campus environment embraced a collaborative and comprehensive approach to supporting Latinx students on campus. According to Maria the holistic approach would support a Latinx student from enrollment to completion.

> I think that it means that we are providing a holistic approach to education to Latinx students, and that is that we're not only providing the educational component, which is the admissions process, the whole registration and financial aid, but we're also making sure that we provide the counseling and give students the necessary tools so that they're walking across that graduation stage within two to three years.

In addition to the student support services that are provided by the community college, Maria believes that HSI community colleges need to continue engaging and including the family of Latinx students as part of their holistic approach. Maria explains:

> I think we need to be more inclusive of family. I think that is ... embedded within the culture that families are a big part of students' success. And whether our student is the parent or the child, it doesn't matter. We need to get the family

> involved, I believe, in order to help them understand if they don't already, if it's a first-generation student, the kinds of things that the student needs to be aware of, the family can help with that. I know our students tend to seek guidance from their families first. And I think that's, in my experience, particularly true of the Latinx students.

At ACC, Clara believes there is a strong commitment among institutional agents to support each other on campus, which carries over to the quality of the holistic support that the Latinx students receive on campus. Through the mutual support of campus initiatives and programs, the institutional agents at ACC collaborate to ensure their best effort to support the Latinx students they serve. According to Clara, "We help support each other's programs. We help support each other's initiatives to do the best job we possibly can." Overall, at ACC, implementing a holistic approach among institutional agents to support and engage with Latinx students and their families can enhance the Latinx student experience and assist with increasing student success.

Increasing Latinx Cultural Relevancy. The final culturally engaged campus environment theme to emerge from the data collected refers to the level of culturally relevant knowledge and the ability to communicate and interact with Latinx students on campus. At ACC, Maria believes that it is important to provided opportunities to learn more about the Latinx community.

> I think that exposure to different programming opportunities that are of a Latinx nature, you have to get the faculty and staff exposed as well, so that they can embrace the culture and then they can embrace the students, and there's that back

> and forth. We also have to understand culturally how to approach Latinx students just as we would African-American [Students].

Omar also believes it is important to understand and relate to Latinx students on a cultural level but thinks that cultural relevancy can be increased on campus by having increased support from institutional agents and the campus community at student events and serving as student club advisors. Omar explains:

> So although I myself am not Latino, I like to feel like I'm coming from a place of understanding when dealing with [Latinx] students. Because being Caribbean and from humble upbringings, I would say I would definitely relate on some levels…Trying to get our faculty to not just open [campus-wide] announcements but attend [student cultural] events and to serve as advisors for some of these cultural-based clubs is important.

Omar further explains there can be a negative impact on Latinx students on campus if faculty and staff do not attempt to be more empathetic to the Latinx student plight and understand where they are coming from. According to Omar:

> From speaking to some [Latinx] students, there is that feeling of... Sometimes you might, you might feel... In a class or working with, interacting with an administrator or interacting with somebody a part of the college community that doesn't quite understand where you're coming from, and they will address you and assist you exactly how they assisted person X who is from a different background.

At ACC, increased engagement with institutional agents can lead to increasing cultural relevancy and meaningful engagement with Latinx students. As a result, to improve

student success for Latinx community college students it is critical for institutional agents to assist with understanding and incorporating cultural relevancy on campus.

Facilitating Latinx Completion

Facilitating Latinx completion refers to the identification of completion policies, structures, strategies that intentionally support graduation and transfer for Latinx students on campus. At ACC, the participants were not able to highlight any specific targeted strategies, policies, or structures that are intentionally aimed at increasing Latinx completion. Addressing and eliminating potential barriers and obstacles for Latinx students is another element of facilitating Latinx completion. There were two primary themes that emerged regarding the perceived barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx students at ACC. The inability to utilize available student resources in a timely manner and the lack of bilingual communication emerged as these themes under the facilitation of Latinx completion at ACC.

Lack of Timely Utilization of Student Resources. This theme refers to how institutional agents perceived the lack of timely utilization by Latinx students of student resources that are designed to support completion. From the data collected at ACC, several participants in this study believe Latinx students on campus are not aware of or are not utilizing the student resources that are available to support them towards completion. Maria explains it can be a challenge and a barrier for Latinx students to identify the student resources or key student service contacts on campus, “I think sometimes not knowing where the resources are and not knowing who the resource people are, can be an issue for [Latinx] students.” Clara expands on the perceived lack of timely utilization of student resources when she discusses the registration process, “well

certainly the whole registration, you know, advising, all of that whole [enrollment] process. It's critical to everybody. And I think [Latinx] students wait way too long [to register].” However, Omar discussed the lack of intentional engagement towards Latinx students regarding campus resources and adds to the perceived lack of awareness and utilization of student resources.

> I don't think we have it focused just on Latinx students. It is very general, whether it's student success coaches, or different academic things like tutoring, our instructional resource service we offer at the Learning Center when it comes to assisting [Latinx students] academically.

Increasing intentional engagement efforts with Latinx students can improve the timely utilization of campus resources.

At ACC, there is also a concern on how Latinx students utilize transfer services on campus. According to Maria, “I think we need to do a better job on the campus in terms of transfer and working with Latinx students to move to the next institution.” Improving how and when institutional agents engage with Latinx students to provide critical resources and services at ACC is crucial to increasing the transfer rate for this population. Clara explains:

> Every student in a transfer program should touch base with a transfer counselor or advisor…if we're going to be successful with our [Latinx] students and help them be successful here, we have to start much earlier with some populations.

The timely utilization of transfer services ca increase the transfer rates for Latinx students.

From the document analysis at ACC, data regarding the utilization of student services was not available. However, according to the results of ACC's most recent Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE), ACC had more respondents (36.2%) indicate that they 'Never' discussed career plans with an instructor or advisor, as compared to 25% of students at HSI's and 23.3% of the cohort group in 2018. As a result, institutional agents need to increase and promote the utilization of available student resources that can assist with Latinx completion.

Increasing Bilingual Communication. The next theme to emerge under Latinx completion addresses the need to increase targeted communication strategies in English and Spanish to increase Latinx student success. Currently at ACC, none of their institutional publications are published in Spanish. In addition, the website is not available in Spanish, which is perceived to be an obstacle for the Latinx students who begin their academic career in the English as Second Language (ESL) program. According to Clara,

> I think our website doesn't help [Latinx] students know that they can get some support. Because it's way too complicated for them to figure out. You know, we expect the students to know us by name and find us that way and know what we do. That's stupid. How would they know that? We need to be able to have them navigate this resource in a way that makes sense to the students.

Clara also believes that institutional agents at ACC need to explain and communicate in Spanish how available student resources can specifically assist Latinx students to completion. For example, Clara believes Latinx students have a negative perception of tutoring.

> I had done some research in the past, and I do think Latinx students in particular see tutoring and other things as a signal of failure. And that may be, you know, so it's kind of, 'I can't cut it.' And instead of a position of strength in advocating for themselves, it tends to be perceived as I'm failing and that's a bad thing and I can embarrass myself or my family by being here and seen as a failure. So we can do a better job with that.

As a result, institutional agents at ACC believe there is a need to increase bilingual communication efforts and promote the student services that are available at the community college to Latinx students on campus.

Case II: Bandera Community College

Bandera Community College (BCC) has the distinction of being one of the oldest community colleges in the state (BCC Annual Institutional Report, 2020). The College was established in 1933 and merged with a technical school in 1982 to become the current public community college (BCC Annual Institutional Report, 2021). In the Fall 2020 semester, the College enrolled 8,298 students in credit programs; 45% of students were enrolled full-time and 55% were enrolled part-time (BCC Annual Institutional Report, 2021). BCC is located within a diverse county in the state of New Jersey and enrolls a diverse population reflective of the communities served at their five locations in the county. In the Fall 2020 semester, 39.7% (3,298) students identified as Latinx (BCC Annual Institutional Report, 2021). According to the Annual Institutional Report (2021), BCC has three Latinx members on their Board of Trustees. BCC also highlights several programs that target the Latinx community and are designed to provide access and support to this student population. In addition, BCC does acknowledge their HSI status

in their annual report but does not mention or acknowledge their HSI status on the website.

