UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTREACH EFFORTS FOR LOW INCOME, FIRST GENERATION, MINORITY STUDENTS IN ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

A Thesis

by

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DEDICATION

Para mi mamá, que siempre me apoyado en mi deseo de continuar mis estudios.

Para mi papá, que ya no está aquí, pero me enseñó a valorar la educación y él estaría muy orgulloso de mis logros.

Para mi prometido, Liam, que me ha empujado hacia el logro más alto y ha sido un gran apoyo.

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Para los estudiantes de primera generación que dudan de su capacidad para tener éxito en la educación superior. Yo lo pude hacer y ustedes lo pueden hacer también!

To my mom, who has always supported my desire to pursue higher education.

To my dad, who isn’t here anymore but taught me to value education and he would be so proud of my accomplishments.

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To first generation students who doubt their ability to succeed in higher education, I could do it and you can do it, too!
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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF OUTREACH EFFORTS FOR LOW INCOME, FIRST GENERATION, MINORITY STUDENTS IN ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

By © Yaneli Torres

Master of Arts in Social Science

California State University, Chico

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The number of low income, first generation, minority students who enter into higher education is significantly low (Pew Research Center, 2012; Auerbach, 2004). These students encounter many barriers that prevent them from accessing higher education. The main barrier they experience in accessing college is lack of information about college. They are unprepared and unaware of the necessary requirements for continuing to higher education. This research focused on better understanding how current low income, first generation, minority, college students gained their information about college. Current college EOP students were asked to evaluate the following resources: guidance counselors, parents and college outreach programs, based on their ability to help them reach higher education. Most students do not have access to all of these resources. This study found that in order to help these underrepresented students overcome these barriers of access, resources must work together to find ways to help students begin to prepare for college at an early age.

Keywords: Low income, first generation, minority students, EOP, college outreach programs, guidance counselo
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Changes in the workforce have made obtaining a college degree a necessity for being able to find a good job. Unfortunately the number of students who attend higher education is still low. The Pew Research Center (2012) conducted a survey on the educational attainment of adults 25 and older and found that only 60% Asian, 51% White, 26% African American, and 37% Latino had attended college (Pew Research Center, 2012). The main reason for this problem is due to students not being informed and prepared for college at an early age (Auerbach, 2004). The number of students who receive information about college is limited to those who seek it. This is heavily impacting first generation, low income, minority students whose parents have not obtained a college degree (Auerbach, 2004; Pstross, Rodriguez, Knopf, & Morris Paris, 2014). The lack of information about college requirements, the college admission process and financial support prevents many parents from being able to assist their children continue their education (Auerbach, 2004).

The following resources support students in accessing higher education: guidance counselors, parents, and college outreach programs. Unfortunately these resources are limited or not always readily available for all students. School guidance counselors provide students with information and guidance for planning their life after high schools. They organize college tours and write letters of recommendation for students (Bangster, 2005). But school guidance counselors, especially those working in low funded, public schools, are given caseloads so large they are unable to meet with each student (Moyer, 2011). Parents are also a great resource for
students but for many first generation students language barriers and inexperience with the educational system can limit the amount of guidance parents can provide their children when applying for college (Auerbach, 2004). Outreach programs are another very important resource for students who are looking to information about college. These programs are heavily impacted and require the students to already be motivated to go to higher education.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of my study is to gain an understanding of the barriers students encounter when attempting to access higher education. Low income, first generation, minority, college students were surveyed to evaluate the level of support they received in regards to applying and preparing for college. This helped to identify successful strategies and resources that may assist future low income, first generation, minority college students seeking to attend a four year university. While research identifies parents, guidance counselors and college outreach programs as important resources for students the survey looked for additional resources and people that can provide first generation, low income, minority students with more information about continuing towards higher education.

CSU Chico students in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) and Student Support Services (SSS) were asked to voluntarily participate in this research by taking a survey, filling out a questionnaire and attending a focus group session. The survey consisted of questions asking them about their pre-college preparation experience. Students answered questions in relation to the different types of people and resources that helped them apply and prepare for attending four year colleges. Since they are current students at CSU Chico they represent students that have successfully navigated the college admissions process.
The data from the survey allowed me to evaluate the long-term benefits of college outreach programs and other resources. A high number of students in EOP and SSS have participated in a college outreach program prior attending CSU Chico and all participants of these programs are first generation, minority, low income students. The students who participated in this study were primarily Mexican, Latino, African American, and Hmong. Most came from homes that spoke Spanish as their primary language and few had parents who attended college. Questions on the survey focused on assessing the level of support and information they received from their parents, school guidance counselors, college outreach programs and other sources such as peers, church groups, and family friends.