Institutional Agents' Perceptions of the HSI Designation

In this case, the HSI designation was also not clearly apparent to the external community based on their current website and physical space. However, the HSI designation was prevalent in their recent annual reports and several of their published institutional documents. The institutional agents interviewed at BCC were aware of the federal designation and expressed a strong sense of commitment towards the HSI designation. In addition, they expressed a strong desire to intentionally support the Latinx students at their institution. Embracing and celebrating campus diversity, and a diverse, visible, and accessible institutional agent representation were the major themes that emerged from the data collected regarding the perception of the HSI designation on campus.

Embracing and Celebrating Campus Diversity. In this theme, the HSI perception is defined by how the campus community embraces and celebrates diversity. All the participants interviewed explained how the BCC campus community and the institutional agents strongly embrace diversity on the campus. Manny believes that the HSI designation is a testament to BCC's commitment to embracing diversity. Manny explains:

> I think being a Hispanic serving institution is a great responsibility here. I was just looking at the numbers today with our first-time cohort. We have about 40% of our students who are Hispanic or of Latin descent, which is just phenomenal. That highlights and illustrates the diversity that we have here at the institution.

According to Diego, being designated as an HSI just confirms how visually diverse and welcoming the campus is. Diego explains, “For me I think the overall welcoming aspect is seeing a diverse population on campus”. Diego also mentions how important it is for him to continuously familiarize himself with the populations that he serves, like the Latinx students at BCC. As an HSI, Diego explains “it is just being cognizant of some of the values, cultural differences. I'm really educating myself to know more if I'm dealing with a Latino student.” Sofia takes it a step further and believes the HSI designation endorses the expectations at BCC to serve and support a diverse student body. Sofia explains there is an “expectation that you're going to be serving students who have Hispanic or Latinx heritage and supporting them after their enrollment up to degree completion.” The perception of the HSI designation is associated with how institutional agents embrace and celebrate campus diversity in support of their Latinx students.

Diverse, Visible, and Accessible Institutional Agent Representation. In this theme, the HSI perception is associated with the importance of having a diverse, visible, and accessible group of institutional agents that identify with the Latinx culture and represents the Latinx campus community. All the participants interviewed at BCC believe it is important to have a diverse representation of faculty, staff, and administrators to assist and support Latinx students and to fully embrace the HSI designation. According to Manny:

> I think in some capacity or form we have representation of Hispanic descent folks in just about every single department at our Institution, whether in a leadership role or director role or some capacity or form.

Manny further explains:

> It’s having not only the student population being of high Hispanic, Latino students, it's also having faculty and staff that are a reflection of the student demographic and population. And I think that's key here in how we've had so much success at the institution, is having administrators, staff, faculty that look like the students that we serve. I think that's huge.

Diego also supports Manny’s assertions and believes having a diverse representation of faculty, staff, and administrators allows BCC to embrace the HSI designation and foster a welcoming environment. According to Diego:

> It's not just seeing the average Caucasian man on campus, there is a variety with women, African American males, Hispanics, and different aspects of a college, different leadership roles. So, I think them seeing that creates that welcoming environment.

Sofia also agrees and adds:

> You're seeing White faculty, White staff, what are you going to think? Having more diverse staff members, I think that's definitely necessary, and we need to have more black and brown Latinx folks in our staff, and in higher positions, in higher level positions.

Based on 2020 IPEDS data, BCC’s total percentage of Latinx faculty, management, and professional staff comprised 17.8% of their total employee pool. Overall, at BCC the perception of the HSI designation is associated with the strong commitment to have a diverse representation among their institutional agents.

Fostering a Culturally Engaged Campus Environment

In this case, there were several themes that emerged as examples of cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness to the Latinx students on campus. External community engagement for Latinx students, intentional cultural programming, and cultivating a safe and welcoming environment for Latinx students were the themes and indicators of a culturally relevant and responsive campus environment that emerged from the data collected at BCC. However, there was no clear indication of how BCC assesses the campus climate. All three institutional agents interviewed mentioned there is no systemic college-wide initiative to assess the campus climate for Latinx students. According to Sofia, "Institutional assessment…great job but does not look into student engagement. Campus climate, the closest that they got to it was like, all students are frustrated about parking".

External Community Engagement for Latinx Students. This theme describes how student programming intentionally engages with the local external community to support Latinx student engagement. Service learning and civic engagement have become integral to Latinx student engagement. According to Manny, there are many opportunities for Latinx students to engage with the external community.

> Our college life does a really good job of providing numerous community service activities that go on throughout the year. Even during our winter break, they provide some community service or activities that go on throughout the academic year.

Manny also highlighted the relationships that have been established with the consulates from South America. Manny explains:

> [BCC] have built and developed some great relationships with consulates from all over South America that are here in the United States and a lot of our Latin countries. And [we] brought them to the Institution and we've done programming at the Institution, like film festivals.

According to Diego, the collaborative relationship with the Consulates is reflective of the County's Latinx population. Diego states:

> I know they're doing a wide set of community outreach because again, [Bandera] County itself is predominantly Hispanic. There's a big sector of the County that is Spanish. So seeing [Latinx students] embrace the culture and getting into the community, and letting them know, hey, here's what's going on. There's a lot of joint programs with, like I said, the consulate of Columbia, some of the Hispanic embassies. One of the Presidents was here from another country. Just bringing them over and having different activities such as that is huge. And it shows the Campus community as well as the city of [NJ City], who has a big Hispanic population, that listen, we're here to help you and we want to make sure that you're supported and successful.

The collaborative relationship with the external community has allowed the Latinx students and the student clubs at BCC to launch community service initiatives. For example, Diego describes a program initiated by Latinx students:

> I remember the Hispanic club for Hispanic Heritage Month, they took on a lot of the embrace your cultural activities. I remember for this community outreach, like right before Thanksgiving. They came a day, worked with a few other clubs and came up with the Feed the Homeless Initiative for Thanksgiving. They did that for

> Christmas. And that's a few of the programs that I've seen them do when it comes in [to] community engagement.

As a result of the Latinx engagement with the external campus community at BCC, collaborative relationships have been established by institutional agents to allow Latinx students to network, implement cultural and community service programming, and bridge the campus and external communities. Similar to the findings in the previous case, the data collected suggests that institutional agents at HSI community colleges should cultivate external community partnerships to enhance the Latinx student experience.

Intentional Cultural Programming. At BCC, this theme refers to student programming that is intentional, inclusive, and focuses on addressing the Latinx community on campus. From the data collected at BCC, the institutional agents interviewed highlighted several examples of intentional Latinx student programming. According to Sofia:

> I mean, we celebrate Dia de los Muertos, Cinco de Mayo, when we have women's history, black history, we also celebrate Afro-Latinx folks, Latinx women. We just try to make, because regardless we have to work collectively with the college and their initiatives, so when they're doing the month long events we try to incorporate our own events based on the population in [Campus Location].

Diego also discusses the importance of cultural programming at BCC:

> Having [Latinx students] see students that are representing the population. Programs geared towards them…not just for Hispanic Heritage Month, but there's definitely clubs, Hispanic Heritage clubs and things like that doing familiar outreach as well.

However, Sofia believes that intentional cultural programming needs to occur beyond Latinx heritage month. Sofia explains, “We also host cultural month-long events. The only time you really hear about Latinx, or Hispanics from the school as a whole is during mid-September to mid-October”. Manny also questions whether BCC institutional agents do enough to intentionally engage the Latinx students on campus. According to Manny, “are the events deliberate, specifically towards Latinx students? And, I don't know enough from our college life, if it is deliberate enough for specifically Latinx [students].” While there are efforts to support intentional and inclusive cultural programming for Latinx students at BCC, the institutional agents believe there is more to do beyond Latinx heritage month.

Cultivating a Safe and Welcoming Environment for Latinx Students. In this theme, a safe and welcoming environment refers to a campus environment that consists of safe and open communication with Latinx students. The institutional agents at BCC believe they have fostered a welcoming campus environment for the Latinx students on their community college campus. According to Diego:

> For me I think we provide a welcoming environment. I think the students, especially with the one-stop model, know they can come in any time, they can connect with an advisor, they feel comfortable finding and or connecting with an advisor, number one. The programming as well, just having that open communication, open door policy. They can talk with anybody really. It's in that welcoming environment from new student orientation to the first day.

Sofia believes it is important for institutional agents to create a safe space for Latinx students on each campus location. She explains:

> I think what makes us unique is the fact that we have a space where students can come in without any questions asked, as long as they're a student. That we have a safe environment for them to come into where they just need to kind of unplug from the classroom, or school itself.

In a safe and welcoming campus environment, Sofia believes it allows the institutional agents to engage in meaningful conversations with Latinx students and learn about their backgrounds. Sofia explains:

> It starts with knowing what type of Latinx students are coming in. Are they part of the LGBTQ community? Did they recently become an American citizen? Maybe that's extra work, or maybe confidential information, but there has to be a way for us to know who encompasses the student body.

At BCC, the institutional agents described the safe and welcoming environment as a place for Latinx students to come in and openly engage in meaningful conversations about their academic and personal experiences. It begins with new student orientation sessions and continues through their one stop engagement with Latinx students. By cultivating this type of safe and welcoming campus environment for Latinx students at BCC, institutional agents believe they can assess and improve communication with this student population. According to Manny, “I think that's where I pay the most attention to, is making sure that we can have really good communication with our [Latinx] students.” From the data collected at BCC, institutional agents at this HSI community college focused on creating a safe space for Latinx students to enhance meaningful communication.

Facilitating Latinx Completion

At BCC, there was no evidence of targeted completion policies, structures, or strategies that intentionally support graduation and transfer for Latinx students at their community college campus. Interestingly, the participants were able to highlight an initiative that was designed to improve completion for African-American males. However, intentional Latinx resource allocation and implementing personalized campus support were the two primary themes that emerged regarding the institutional agents' perceived barriers and obstacles regarding Latinx student completion at BCC.

Intentional Latinx Resource Allocation. In this theme, the campus resources are intentionally allocated to support Latinx students through completion. At BCC, several of the participants highlighted how the community college allocates campus resources to assist Latinx students to achieve completion. According to Manny, "I think the President has done a really great job in allocating the resources for [minority initiatives] …By doing so with our Latinx population, we're going to have tremendous success." The allocated campus resources allow BCC to tailor services towards the needs of Latinx students. For example, Diego mentions how campus resources are used to support non-traditional Latinx students. Diego explains,

> [Latinx students] might not be straight out of high school and they may be nontraditional students coming in. So you need to provide these resources for them. Not only weekdays, but weekdays in the evenings and weekends, because that's just the reality we live in. Having the materials, whether it's the books or the laptops or a study environment.

Sofia also believes the allocation of campus resources is key to assisting Latinx students with navigating the community college experience. According to Sofia,

> First, you come straight out of high school, first generation student. Just bringing all of that baggage thinking they have to show up a certain way. Then, you have even more nontraditional students like, maybe a single parent, or someone who's working a 40-hour job that has to come in and out of campus. I mean, the students will not stop to talk to you unless you have an incentive. Obviously, food and stuff and free giveaways. I try to engage them before they reach for the food.

By allocating campus resources to support extended hours, a study environment, supplies and equipment, and food, BCC supports their Latinx students. Institutional agents play a critical role in supporting their Latinx students by effectively allocating resources to meet the needs of their Latinx students.

Implementing Personalized Campus Support. In this theme, campus support is personalized to respond to the needs of the Latinx students on campus. At BCC, campus support policies and efforts are in place to serve and engage all community college students. However, the institutional agents at BCC emphasized a personalized approach to engaging and supporting their Latinx students. According to Sofia, "In order for [Latinx students] to understand how to navigate college they need to be supported and it can't just be a thirty-minute meeting with their advisor, oh you got registered, all right that's it." Diego believes in the personalized approach when working with Latinx students, "Programs geared towards them, advisers that are geared towards them, just helping them every inch of the way." Manny believes there is a culture of personalized support and strong commitment to helping the Latinx students on campus. Manny states,

> You know, I've been to other institutions, and I tell some folks what I do and they're like, our Dean doesn't do that. I'm like, well, I like being out on the floor. I like to know what's going on. So I interact with all students. I like to get a beat of what our students are doing, like, don't like. Part of it is having folks out there on the floor that they can build a rapport with [Latinx Students] and provide [Latinx Students] with good information. For us, it is training, making sure that first we know what we're talking about and then providing our advisors with skills to build rapport with students in a short amount of time.

Sofia believes that it is important to be personal and authentic with Latinx students.

> Well, I think I bring my passion in everything that I do, and my authenticity. If something seems off, I'm going to say it, and I'm going to let the student know, this seems off, we need to do our due diligence for you and see how we can fix X, Y and Z.

Diego mentions that his personalized support of students extends to student programs and being visible. Diego states,

> Colleagues in leadership roles can say that they're there for the programs, they support it, but I actually don't just talk about it, I'm there at every program. It could be on the weekends, it can be on the weekdays, it could be on another campus. I'm going to make it my business to actually show up and support the program.

At BCC, Latinx completion and student success is rooted in the strong commitment by institutional agents to implement a personalized approach in providing support and engagement with Latinx students on campus. As suggested by the data collected,

institutional agents at HSI community colleges need to consider enhancing personalized campus support systems to facilitate completion for Latinx students.

Cross-Case Analysis

Stake (2006) described a multi-case study as an opportunity to better understand the quintain and highlight the uniqueness of each case in the multi-case study. The quintain in this study is the culturally engaging campus environment and Latinx college completion at New Jersey HSI community colleges. The cross-case analysis focused on the comparison of the data collected at each HSI community college setting to identify the patterns and relationships between each case and the role of the institutional agent in fostering a culturally engaged campus environment to support completion for Latinx students. The main activity of the cross-case analysis was to apply the situated findings from the case reports to the research questions and the quintain (Stake, 2006). From the analysis, I have generated assertions that will allow me and the readers of this multi-case study to better understand the quintain (Stake, 2006).

Perceptions of the HSI Designation

The perception of the HSI designation is associated with the importance of having a diverse, visible, and accessible group of institutional agents who identify with the Latinx culture and represent the Latinx campus community. Internally, the institutional agents interviewed in both cases were aware of and embraced the federal designation. The institutional agents also expressed a strong desire to intentionally support the Latinx students at their community colleges. However, the HSI designation was not clearly apparent to the external community based on an analysis of their 2017-2020 institutional publications, the website, and their physical space. I was only able to find a paragraph in

the 2020 annual report at Bandera Community College that specifically mentioned the HSI designation.

The institutional agents in both cases believed their campus diversity was an asset in serving the Latinx students on their community college campus. Based on 2020 IPEDS data, Aventura Community College's Latinx faculty, management, and professional staff comprised 17.3% of their total employee pool, with professional staff containing the largest numbers of Latinx employees. At Bandera Community College, their total percentage of Latinx faculty, management, and professional staff was higher at 17.8%. The percentage of Latinx institutional agents at all eighteen community colleges in New Jersey is at 11.8%. As depicted in table 4, both cases are higher than the total percentage for all the New Jersey Community Colleges. However, Aventura Community College did not have any Latinx representation at the management level. The perception of the HSI designation is associated with the strong commitment to have a diverse representation among the institutional agents at each community college. Overall, the data collected validates the perception of having a visible and diverse group of institutional agents that can identify with the Latinx culture is critical for student success.