Students were asked to fill out an open-end questionnaire. This questionnaire allowed students to express their experiences more in-depth. Student were also invited to attend a focus group to gain better understanding of how these students learned and prepared for college. A focus group was needed for this research because it allowed students the ability to answer more open-ended questions. In the focus group discussion sessions students were asked to recall high school experience working with the different types of resources. The questionnaire and focus group sessions were able to provide the study with more in-depth answers and a better understanding of the students’ experiences with resources and more information about resources that other students will benefit from using.

Purpose of the Study

While there have been changes made in the outreach efforts to low income, first generation, minority students, there is still a lack of student diversity at institutions of higher
education. Latinos and African Americans are still highly underrepresented (Pew Research Center, 2012).

The goals of this study are to examine the resources and outreach methods that have successfully assisted low income, first generation, minority students get into college, evaluate the effectiveness of the current resources in place for this population of students, as well as make recommendations about how to better utilize these resources to increase the number of low income, first generation, minority students attending higher education.

Some of the barriers these students experience are difficult college admission requirements, a lack of awareness of the college admission process and requirements, and lack of preparation for those requirements. Students also experience difficulties navigating through the “hidden curriculum” (Myle, Trautman & Schelvan, 2009, p.1) and the school’s tracking system. Students experience a combination of these barriers that prevent them from preparing and applying to college. For example, a student that is tracked as average or below average, is less likely to be placed in honors or AP classes. Students may experience difficulties knowing how to navigate social interactions with school administrators such as requesting a transfer from a class.

Students are not accessing all of the resources that are available to them. By saturating them with information on multiple levels and through multiple sources we will increase the likeness for students to continue to higher education. The collaboration between resources is the key to reaching a wider number of students. Parents and peers can be strong resources if they are kept informed. The Future Families program and American Dream Academy demonstrated that if schools and college outreach programs work with parents it will increase the likeliness of these students to continue toward higher education (Auerbach, 2004; Pstross et al, 2014).
A partnership between multiple resources is essential for helping increase students likeliness to continue their education. This partnership should not be limited to the relationship between a student and their guidance counselor or their participation in a college outreach program. Multiple resources must be able to work together and maximize their support of low income, first generation, minority students.

Research Questions

1. What resources are most effective for assisting first generation, low income, minority students towards attending a four year university?

2. What efforts can high schools and middle schools put forth to help increase the number of minority, low income, first generation students attending a four year university?

Definitions of Terms

First generation student

“Is defined a student not having a parent who graduated from college with a bachelor’s degree” (Thomas et al., 1998).

Educational Opportunity Programs

According to the CSU Chico EOP website;

The Educational Opportunity Program (EOP) is designed to improve the access and retention of low-income and first-generation college students at CSU, Chico. EOP applicants must have the motivation to succeed and have the potential to perform satisfactorily at CSU, Chico, but may not have been previously able to realize their potential because of their economic or educational background. California residents and students who qualify for an AB540 nonresident tuition exemption are eligible to apply for the program (CSU Chico EOP, 2015).
Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID)

According to the AVID website AVID is a; global nonprofit organization dedicated to closing the achievement gap by preparing all students for college and other postsecondary opportunities. Established more than 30 years ago with one teacher in one classroom, AVID today impacts more than 800,000 students in 44 states and 16 other countries/territories” (AVID, 2015).

College outreach programs

Focus on providing students with support and information about attending college. They help students prepare and become motivated to attend college.

Higher education and college

In this paper will mean attending a four year university and working towards a bachelor’s degree.

Low-income families

“The term "low-income individual" means an individual whose family's taxable income for the preceding year did not exceed 150 percent of the poverty level amount” (U.S. Department of Education, 2015).
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Despite gains in the last decade there is still a lack of minority students attending and graduating from post-secondary institutions (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50 & Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009; Pew Research Center, 2012). The results of the Pew Research Center (2012) demonstrate that there is a significantly low number of Latino and African Americans continuing toward higher education (Pew Research Center, 2012). Factors and barriers that influence students are the lack of knowledge about the college admission requirements, the lack of preparation, the difficult admission requirements of schools, high school tracking systems and cultural differences. Another significant factor is the proximity of having a college campus close by will increase the amount of outreach programs and the students’ exposure to more college information (Turley, 2009).

One major factor that can influence students’ likeliness to continue on to post-secondary education is students’ exposure to college information and resources at an early age or point in their schooling (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). Resources that can help students prepare for college are guidance counselors, parents, and college outreach programs. Guidance counselors’ ability to expose students to information and resources for preparing for college can help increase students’ chances of attending college. Having parents that have college degrees also increases the knowledge the student has about the college system (Auerbach, 2004; Pstross et al, 2014; Walsh, 2010, p.371). Participating in
college outreach programs will significantly increase the student’s likeliness to attend college (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009).

The main purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of why low income, first generation, minority students are not continuing on to higher education. By looking at the barriers students encounter when trying to access the colleges outreach resources we can look at how to better improve these resources. This will increase the number of low income, first generation, minority students preparing and attending college. This research looks to identify the resources current college students utilized when they prepared for college.