Table 4

Percentage of Latinx Employees by Faculty, Management, and Support/Professional Staff - 2019

Latinx Employees	Aventura % of Total	Bandera % of Total	NJ Community Colleges %
Faculty (full-time)	4.9%	5.9%	4.2%
Management	0	14.6%	9.7%
Support/Professional Staff	22.3%	22.8%	16.2%
Total	17.3%	17.8%	11.8%

Source: IPEDS Human Resources Survey 2020

Fostering a Culturally Engaged Campus Environment

In both cases, the data collected points to an intentional effort by institutional agents to foster an inclusive and culturally engaged campus environment for the Latinx students on their community college campus. There are several examples of culturally relevant and culturally responsive indicators presented in each case that illustrate an understanding of the impact of campus environments on the academic motivation and success of Latinx community college students. In both cases, intentional cultural programming and connecting Latinx students to external community engagement opportunities were the prominent themes to emerge as indicators of a culturally engaged campus environment. However, there were some unique themes in each case. For example, in the case of ACC, a holistic approach was explicit and a unique indicator of cultural responsiveness. In the case of BCC, a unique indicator that emerged is the focus

of institutional agents on cultivating a safe and welcoming environment for Latinx students.

In both cases, there were several examples of intentional cultural programming focused on engaging and addressing the Latinx community on campus. From the data collected at ACC, student programming is critical to the success of the Latinx students on their campus. The programming by institutional agents focuses on culture, art, and politics, but primarily only occur during Hispanic Heritage month. Similarly, at BCC, the data highlighted several examples of intentional Latinx student programming on each campus location, but the programming is also prominently centered around Hispanic Heritage month. In addition, from an analysis of public institutional documents between 2017 through 2020 at both institutions, only BCC highlighted their Hispanic Heritage month programming in their annual report. In both cases, cultural programming also varied by satellite campus or satellite center, which often leads to a lack of coordination among the institutional agents. As a result, ACC and BCC institutional agents employ cultural programming as strategy to foster a culturally engaged campus environment for Latinx students, but there is a concern about the consistency of the programming on each community college campus.

Institutional agents connecting Latinx students with external community engagement opportunities is another prominent indicator of cultural relevance in both cases. At ACC and BCC, the data collected describes how student programming intentionally engaged with the local external community supports Latinx student engagement. Service learning and civic engagement activities emerged as a critical strategy for institutional agents to increase Latinx student engagement with the external

community. From the data collected at ACC, engagement with the community via their satellite locations has been critical to connecting Latinx students to the external community. At BCC, the collaborative relationship with the Consulates from Spanish speaking countries, is reflective of the community college and the county's Latinx population. The collaborative relationship between the institutional agents and the external community allows the Latinx students and the student clubs in each case to launch community service initiatives. In each case, some of these service learning and community services initiatives were prominently featured in the annual reports between 2017 and 2020. As a result of the engagement with the external campus community in each case, collaborative relationships were established by institutional agents to provide Latinx students with the opportunity to network, develop cultural and community service programming, and bridge the campus and external communities through collaborative events and programs.

At ACC, a unique indicator of cultural responsiveness is the holistic approach in supporting the Latinx students on their campus. From the data collected, there were examples and strategies of how the campus environment and institutional agents embrace a collaborative and comprehensive approach to supporting the Latinx students on campus. In addition, strategies to engage with families and parents are part of this holistic approach to engaging Latinx students. Included in their 2020 Institutional Profile Report, several pre-college initiatives that target Latinx families out of their satellite locations are highlighted as examples. Therefore, having a collaborative and holistic approach among the institutional agents to support and engage with Latinx students and their families has proven to be a beneficial strategy of engagement at ACC.

At BCC, cultivating a safe and welcoming environment emerged as a unique indicator of cultural responsiveness. From the data collected, a safe and welcoming environment at BCC refers to a campus environment that consists of safe and open communication between institutional agents and Latinx students. Several of the institutional agents interviewed believe the engagement strategies implemented through their one-stop enrollment center has led to having meaningful communication with the Latinx students at each campus location. As a result, through the efforts of the institutional agents in this case, they have fostered a campus environment that is distinguished by caring, committed, and meaningful connections with Latinx students.

In both cases, there was no formal assessment process on how institutional agents at each HSI community college assessed the campus climate. In each case, the institutional agents interviewed were asked about their strategies to assessing the campus climate and about any equity initiatives that address Latinx community college students. However, they were not aware of any systemic college-wide initiative to assess the campus climate and equity initiatives for Latinx students. In a review of the strategic plan and goals and objectives in each case, there is also no mention of assessing the campus climate.

From this study, the institutional agents in both cases demonstrate cultural responsiveness strategies in their work with Latinx students but are weaker in this area of the CECE model. The cultural responsiveness indicators of the CECE model gauge the degree to which campus environments respond to the cultural norms and needs of racially and ethnically diverse student populations (Museus, 2014). On a culturally responsive campus, the students should be able to receive assistance from trusted institutional agents

and are able to access student support services that are both available and visible. Of the four indicators outlined in the CECE model, the institutional agents in each case provided evidence of a humanized educational environment and holistic support. At BCC, the theme of cultivating a safe and welcoming environment is indicative of providing a humanized education environment. At ACC, a unique indicator of cultural responsiveness is the holistic approach in supporting the Latinx students on their campus. However, after interviewing and revieing the data collected, the institutional agents in each case do not provide examples or strategies of a collective cultural orientation and of proactive philosophies when addressing Latinx students on their community college campuses. As a result, institutional agents at both HSI community colleges have not fully engaged in culturally responsive strategies to address the campus environment. Overall, the institutional agents in this study did not demonstrate sufficient strategies to address all of the cultural responsiveness indicators of the CECE model.

Facilitating Latinx Completion

In each of the cases, the data collected regarding how the institutional agents facilitate and support Latinx completion was unique to each institution. Facilitating Latinx completion refers to the identification of completion policies, structures, strategies that intentionally support graduation and transfer for Latinx students on campus. Addressing and eliminating potential barriers and obstacles for Latinx students is another element of facilitating Latinx completion. The utilization of student resources and the lack of bilingual communication were the areas of concern that institutional agents identified as barriers and obstacles under Latinx completion at ACC. Intentional resource allocation and implementing personalized campus supports for Latinx students were two

primary strategies that emerged to address the perceived barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx student completion at BCC.

At ACC, the perceived lack of timely utilization by Latinx students of critical student resources designed to support completion emerged from the data collected. Several of the institutional agents believe Latinx students on campus are not aware of or are not utilizing the student resources that are available to support them towards completion. As a result, from the information collected, institutional agents need to increase and promote the available student resources that can assist with Latinx completion. By identifying and promoting essential student resources or key student service contacts on the HSI community college campus, institutional agents can support Latinx student completion.

In the case of ACC, the next unique barrier to emerge under Latinx completion is the lack of targeted bilingual communication strategies to support Latinx students and provide information to families. Currently at ACC, none of their institutional publications are published in Spanish and their website is also not available in Spanish, which is perceived to be an obstacle for the Latinx students who begin their academic career in the English as Second Language (ESL) program and for the parents of the first-generation Latinx students who do not speak English. From the document analysis, ACC does not mention any specific services in Spanish, while in the case of BCC, they offer credit and non-credit courses in Spanish and actively promote their services in Spanish via published brochures and flyers. From the data collected, the institutional agents at BCC demonstrate a stronger commitment to launching bilingual communication efforts to engage with their Latinx students and campus community.

In the case of BCC, institutional agents facilitate Latinx completion through their strong commitment to a personalized approach in providing support services to the Latinx students on campus and through the allocation of resources. The data collected suggests there is a strong culture of personalized support and a strong commitment to supporting the Latinx students on their campuses. According to the institutional agents interviewed at BCC, there is a strong commitment to also intentionally allocate campus resources to support Latinx students through completion. By allocating campus resources to support extended hours, study environments, supplies and equipment, and food, BCC can tailor support services to address the needs of their Latinx students.