Barriers for First Generation, Minority, Low-Income Students

Difficult College Admissions

Requirements

The increase in college admissions requirements has placed minority students at a significant disadvantage when trying to access a four year university (Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). In Access Without Equity: Longitudinal Analyses of Institutional Stratification by Race and Ethnicity, 1972–2004 (2012), the authors looked at how these changes in the admissions requirements resulted in the decrease in the diversity of students’ demographic at prestigious universities (Posselt, et al, 2012). The college admissions requirements have become more difficult as institutions expect more from students. More emphasis is being placed on SAT scores, ACT scores, academic preparation and extra-curricular and leadership involvement (Posselt, et al, 2012). Yet low income, first generation, minority students at underfunded high schools are not getting the sufficient support and preparation needed to
accomplish these requirements. If students were more aware of these requirements they would be able to better prepare.

**Lack of Awareness of the College**

**Admission Process and Requirements**

Lack of awareness of college admission requirements is the biggest barrier that is keeping low income, first generation, minority students from continuing their education (Graham, 2011; Walsh, 2011). Students should be exposed to the college admission requirements at an early age. They should also be made aware of the different resources such as fee waivers for applications and college entrance exams. This information is normally shared through guidance counselors, parents, and college outreach programs to students. Unfortunately, a high number of low income, first generation, minority students are not actively using these resources because they are unaware of them.

Students are unaware of the coursework, standardize tests and extra-curricular activities needed to be eligible to apply to universities. They are often unaware of the application deadlines and fees. They are also not exposed to the different types of financial aid and scholarships that could help them pay for college. Some students also do not understand how going to college can benefit them or the different types of majors available to them.

**Lack of Preparation When Applying to College**

Most college outreach programs focus on high school students, by this time students are already on track, or not, to attend college. Being aware at an early age about the requirements
for applying to college will increase students’ ability to prepare and successfully transition to college. The courses students take in middle school dictate the courses the student will be eligible to take in high school. Most universities and colleges have strict admissions requirements that require students to have taken certain classes during high school (Posselt, Jaquette, Bielby, & Bastedo, 2012). If a student does not take Algebra in junior high they will be one year behind in the math requirements when they enter high school. In order for students to be eligible for attending college they must go above and beyond the high school “A-G” subject requirements to graduate high school requirements. While these requirements align with the UC/CSU college admissions eligibility requirements for students to be competitive applicants they must surpass them. For example, students to be considered a competitive college applicant should take at least four years of English, three to four years of science and math and 3 years of a language, with most being AP and honor classes. Students who are not aware of these requirements have more trouble meeting them and might need to attend a community college to complete them and before transferring to a four year university.

Surpassing Cultural Differences and Stereotypes

Another struggle for minority students is their inability to understand what Myle, Trautman and Schelvan (2009) explain as the “hidden curriculum”. They define this as “the unwritten and unspoken values, dispositions, social and behavioral expectations that govern the interaction between teachers and students within schools” (2009, p.1). When teachers do not take into consideration cultural difference of students it can hinder students’ ability to succeed. For example in some cultures women are taught to be less outspoken, this can be a disadvantage in a
classroom where the teacher expects students to participate in a debate. Myle, Trautman and Schelvan proposed that students should be taught how to navigate academic culture through a mentorship program. The program would provide students with academic support, networking skills and provide them with academic cultural knowledge.

Another barrier that minority students face are low teacher expectations. This is especially true for students who are English Language Learners (ELL). Rodriguez’s (2012) paper “But They Just Can’t Do it”: Reconciling Teacher Expectations of Latino Students” gives an insight into how teacher’ expectations can influence the students’ likeliness to succeed. Rodriguez takes the perspective of Principle Morales who works at an elementary school in Rio Grande Valley. This elementary school has a high number of Hispanics, low income students. In Morales’s first year she was tasked with finding a way to raise the achievement outcomes. Morales found that the major factors influencing students’ success were teachers’ attitudes and expectations for their students (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 27). Teachers at her school had low expectations for their students and their classes lacked rigor. This produced students who were unprepared for middle school. Teachers explained to the Morales that they felt it was unfair to hold students to such high expectations when they lacked the proficiency needed to succeed. Other teachers made the assumption that the students and their parents did not value education (Rodriguez, 2012, p. 27).

The Inequality of the Student Tracking System

Tracking is the sorting of students based on their perceived ability or potential to learn (Oakes 2005, 3). The tracks students are placed in define the classes they take, how others perceive them, how they experience their school, and their future opportunities. These tracks
vary by school but the main three tracks are usually below average, average and above average. These groups are openly labeled and they define how students are treated by others. Students in the more advanced classes are treated differently than those in lower level classes. Oakes argues that the tracking system is another form of inequality for those students that already experience difficulties outside of the classroom (Oakes, 2005, p. 4). Many of the students placed in lower tracks lack the necessary educational support due to their social economic statue or their families’ inability to assist them in their school work.

Schools validate the use of the tracking system because they feel that grouping students with similar levels of learning abilities will help improve a teacher’s ability to teach as well as a students’ ability to learn. Oakes (2005) argues that the tracking system actually harms the average and below average groups. The tracking system decreases students’ aspirations and negatively influences their self-esteem. The tracking system plays a big role in the future of students and while it is taken very seriously by school administrators it is an antiquated sorting system that is no longer valid and it is not beneficial for students (Oakes, 2005, p. 7-9).

The following three factors are considered when placing students in a track: “standardize tests, teacher and counselors recommendations (including grades), and parents and student’s choice” (Oakes, 2005, p. 9). Unfortunately these factors are biased and unfair. Standardized tests are highly biased, because those in the privilege groups have a better understanding of the language and more experience with the procedures as well as a better understanding of the content on the test. Teachers and counselors are also unable to be fair because other factors influence their decisions such as, how the student speaks and interacts, and how they dress and behave (Oakes, 2005). Teachers and counselors both have a large number of students and are unable to personally get to know each student. Parents and students are not made aware that they
have a choice in the track they are placed; instead they are usually directed towards a specific track based on the other two factors. Parents are usually not informed of the tracking system. Many of the parents, in Auerbach’s study, when they learned about the tracking system were upset because they felt this system placed their kids at a disadvantage. Parents feel that this tracking system prevents students from getting an equal opportunity to succeed, “repeatedly, parents insisted that all students should have the “same rights,” the “same opportunities,” and the “same classes” because they should all be prepared to go to college” (Auerbach, 2005, p. 138).

Tracking actually limits students’ ability to surpass expectations and advance to more difficult classes. While the administrators take the selection process very seriously there is a lot of room for error and too much weight is placed on standardized tests. Students and parents also experience difficulties when trying to change a student’s track. The tracking system in a way places the blame on students; they must earn their way to the top track. Oakes’s study found that students in lower tracks were more negative and had less confidence about their own academic performance. Students felt the school and classes were okay it was them that had the issues with learning (2005, p. 143-144).

Resources Available for Students

School Guidance Counselors

According to the American School Counselor Association a school guidance counselor’s role is to “help all students in the areas of academic achievement, personal/social development and career development, ensuring today's students become the productive, well-adjusted adults of tomorrow” (ASCA, 2015). Although, high school guidance counselors can be a great asset for students interested in attending college most students do not utilize this resource or, they are
exposed to this resource too late (Mc Donough, 2005). Counselors struggle to meet the needs of all of the students on their caseload because of the high student to counselor ratio.

The guidance counseling profession began with the purpose of guiding students towards becoming productive citizens by encouraging them into a vocation. New theories have helped professionals become more well-rounded in that services they provide students. In 2003 Pat Martin and Dr. Reese House formed the National Center for Transforming School Counseling (NCTC) with the purpose of providing guidance counselors with more extensive training. Martin and House’s research showed that guidance counselors were not providing all students with adequate information about post-secondary education. Martin and House (2003) analyzed how students interacted with counselors and which students were being served by counselors. Hart and Jacobi’s (1992) research demonstrated similar results; students who were not excelling in school were not being informed and prepared for attending college. Denalla and Snyder also found that factors like race, gender, grade level, and academic performance of students influenced their interactions and satisfaction with their guidance counselors (2004, p. 27). The NCTC has focused on doing research and providing training for guidance counselors in how to be more inclusive when reaching out to minority students. This change can help increase the demographic diversity of the students continuing on to post-secondary education.

Another agency that was formed with the purpose of improving the efficiency of guidance counselors was the National High School Center (NHSC). Bangser (2008) for the NHSC wrote “Preparing High School Students for Successful Transitions to Postsecondary Education and Employment”. This report analyzed the effectiveness of high schools to prepare students for post-secondary education. The results of this research expressed the important role that guidance counselors and college outreach programs play in helping students continue their education (Hart
& Jacobi, 1992; Martin & House, 2003; Denalla & Snyder, 2004). Bangser also expressed that a lack of funds prevented schools from being able to implement the methods necessary to help all students prepare for continuing their education. Limited funding results in fewer counselors with more students which in turn limits the number of students that each counselor can properly serve (Bangser, 2008).