Summary

In conclusion, the findings of the study focused on understanding how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. The participants in this research study addressed the quintan and described how institutional agents perceived the HSI designation, fostered a culturally engaged campus environment, and facilitated completion for the Latinx students at their community colleges. From the findings, the institution agents' perception of the HSI designation is associated with the importance of having a diverse, visible, and accessible group of institutional agents that identify with the Latinx culture and represents the Latinx campus community. In both cases, intentional cultural programming and connecting Latinx students to external community engagement opportunities are the prominent themes to emerge from the institutional agents as indicators of a culturally engaged campus environment. The need of institutional agents to increase the utilization

of available student resources and the lack of bilingual communication are the areas of concerns that emerged as barriers and obstacles under Latinx completion. Intentional resource allocation and personalized campus support for Latinx students are two primary strategies that emerged from the institutional agents in addressing the perceived barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx student completion. The next chapter will provide a discussion on the findings as it relates to the culturally engaged campus environment model and the research questions will be answered to explain the quintain. Furthermore, chapter 5 will address and reveal the study's limitations and suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5

Discussion and Implications

This multicase study adds to the current literature on HSI community colleges and how institutional agents might support Latinx completion through a culturally engaging campus environment. Most of the research on HSIs has emphasized the potential of the community college sector to raise college access and completion rates for Latinx students in the states with a large proportion of Latinx students (Hurtado & Ruiz, 2012; Santiago, 2006). However, few studies have critically examined and challenged community college HSIs to examine their campus environment and how they intentionally engage and support Latinx students to increase student success and improve academic outcomes. Furthermore, there is dearth of research regarding New Jersey community college HSIs.

The purpose of this multicase study was to investigate and understand how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. Through interviews, observations, and analysis of institutional documents, data on institutional capacity, intentionality, and clarity of purpose were collected to answer the research questions and identify patterns among the cases. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) model of college success (Museus, 2014) was used to guide and present the findings.

The following research questions helped me to further understand the role of institutional agents and the campus environment in supporting Latinx college completion at HSI community colleges in New Jersey:

1) How do institutional agents perceive the HSI designation?

2) How do institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment for Latinx students?
    a) What are the strategies for assessing campus climate?
    b) What are the strategies to responding to the perceived needs of Latinx students?
    c) What are the strategies for making the campus environment culturally relevant to Latinx students?
3) How do institutional agents facilitate completion for Latinx community college students?
    a) What are the perceived barriers and obstacles for Latinx students?
    b) What are the strategies to intentionally engage and support Latinx students?
    c) What are the policies and institutional structures that address Latinx student completion?

The findings reported in chapter four helped me to answer the research questions that guided this study. The questions in this study developed the major themes and assisted with describing the participants' experience at an HSI community college in New Jersey (Stake, 2006). This study was not intended to provide a generalization of the campus environment and Latinx college completion at New Jersey HSI community colleges. However, it provides insight into helping us understand how institutional agents at Aventura and Bandera Community Colleges foster a culturally engaged campus environment to support Latinx student completion on their campuses.

Institutional agents within HSIs take on the role of connecting students to institutional resources and support services that increase student success. In this multicase

study, an institutional agent as defined by Stanton-Salazar (2011), refers to an individual who holds a hierarchical role within the institution. These individuals act as institutional agents when they directly transmit or negotiate the transmission of crucial resources on behalf of students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Research by Deil-Amen (2011) in a community college setting found that students identified institutional agents as key to persistence. Consequently, institutional agents play a considerable role in shaping the campus environments that can enhance college student success (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

Discussion of the Findings

This qualitative multicase study was designed to gain a better understanding of how institutional agents foster a culturally engaged campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at HSI community colleges in New Jersey. The research questions were used to guide this study in exploring the campus environment and Latinx completion through the perspective of the institutional agents at each New Jersey Hispanic-serving community college. The following summary provides answers to the research questions in this multicase study that were drawn from the findings.

Perception of the HSI Identity

The first research question asked how institutional agents perceive the HSI designation in this multicase study; I found the perception of the HSI designation to be associated with the importance of having a diverse, visible, and accessible group of institutional agents who identify with the Latinx culture and represent the Latinx campus community. Internally, the institutional agents in both cases were aware of the federal HSI designation and expressed a strong desire to intentionally support the Latinx students at their institution. Nevertheless, the HSI designation was not clearly apparent to the

external community. Unfortunately, this is consistent with other research studies that have found few HSIs explicitly express their status as an HSI in mission statements on their web sites or in strategic planning materials, raising concerns about the extent to which HSIs may authentically "serve" Latinx students (Contreras et al., 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Bensimon, 2015). However, there is evidence from the findings that institutional agents in HSIs make unique efforts to serve Latinx students, even if these community colleges may not publicly or clearly articulate their HSI status.

From my findings, the perception of the HSI designation was associated with the strong commitment to have a visible and diverse representation among the institutional agents at each community college. The data collected validated the perception of having a visible and diverse group of institutional agents that can identify with the Latinx culture is critical for student success. The findings are consistent with research on HSIs which highlight the lack of a fully representative proportion of Latinx faculty and administrators in relation to Latinx students (Contreras & Contreras, 2015; Hatch et al., 2015; Santos & Acevedo Gil, 2013). For example, Latinx representation among the institutional agents at both HSI community colleges did not reflect the percentage of Latinx students enrolled, but they were higher as compared to the rest of the New Jersey community colleges. Interestingly, Aventura and Bandera Community College have the highest completion for Latinx community college students in New Jersey.

Latinx institutional agents are certainly not the only personnel who can or should be responsible for understanding and supporting Latinx students. It is important to have a diverse group of institutional agents who are committed to serving Latinx students and fully support the HSI designation. While these HSIs may not have espoused a mission to

target Latinx students, personnel at these community colleges still serve as critical institutional agents who build an organizational culture to advance Latinx student success (García, 2017). This was evident in the findings at Aventura and Bandera Community Colleges where the institutional agents from diverse backgrounds demonstrated a strong commitment to serving Latinx students and supporting them to completion.

Institutional Agents Fostering a Culturally Engaged Campus Environment

The second research question asked how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment for Latinx students. I found that institutional agents in both cases espoused an inclusive and culturally engaged campus environment where they felt welcomed and empowered to express their identity without fear of judgement or discrimination. The strategies presented by the institutional agents responded to the needs of Latinx students and made the campus environment culturally relevant for the Latinx students they serve. The CECE model of college success is based on the notion that institutions can construct campus cultures that meaningfully reflect and respond to the diverse backgrounds of their students in order to create the conditions for diverse student bodies to thrive (Museus, 2014). Using the CECE model to situate the findings, I found indicators of cultural responsiveness and cultural relevance at each HSI community college. In both cases, intentional cultural programming and providing opportunities for external community engagement emerged as indicators of a culturally engaged campus environment.

In applying the CECE model to the findings from both cases, cultural relevance and cultural responsiveness indicators are not all prevalent at each community college. The five indicators of cultural relevance focus on the ways that institutional environments

are relevant to the cultural backgrounds, communities, and identities of diverse college students (Museus, 2014). Of the five indicators of cultural relevance, institutional agents in both cases demonstrate strategies that address cultural familiarity, culturally relevant knowledge, cultural community service, and cultural validation. Through intentional cultural programming, institutional agents in these cases increased cultural familiarity and culturally relevant knowledge for Latinx students. By connecting Latinx students to external community engagement opportunities, institutional agents in both cases address the cultural community services indicator and allow Latinx students to give back to their local communities. This indicator of cultural validation refers to the degree to which colleges value their Latinx students' cultural backgrounds and identities (Meseus, 2014). From the findings, there were several examples of how institutional agents attempted to highlight and celebrate the Latinx culture on campus, especially during Hispanic Heritage Month. Unfortunately, the indicator of meaningful cross-cultural engagement is missing in both cases. The institutional agents do not provide any examples of how they offer purposeful opportunities for Latinx students to engage in meaningful and positive interactions with students from different cultural backgrounds (Museus, 2014). As a result, institutional agents at ACC and BCC primarily support student success for Latinx community college students by understanding and incorporating culturally relevant strategies to foster a culturally engaged campus environment.

Cultural Responsiveness Strategies. Holistic support is one of the examples that I found was a prominent indicator of cultural responsiveness. The strategy was evident through several examples and strategies of how the institutional agents embraced a collaborative and comprehensive approach to supporting the Latinx students on their

campuses. Part of this holistic approach to supporting the students included the strategy to engage with families and parents of the Latinx students. In addition, I found that several pre-college initiatives targeted Latinx families out of their satellite locations, which are prominently located in areas with large Latinx populations. On a culturally responsive campus, the students should be able to receive assistance from trusted faculty members and access student support services that are both available and visible. The four indicators focus on cultural responsiveness, or the extent to which campus programs and practices effectively respond to the needs of culturally diverse student populations (Museus et al., 2017). As a result, having a collaborative and holistic approach among the institutional agents to support and engage with Latinx students and their families is an effective strategy for cultural responsiveness.

Institutional agents cultivating a safe and welcoming environment for Latinx students emerged as a second prominent culturally responsive strategy. I found that fostering a safe and welcoming environment required safe and open communication with Latinx students. Several of the institutional agents in this study believe that the initiatives implemented through their one-stop enrollment center has led to meaningful communication with the Latinx students on each of their campuses. As one of the indicators of the CECE model, providing a humanized educational campus environment that is distinguished by caring, committed, and meaningful connections with Latinx students is an important strategy for cultural responsiveness (Museus, 2014). This is consistent with the literature that demonstrates such humanization supports the motivation of college students (Guiffrida, 2003; Nora et al., 2011; Rendón, 1994; Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

Cultural Relevance Strategies. In both cases, there were several examples of intentional cultural programming focused on engaging and addressing the Latinx community on campus. Cultural relevance refers to the degree to which students' campus environments are relevant to their cultural backgrounds and identities and is characterized by five indicators (Museus et al., 2017). The indicators of cultural relevance focus on the ways that institutional environments are relevant to the cultural backgrounds, communities, and identities of diverse college students. From the research, I found that institutional agents relied on student programming as a critical strategy to engage and support Latinx students on campus. Consistent with the research of Kezar et al. (2015), cultural relevancy suggests that classrooms, services, programs, and extra-curricular experiences should reflect the perspectives and characteristics of the different student populations on campus. The programming implemented by the institutional agents focused on culture, art, and politics, but primarily occurred during Hispanic Heritage month. These cultural programs that occurred during Hispanic Heritage month were often highlighted in the annual reports. In both cases, cultural programming also varied by satellite location, which frequently led to a lack of coordination and a lack of consistency with cultural programming.

From the findings, external community engagement was another prominent strategy and indicator of cultural relevance. Each case highlighted how student programming intentionally engaged with the local external community to support Latinx student engagement. Service learning and civic engagement activities emerged as critical initiatives to increasing Latinx student engagement with the external community. I found that engagement with the community via their satellite locations was critical to

connecting Latinx students to opportunities. Cultivating a collaborative relationship with the Consulates of several Caribbean and Latin American Countries reflective of the community college and the county's Latinx population was another strategy to connect Latinx students to the external community. The collaborative relationship with the external community has allowed the Latinx students and the student clubs in each case to launch several community service initiatives. As a result of the engagement with the external campus community in each case, collaborative relationships have been established to allow Latinx students to network, implement cultural and community service programming, and to bridge the campus and external communities. Consistent with the research, culturally relevant practices and the institutionalization of student support services are especially important at HSIs (Garcia & Okhidoi, 2015). Consequently, to improve student success for Latinx community college students, it is critical for institutional agents to assist with understanding and incorporating cultural relevancy at HSI community colleges.

Lack of Campus Climate Assessment. In each case, I found no systemic college-wide initiative to assess the campus climate for Latinx students. In a review of the strategic plan and goals and objectives in each case, there is also no mention of assessing campus climate or implementing equity initiatives for their Latinx students. Campus climate has been found to be related to the retention of Latinx students (Hurtado et al., 2012). However, from my research, there was no indication of how each HSI community college assessed the campus climate at their institution. As a result, the lack of a comprehensive assessment of the campus climate makes it difficult for institutional agents to address how Latinx students view the campus environment and to launch

effective retention initiatives. If students have negative feelings or perceptions about their campus, then students of color like Latinx students may be more likely to fail (Gloria et al., 2001). The absence of deliberate campus climate assessment efforts at the two HSIs with the largest Latinx populations in the state is problematic.

Facilitating Latinx Completion

The third research question asked about how the institutional agents facilitated completion for Latinx community college students. Specifically, I examined completion policies and structures, perceived barriers and obstacles, and strategies that intentionally support graduation and transfer for Latinx students. From the findings, I found that institutional agents facilitate and support Latinx completion at each HSI community college through intentional resource allocation and personalized campus support for Latinx students. These were the two primary strategies that emerged in addressing the perceived barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx student completion. Neither of the community colleges in this research study had any specific policies or structures that were designed to intentionally increase Latinx completion. However, the institutional agents at each HSI community college were able to highlight some of the barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx completion at their community college.

Perceived Barriers and Obstacles. Consistent with the research, efforts to increase completion rates within the community college sector for Latinx students requires an understanding of the needs, barriers, and sociopolitical contexts facing students, faculty, and higher education leaders (Kilgore & Wilson, 2017). I found that the utilization of student resources and bilingual communication were some of the areas of

concern that emerged as perceived barriers and obstacles. The perceived lack of utilization by Latinx students of critical student resources designed to support completion emerged. From the findings, several of the institutional agents perceive that Latinx students on campus are often not aware of or are not utilizing the student resources that are available to support them towards completion. In addition, the lack of bilingual communication is perceived to be a barrier for Latinx students. I found that none of the institutional publications were published in Spanish and the websites are also not available in Spanish. This is perceived to be an obstacle by the institutional agents for the Latinx students that begin their academic career in the English as Second Language (ESL) program and for the parents of the first-generation Latinx student who do not speak English. The institutional agents in this study believe there is a need to enhance targeted communication strategies in English and Spanish to increase Latinx student success. As a result, from the information collected, there is a challenge for institutional agents to connect Latinx students at HSI community colleges with the essential student resources and key student service contacts on campus to support completion.

Strategies for Intentional Engagement. Strategies to intentionally engage Latinx students were primarily driven by the commitment of the institutional agents at these HSI community colleges. I found that institutional agents can support student success through a strong commitment to a personalized holistic approach in providing support and engagement with Latinx students. The findings suggest there is a robust culture of personalized support and a solid commitment by institutional agents to support the Latinx students on their community college campuses. In addition, I found there is a strong commitment and effort by the institutional agents to intentionally allocate campus

resources to support Latinx students through completion. For example, by allocating campus resources to support extended hours, a quiet study environment, supplies and equipment, and addressing food insecurities, institutional agents at these HSI community colleges can tailor support services to address the specific needs of their Latinx students.

Limitations

This study focused on the quintain, understanding how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. A couple of the research questions focused on the perceptions of the HSI and organizational identity, but primarily through the perspective of student affairs and student services administrators. The parameters of the case study and the criteria of the participant selection of this case study limited the participants to institutional agents on the student affairs and student services side of the community college. Therefore, this research did not explore the experiences of other staff and faculty members who may be acting as institutional agents and are involved with facilitating Latinx completion. The limitations of this study are also related to the HSI organizational identity, the racial campus climate experience, and the student perspective. This study did not explore how institutional leaders make sense of their HSI organizational identity. In addition, the racial campus climate experience for other racial and ethnic students on the community college campus was not explored in this study and might be a limitation in understanding the campus climate. Furthermore, this study is limited by the lack of a Latinx student perspective. The Latinx student perspective is only captured through institutional reports and student

success outcomes. Finally, the data collected in this study occurred prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, so the outbreak is not addressed.