However, school guidance counselors also are prone to experiencing burnout. Moyer (2011) expressed that the three factors that cause guidance counselors to burnout are the lack of supervision, a high student to counselor ratio and excess of non-counseling duties. The lack of supervision for counselors deprives them from getting guidance and support from their supervisors, this hinders their ability to improve (Moyer 2011, p. 5). The high student to counselor ratio decreases counselors’ ability to assist students on a one on one basis (Moyer, 2011, p. 6). According to the California Department of Education, “the ratio of students per counselor in this state averages 945 to 1, compared to the national average of 477 to 1, ranking California last in the nation” (California Department of Education, 2014). The success of guidance counseling programs can be attributed to a low student to counselor ratio (Baker & Gerler, 2008). School guidance counselors are also overwhelmed with other duties such as substituting for teachers, performing lunch or bus duties, and administering standardized testing (Moyer, 2011, p. 3). These factors increase the likeliness for counselors to burnout and also decrease their ability to provide students with services.

Parents

Parents can be another important resource that provides students with access to needed information about college. Low income, minority students are less likely to have parents with post-secondary degrees that are familiar with the educational system. The educational system can
be confusing and although parents want their children to attend college they may have limited knowledge about how to best support them (Auerbach, 2004; Pstross et al, 2014; Walsh, 2010). College graduated parents can provide their children more guidance about the college admission process because they have personally experienced it. Parents of first generation students do not have the same type of understanding in regards to the college admission process and must seek guidance to better understand the process. “The information gap is especially wide for lower SES immigrant parents who are not fluent in English and who have specialized needs on the issues of financial aid, undocumented status, and college life” (Auerbach, 2004, p. 126). Parents are one of the main sources of information for students (Auerbach, 2004, p. 126). In order increase the number of students who apply to college we must find ways of engaging and educating their parents. Two promising approaches for supporting the pipeline of information to students are the Future Families program and the American Dream Academy.

Auerbach (2004) looked at the benefits of the Future Families program. A program that focuses on helping the parents of first generation students better understand the educational system and resources available. Future Families is a UCLA sponsored program that began in 1998 for parents of high school students that are interested in becoming more involved in helping their children prepare for college. This program consisted of having parents attend informational workshops and panels in their native language. Parents were able to interact with high school counselors, teachers, college administrators, and families who had undergone this process already. The study looked for successful methods for engaging and empowering minority parents in their children’s education. Auerbach found that after joining the program most of the parents felt more prepared for assisting and encouraging their children to apply to college. After completing this program parents also became advocates for their children and became more
aware of the flaws of the schools’ tracking methods. The research project concluded that parents of minority students were eager to get informed and find new ways to help their children (Auerbach, 2004). Auerbach found that most of the students whose parents were actively involved in the program continued onto a four-year university (2004, p.139).

The American Dream Academy is another example of a program that teaches parents how to support their students through the educational system (Pstross, Rodriguez, Knopf, & Morris Paris, 2014, p. 3). This academy “was developed by the Center for Community Development and Civil Rights at Arizona State University” for the purpose of increasing the number of Latino students attending college (Pstross et al, 2014, p.3). Over the years there have been more than 190 academies all over Arizona and between 2006 and 2013 about 29,228 parents graduated from this academy.

Pstross, Rodriguez, Knopf and Paris (2014) conducted a qualitative analysis of the parents’ graduation speeches to better understand the parents’ feelings about higher education. The six common themes they found were: “facing challenges, envisioning success, understanding the school system, taking ownership, community raising a child, and creating a supportive home environment” (Pstross et al, 2014, p.10-12). These themes allowed readers to understand some of the barriers and feelings minority parents experienced when trying to guide their children through a system they felt was foreign. Ninety percent of the parents were non-English speakers, ninety-five percent were from Latin America, and most were first generation immigrants (Pstross et al, 2014, p.3). These demographics might seem skewed due to the fact that Arizona has a large population of Latinos, but the researchers expressed that in the recent census the population of Latinos in the United States has exceeded fifty million and will continue
to grow (Pstross et al, 2014, p.3). This population shift has made providing Latinos with college preparation resources a more pressing need.

While parents of first generation college students might not possess an understanding of the educational system or the college application process they still play a big role in helping their kids develop other outside skills that can help students develop their academic skills. Yosso (2005) defines cultural wealth as the knowledge and skills acquired through family and community bonds. This type of wealth provides Communities of Color with the ability to surpass different forms of oppression. She presents six types of cultural wealth: “aspirational capital, linguistic capital, familial capital, social capital, navigational capital and resistant capital” (Yosso, 2005, p. 77-80). These different forms of capital provide “students of color” with social, networking, resiliency and educational skills that can be applied to classroom (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Students of color have the ability to be successful in a classroom if teachers were willing to work with the students. Teachers play a big role in helping students succeed by restructuring their lessons and setting high expectations.