Implications

This study has implications for research, policy, and practice as it relates to HSIs, Latinx completion, and a welcoming campus environment. I have found that it is important for institutional agents to make sense of their HSI status, how they utilize their positions to enact change, and the value of implementing intentional programs and services that are necessary for Latinx students to achieve student success in the community college sector in New Jersey. As the Latinx student population continues to increase on community college campuses in New Jersey, evaluating and examining the current student policies, programs, and practices that can foster positive student engagement is critical to increasing student success and addressing the New Jersey equity gap in degree completion for Latinx students.

Policy

In New Jersey, the percentage of Latinx adults 25 and older with an associate degree or higher was at 27% as compared to 42% of White non-Hispanic adults in 2018 (Excelencia in Education, 2019). Furthermore, 27% of the K-12 population is Latinx and the median age for the Latinx population is 32, compared to 47 for White non-Hispanics (Excelencia in Education, 2019). In addition, the Latinx population in New Jersey ranks seventh nationally and continues to grow (Excelencia in Education, 2018). As more and more Latinx students enter the higher education pathway, policymakers at the institutional, county, and state level will need to consider the increasingly younger and often first-generation Latinx student population in their decision-making process.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the need for Latinx-serving HSI community colleges to implement recruitment and retention policies that address these achievement gaps for Latinx students. The demographics in New Jersey continue to shift and as more community colleges reach the 25% enrollment threshold to become an HSI, the public promotion and embrace of the HSI designation must increase in the sector. The perception of the HSI status must go beyond being associated with having a diverse, visible, and accessible group of institutional agents that identify with the Latinx culture and represents the Latinx campus community. Policies must be implemented to go beyond a Latinx enrolling community college identity to becoming a Latinx serving HSI community college. In her research, Garcia (2017) found that having a positive campus climate for Latinx students would also be indicative of a Latinx-serving identity (Garcia, 2017). Therefore, HSI community colleges and their institutional agents must also develop policies to ensure a periodic assessment of their campus climate.

Practice

Although HSI community colleges can provide welcoming environments and transfer pathways for Latinx students, these institutions can further enhance student experiences and academic outcomes for all students through the development and implementation of a culturally engaged campus environment. From the research, Latinx students attending HSIs have greater academic and financial needs (Nunez & Elizondo, 2013; Nuñez et al., 2011). From the findings, institutional agents within HSI community colleges in New Jersey must continue to play a critical role in providing holistic and personalized support services to their Latinx students. Intentional resource allocation and personalized campus support for Latinx students are two primary strategies that

institutional agents can implement to address perceived barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx student completion. As part of their practice, institutional agents should include intentional Latinx cultural programming and connect Latinx students to external community engagement opportunities to foster a culturally engaged campus environment.

Intentional HSI community colleges ensure that Latinx students not only have access to holistic support programs, but also value and include Latinx families in campus events like new student orientation sessions and open house events. It is also important for Latinx students to see themselves represented on campus, in the curriculum, and among the administrators, faculty, and staff. From the findings, faculty and staff representation is critical to culturally responsive programming and implementing culturally relevant pedagogy. Culturally responsive programming permits Latinx students to incorporate their personal and cultural experience as they navigate the community college landscape. By providing a culturally engaged campus environment that is welcoming and supportive, our institutional agents can work with community college Latinx students and help them express their strengths and needs as they navigate the challenges of their student experience. It is critical for institutional agents at HSI community colleges to develop and implement culturally responsiveness and culturally relevant programming into their practice with Latinx students to enhance the student experience and support Latinx completion.

Research

The New Jersey achievement gap in degree completion for adults 25 and older continues to persist. In addition, six of the eighteen community colleges in New Jersey

are currently classified as HSIs, but there are several additional institutions that are emerging HSI's with Latinx enrollment hovering close to the 25% threshold. Unfortunately, the body of literature specific to New Jersey community colleges with the HSI designation is relatively small. Therefore, additional research in this sector will greatly benefit community college policymakers and practitioners as they consider ways to establish and cultivate an inclusive campus environment that positively impacts Latinx completion.

As the youngest and fastest growing population in the United States, Latinx students are entering postsecondary institutions at substantial rates, driving a surge in the number of HSIs. Research focused on better understanding HSIs is essential as these institutions are critical to the access, success, and overall social mobility of the Latinx student population (Flores & Park, 2013; Gasman, 2008; Malcom-Piqueux & Lee, 2011). From this study, building a supportive and culturally engaged campus environment, and increasing the quality of relationships with other students and institutional agents is integral to increasing Latinx student success. Consequently, it is important to continue to investigate and understand how the campus environment influences student success and college completion for Latinx students attending HSI community colleges in New Jersey. Unfortunately, the bulk of the research regarding community college HSIs is focused on states like Texas, California, New York, and Florida. Thus, further research on gaining an understanding of a culturally engaged campus environment at New Jersey community college HSIs may assist policymakers, practitioners, and community college leaders with increasing Latinx completion in New Jersey.

This multicase study did not address the COVID-19 outbreak since the data was collected prior to the impact of the pandemic. According to *Excelencia* in Education (2021), the Latinx student population saw disproportionate declines in enrollment and retention since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. From Spring through Fall 2020, the retention rate of 53% for Latinx students at public two-year community colleges were significantly lower than the Latinx student retention rate of 73% at public four-year institutions (Excelencia in Education, 2021). Furthermore, Excelencia in Education recently found that for the first time in twenty years, the overall number of HSIs has decreased when comparing the 2019-2020 academic year to the 2020-2021 (Excelencia in Education, 2022). The decrease in HSIs can be attributed to enrollment declines, institutional closings, and the consolidation that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic (Excelencia in Education, 2022). However, according to the same report, the number of emerging HSIs has continued to increase (Excelencia in Education, 2022). As a result, researchers will need to explore how the COVID-19 outbreak and its disruption impacted completion for Latinx community college students. Further research exploring what a culturally engaged campus environment looks like for Latinx students in a virtual environment will be valuable as we define what the new normal will be in higher education. An exploration of the role of institutional agents during the pandemic and how they fostered a culturally engaging campus environment to support Latinx completion will assist community college leaders with allocating institutional resources and addressing achievement gaps for Latinx community college students.

Leadership

Considering the findings of this study, community college leaders in New Jersey will need to demonstrate an intentional commitment to enhance the campus environment and improve Latinx student success at their community colleges. The community college mission and strategic plans should clearly articulate this commitment to intentionally support Latinx student success. Community college leadership will need to evaluate how they currently recruit and retain Latinx faculty, administrators, and staff to intentionally serve Latinx students on their campus. In addition, professional development will be critical to building cultural competency at the HSI community college. Finally, leadership at HSI community colleges in New Jersey will need to effectively communicate intentional and authentic holistic support for Latinx students at the community college.

HSI Community colleges will need authentic and transformational leaders (George & Sims, 2007) to foster a culturally engaged campus environment and support Latinx student success. An authentic leader will bring the campus community together around the shared purpose of increasing Latinx student success and will empower institutional agents to step up and lead authentically to address Latinx equity gaps (George & Sims, 2007). Generating innovative ideas and developing a team that can implement holistic student support is crucial to the success of an HSI community college in becoming a Latinx-serving institution. From the results of this study, community college leaders need to align data and practice, recruit and retain Latinx faculty and staff, and increase intentional and holistic support of their Latinx students.

Conclusion

The purpose of this multicase study was to investigate and understand how institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment to facilitate completion for Latinx students at federally designated Hispanic-serving community colleges in New Jersey. Through interviews, observations, and analysis of institutional documents, data on institutional capacity, intentionality, and clarity of purpose were collected to answer the research questions and identify patterns among the cases. The Culturally Engaging Campus Environments (CECE) Model of college success (Museus, 2014) was used to guide and present the findings.