**College Outreach Programs**

College outreach programs focus on informing and preparing students for continuing their education. There are two types of government funded college outreach programs; school-wide programs and intervention programs (Domina, 2009). School-wide programs are implemented and accessible to the whole school. Two examples are Advancement Via Individual Determination, (AVID) and Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, (GEAR UP). Intervention programs focus on individuals with certain characteristics and have limited enrollment. TRIO programs, Educational Opportunity Program, (EOP), Upward

School-wide college outreach programs. School-wide college outreach programs are able to provide services to a wider audience. The AVID program provides students with academic support and prepares them for continuing into post-secondary education through a class (AVID, 2014). The class is offered to students in middle school and high school. During the class students are taught note-taking and studying skills, they are exposed to different types of careers and take college trips to visit different universities. Overall the program aims to prepare and motivate students towards continuing their education (AVID, 2014). GEAR UP works with low income, first generation students at the beginning of seventh grade unlike AVID it is an after-school program students can enroll in. This program provides students with support and scholarships for continuing their education. Unlike AVID this program is sponsored by a local university (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

Intervention college outreach programs. The TRIO programs were created in 1994 through the Educational Opportunity Act for the purpose of closing the demographic gap in higher education (Graham 2011, p. 33; Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). They are government funded programs that usually involve the collaboration of universities and secondary schools. They provide and publish yearly updates of their budgets, methods, and an overview of the students they serve (Annual Report for Upward Bound Project, 2014; Annual Report for Educational Opportunity Programs, 2013). One of the main concerns with these programs is that research has had difficulties assessing the significant benefits (Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). Although students who are part of these programs are more likely to
continue their education but there are a number of factors that are hard to measure (Domina, 2009).

The TRIO programs provide academic support and guidance for students. Each of the programs focuses on different a grade level. Educational Talent Search focuses on students in junior high. Upward Bound focuses on high school students and EOP focuses on college students (Graham, 2011, p. 33; Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014; p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). They often work together to help the students’ transition through the different programs. In order to be eligible for these programs, students must show they are financially disadvantage (Graham, 2011, p. 33; Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). Unfortunately, these programs have limited resources and must be very selective on the individuals that they can enroll (Bangser, 2008). Students are required to write a personal statement, provide transcripts and letters of recommendations in order to be considered for the programs.

These programs hold all of their workshops, classes, and summer camps at a university campus (Graham, 2011, p. 33; Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). This helps students become more accustomed to and comfortable with the college setting. This also gives students the ability to interact with more college professionals and build a connection with that institution (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009, p.101; Walsh, 2010). Being part of these programs provides students with much needed guidance. Students attend Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) workshops, ACT and SAT preparation sessions, and receive assistance when filling out college application and requesting letters of recommendation (Graham, 2011, p.34-35; Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009, p.101; Walsh, 2010).
While these programs provide very necessary assistance to minority and low income students, researchers have found it difficult to study them. Walsh (2010) conducted an analysis of the effectiveness of the two original TRIO program: Upward Bound and Educational Talent Search. He used the National Education Longitudinal Study (NELS) of 1988 results to look at how participating in these two programs affected students (Walsh, 2010, p. 378-379). The NELS surveyed 8th grade students four times over a period of twelve years. Based on this data he concluded that students who participated in these programs were 14% more likely to attend college (Walsh, 2010, p. 381). Walsh (2010) noted that one of the difficulties when measuring the effects of these programs was the different levels of implementation of each program and their methods. It was difficult to assess all of the offices’ level of implementations. This means that to fully review these programs we must conduct a study looking at each of the office programs individually.

Walsh (2010) also found that unfortunately the lack of funding limits the amount of students that could benefit from these programs; only 3% of all of the low social economic status students surveyed were able to participate (Walsh, 2010, p. 388). Cowan Pitre and Pitre’s (2009) study focused on identifying the successful methods used by TRIO programs and finding ways for schools to implement these methods. According to their research the TRIO programs’ methods could be implemented into secondary schools to help increase the number of students attending college. One of the main methods that the TRIO programs use is building a connection between students and college institutions. They hold workshops and summer camps at a local campus to increase the comfort level of students at these institutions. Due to the inability of these resources to help all the students in need a good solution would be to find new ways to
implement these methods into the school system. Parents and students should both be engaged in
college discussions.

Proximity of Campus

Another factor that influences students’ likeliness to attend college is the proximity of a
college campus to their home or school (Turley, 2009). One reason is that many of the college
outreach programs that are available to students are developed through a collaboration between a
university and a secondary school. Schools are more likely to develop partnerships with local
college and provide students with tours and informational workshop. Students are also more
likely to interact with college students and become more aware of the possibility of continuing
their education.

According to Turley (2009), who conducted a proximity survey of the areas with and
without colleges, students who lived near a campus were more likely to attend a college of that
type. Living at home while attending college helps students and their families save money. Due
to increases in tuition and loan interests students are unable to move away to college. Students
that live close to home are able to better maintain family ties and uphold family obligations such
as providing child or elderly care (Turley, 2009, p.129-130).