The participants in this research study described how they perceive the HSI designation, foster a culturally engaged campus environment, and facilitate completion for the Latinx students at their institution. The perception of the HSI designation in each case was primarily rooted in the visible diversity of the students, faculty, and staff at each community college. In both cases, intentional cultural programming and external community engagement were the prominent indicators of a culturally engaged campus environment. The utilization of available student resources and bilingual communication were the areas of concern that emerged as barriers and obstacles for Latinx completion. Intentional resource allocation and personalized holistic campus support for Latinx students were the two primary strategies in addressing the barriers and obstacles that have an impact on Latinx student completion.

As the Latinx population increases in New Jersey, so will the number of HSI community colleges, and the question of how to effectively serve Latinx students will become more prominent. The findings from this study show that having an HSI identity

that intentionally serves Latinx students may be complex and may not align with how the community college embraces their HSI designation. Embracing a Latinx-serving HSI community college identity is a process, and institutional agents at new HSI institutions will need to go through a transitional period to publicly accept and promote their HSI identity. This study also confirms that while institutional agents believe that producing student success outcomes is important, enacting a holistic approach to serving Latinx students that is grounded in creating a sense of belonging is essential. In addition, evidence-based strategies that focus on enhancing the campus environment to improve student success in community colleges that have the HSI designation and serve Latinx students in New Jersey may be the key to addressing the equity gap and increasing Latinx completion. Consequently, leaders at federally designated Hispanic-serving community college will need authentic and transformational leaders to foster a culturally engaged campus environment that will allow institutional agents to fully engage and support Latinx student success.

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Appendix A

Interview Protocol

1) What is your current job title?

2) How long have you been serving in this current role?

3) How long have you worked at this community college?

4) What do you think it means to be a Hispanic Serving Institution?

5) What does being a Hispanic Serving Institution look like at your community college? How would you describe the campus environment?

6) What are the needs of Latinx students on your campus?

7) How has the community college demonstrated a commitment to Latinx student success?

8) How do you respond to the needs of Latinx students on your campus?

9) How does the college assess the campus climate for Latinx students?

10) What Latinx campus cultural programs exist?

11) What are the opportunities for Latinx students to engage in community service? (Probe for service-learning or community engagement projects)

12) What policies or institutional structures specifically address Latinx student success? (Probe for graduation and transfer strategies for Latinx students)

13) What are the most significant barriers or obstacles for Latinx students on your campus?

14) In your role, how do you intentionally engage and support Latinx students on your campus?

15) What programs or initiatives are designed to specifically engage Latinx students on your campus?

16) How do you encourage engagement between Latinx students and the faculty, administrators, and staff on your campus?

17) What individuals or offices at this college are critical to Latinx student success? Who else would you suggest I talk to?

18) What is unique about how you advocate for and empower Latinx students, when compared with other administrators/staff/faculty at this college?

Thank you for your time today. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me? May I contact you again if I have any additional questions?

Appendix B

Document Collection Protocol

Document:

Document Descriptors	Analytic Notes
Source of the document	
Description of the document	
Classification of the document (Primary, Secondary, Auxiliary)	
Internal or External use	
Pertinent/critical information related to the quintain	

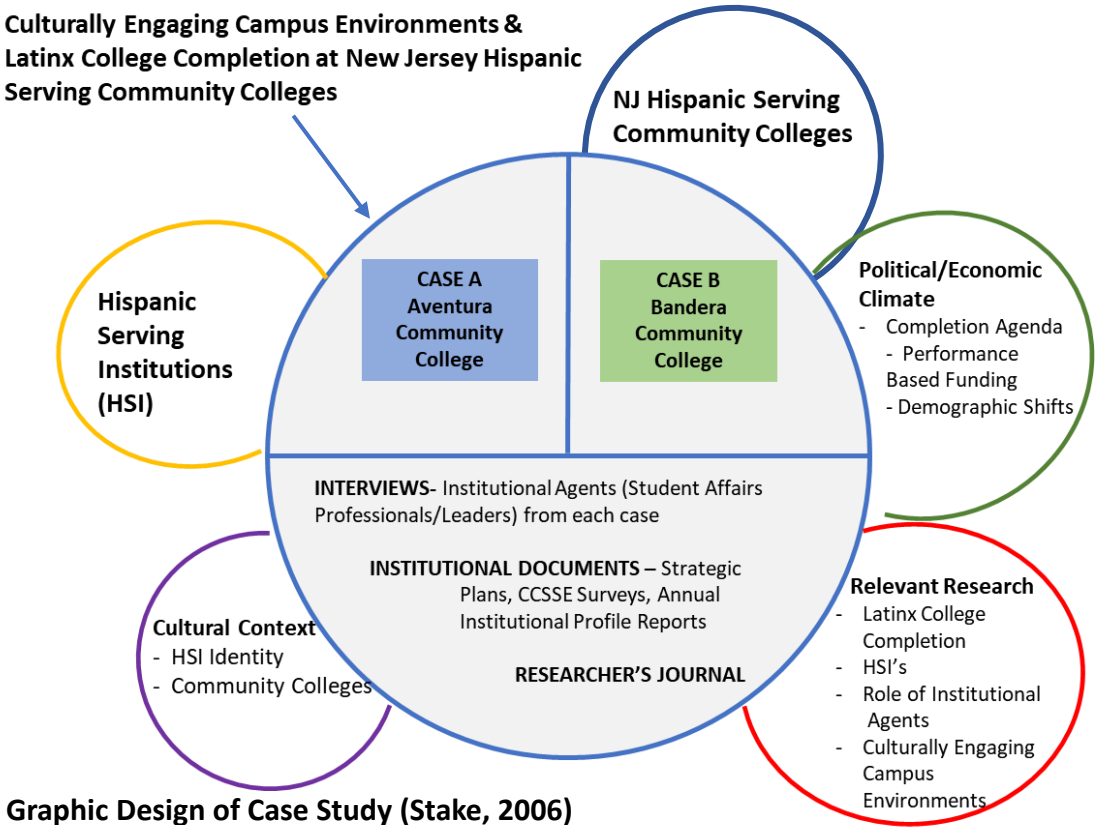
Appendix C

Data Collection Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Questions	Document Review
1) How do the institutional agents perceive the HSI designation?	4, 5	Strategic Plan, CCSE Survey
2) How do institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment for Latinx students?	7	CCSE Survey
a. What are the strategies for assessing campus climate?	9	Annual Institutional Profile 2019
b. What are the strategies for responding to the perceived cultural needs of Latinx students?	6, 10	
c. What are the strategies to making the campus environment culturally relevant to Latinx students?	10, 11	CCSE Survey
3) How do institutional agents facilitate completion for Latinx community college students?	7, 12,18	Annual Institutional Profile 2019
a. What are the perceived barriers and obstacles for Latinx students?	6, 13	CCSE Survey
b. What are the strategies to intentionally engage and support Latinx students?	8, 11, 14, 15, 16	
c. What are the policies and institutional structures that address Latinx student completion?	17	

Appendix D

Worksheet #1: A Graphic Design of a Multicase Study



Graphic Design of Case Study (Stake, 2006)

Issues

- The rapid growth of the Latinx student population.
- Latinx students are the largest group attending community colleges.
- Increased number of community colleges designated as Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI's).
- Increased focus on community college completion.
- Latinx student completion.
- Current student policies, programs, and practices that foster a supportive campus environment at HSI's in NJ.
- HSI organizational identity: Latinx Serving or Latinx Enrolling
- Lack of research on NJ HSI's

Research Questions

1. **How do institutional agents perceive the HSI designation?**
2. **How do institutional agents foster a culturally engaging campus environment for Latinx students?**

a) What are the strategies for assessing campus climate?
b) What are the strategies for responding to the perceived cultural needs of Latinx students?
c) What are the strategies for making the campus environment culturally relevant to Latinx students?

3. **How do institutional agents facilitate completion for Latinx community college students?**

a) What are the perceived barriers and obstacles for Latinx students?
b) What are the strategies to intentionally engage and support Latinx students?
c) What are the policies and institutional structures that address Latinx student completion?