Having a college nearby also increases the number of college outreach programs. Most
college outreach programs are developed through collaborating with a local university. For
example, the TRIO programs all have a hosting university. The TRIO programs were “the first
federally supported education programs designed to increase the college enrollment and
completion rates of economically disadvantaged and underrepresented ethnic background
students” (Cowan Pitre & Pitre, 2009, p. 96). The Future Families program was put together by
UCLA to “equip [families] with new knowledge and confidence for interacting with educational institutions, communicating with their children and easing students’ pathways to college” (Auerbach, 2004, p. 127). The American Dream Academy was developed by the Arizona State University to “address the issue of low Latino college enrollment by providing parents with tools to assist their children in the pursuit of higher education” (Pstross et al, 2014, p. 3). Colleges are a great resource for developing and implementing new outreach practices at the high school or middle school level. Colleges’ proximity to local secondary schools increases the likeliness of first generation, low income, minority students accessing higher education resources and materials.

Developing Relationships between Resources

The resources available for students would be able to maximize their support if they were to collaborate with each other. The development of a partnership between institutions of higher education and K-12 can help fund research and implement trial programs. Guidance counselors and school administrators can help students stay on the college path by providing them with information and support. While parents and peers can help by serving as a support system for these students but they too need the support from the schools and outreach programs to learn more about the application and admission process.

While “partnerships are not quick fixes to educational challenges”, “the longer the partnership the more likely it is to have the resources, knowledge, and access necessary to effect policy change” (Domina & Ruzek, 2012, p. 248) Domina and Ruzek (2012) research looked at the benefits of a K-16 partnership, they put together a quasi-experimental evaluating the partnerships between institutions of higher education and school districts. They analyzed data
from districts whom were in comprehensive partnerships, programmatic partnerships and in no partnerships to find which would be more beneficial for increasing the number of students continuing their education. Based on their evaluation of partnerships Domina and Ruzek concluded that “K-16 partnerships effectively pave the way between high school and college” (Domina & Ruzek, 2012, p. 262). They concluded that the districts that worked with institutions of higher education to formulate educational policies and “offered services for students and professional development opportunities for teachers” were more successful in the long run (Domina & Ruzek, 2012, p. 261).

Conclusion

First generation, minority, low income students encounter many barriers on their path to higher education. Some of their barriers to college eligibility and access include: difficult or confusing college admission requirements, the lack of awareness of the college admission requirements, the lack of preparation for meeting these requirements and financial hardships. Schools’ resources for higher education vary depending on their funding and size. Large underfunded schools have difficulties serving all of its students’ needs. Students must also surpass cultural difference and stereotypes within the classrooms. The tracking system most school implement places underrepresented students at yet another disadvantage when trying to meet the college eligibility requirements.

The resources available to students are school guidance counselors, parents, and college outreach programs. First generation, low income, minority students have limited access to these resources. School guidance counselors are overwhelmed with students and other tasks that they are unable to meet the needs of all of students. Parents who lack a college degree struggle to
guide their children through the college application process due to language barriers and
inexperiece with the process. College outreach programs struggle to meet the needs of the large
number of students who need their services.

This review of the literature provided more information on the types of resources that are
available to first generation, low income, minority students and it also demonstrated how some
of these resources are struggling to provide these students with assistance. Surveying low
income, first generations, minority college students will provide this study with a deeper
understanding of the resources students used to prepare for college as well as the information
needed to improve and develop these resources.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter outlines the data collection methods, the development of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods and the data analysis methods used in this study. All the data was acquired with the collaboration of CSU Chico’s EOP and SSS programs which serves low income, first generation, minority students. I was able to advertise and host all of the data collection methods and the purpose of my study at the EOP and SSS office. The data collected was used to evaluate the resources available for low income, first generation, minority students for the purpose of improving these resources. The EOP and SSS students were asked to fill out an online survey, fill out a questionnaire, and/or attend a focus group discussion session. This information provided the study with a better understanding of how students were able to utilize the resources available to them in high school and middle school. They were also asked to express if there were other resources they could have benefited from.

The collection methods used were both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Students were asked to identify which resources provided them with assistance when preparing to apply to universities. Information was gathered through the use of Survey Monkey, an online survey website. Students were also invited to attend focus group sessions. During these sessions students filled out a questionnaire with open-ended questions, students were able to further explain and express their experiences and opinions. Students engaged in a variety of group discussions based on the questionnaire questions.
These methods will provide the study with the data necessary to answer the two research questions proposed in chapter one:

1. What resources are most effective for assisting first generation, low income, minority students towards attending a four year university?
2. What efforts can high schools and middle schools put forth to help increase the number of minority, low income, first generation students attending a four year university?

Sample Population

At the beginning of the study the subjects of this research were first year EOP students at CSU Chico. This sample group of students was acquired through contacting the EOP office. Students agreed to be involved in the study because they also were interested in the survey results. Initially only first year students were the targeted population but due to the low number of student responses to the online survey, I expanded my subject population group to all EOP and SSS students. This allowed me to advertise the survey in the EOP computer labs, which are only available to EOP and SSS students. I was also able to recruit the interns and professional EOP and SSS staff to email the survey to their client group. The survey and focus group sessions were advertised to all students at the EOP and SSS lobby and computer lab.

Working with EOP allowed me to gain access to the specific demographic that I was looking to study. EOP serves first generation, low income, minority students attending CSU Chico. Also, in my role as intern I was able to collaborate with the EOP and SSS staff members and reach out the EOP and SSS students. The staff was eager to assist me in gathering data. I was also able to directly advertise the survey and the focus group sessions to students.
The main reason why I worked with EOP and SSS was because of the population they serve. The students who join are considered low income, minority, first generation students who have lacked the resources needed to prepare for college. EOP gives students who might have not been accepted into CSU Chico due to their grades, SAT/ACT scores or their extracurricular activities the opportunity to try. They are given a year trial to demonstrate their desire to succeed in the college environment. During that year they are provided with financial support, bi-monthly meetings with an intern advisor and a series of study skill workshops. The SSS program provides students with similar resources for student but accepts students of any year. EOP students must apply to be part of EOP when they first apply to attend CSU Chico. Students can apply and interview to be part of SSS at any time during their time at CSU Chico. SSS provides students with financial assistance, emotional and academic counseling. The SSS program integrates more outing and events to engage their older students. They require their 3rd and 4th year students to be active participants of their program but having a few mandatory counseling per semester.

Students who participated in this survey were diverse in race, age and primary language. From the questionnaires and focus group discussion it was also clear that students came from different types of high schools. Unfortunately due to a lack of clarity in some of the questions, it was difficult to gain enough knowledge of the specific types of schools each student attended. A few students did express that information and it was able to provide the study with the ability to make the connections between the availability of student resources and their type of high school.

Data Collection Methods

Students were emailed the Survey Monkey link and encouraged to complete the survey. Students were also encouraged and reminded to take the survey by their para-professionals. Each
first year student is assigned a para-professional whom they meet with every two weeks during their first year are CSU Chico. Their para-professionals were given more information about the survey so they were able to answer questions students might have. I attended the para-professional’s weekly meetings to introduce my study and answer any questions their students had throughout the data collection process.

Paper surveys were also distributed to students while they waited for their appointments or for an available computer at EOP office. While this method of data collection could be considered biased, it was explained that the survey was entirely voluntary and confidential. To ensure anonymity students placed their filled out surveys in a yellow folder. Also, the survey did not ask students to evaluate the EOP program or any staff members. This also helped to remove bias or any conflicts of interest.

Another method utilized was having the interns pass out paper versions of the survey to students going on a field trip to the Student Diversity Forum. This was a convenience method that ensured that a hundred percent of the sampling group would take the survey. Students filled out the survey and then placed it in a yellow envelope.

Students were invited to attend the focus group through emails from their para-professionals and flyers in the EOP and SSS office. Flyers for the survey and the focus group sessions were also placed in the lobby of the office and on each of the computers in the EOP/SSS computer lab. Food was used as an incentive to encourage students to participate in the focus group sessions. During the first focus group session students were offered pizza and soda as encouragement for participation. During the second focus group session students were encouraged by donuts to participate. While the idea of food enticed them to come to the group sessions, most students expressed genuine interest in the subject. They said they would have
participated regardless of the food. The students who participated in the focus group were primarily EOP or SSS students with the exception of two students who came with a friend from EOP.

Design of the Quantitative Research

The first set of data was acquired through the use of Survey Monkey. This website is a tool to help collect large amount of data through an online survey link. I created a survey with a combination of fill in the blank and multiple choice questions, then distributed the link of the survey to EOP and SSS students. Each question in the survey was written to gain a better understanding of students’ demographics and experiences in high school and middle school when preparing for attending college.

The first four questions asked students for their age, gender, ethnicity, and grade level. This information will provide my study with some context of the type of population that took the survey. Another important question asked was the language spoken at home, this question allowed me to gain a better understanding of whether students were multilingual, nonnative English speakers as well as the primary language of their households. Students also provided the highest level of education that each of their parents have achieved. This question this allowed me to assess the level of experience their parents and families have with higher education process.

Students were asked where they received most of their information about college and to identify key people who provided them with guidance. They were also asked to evaluate the following five resources; parents, outreach programs, high school guidance counselors, their peers, school administrators, and teachers. For each of these resources they were asked to check all that applied. The options were as follows: 1. Guidance in the application process, 2. Guidance
in the admission requirements, 3. Guidance in applying for financial support in college, 4. Guidance in regards to what high school classes to take, 5. Developing study skills, 6. Emotional support, 7. None and 8. Other (please specify all). This knowledge would help identify how each of these resources supported students. Lastly, students were asked to identify any other people who provided them with support such as; Neighbors/Family friends, Religious leaders, Mentors, Coach, Employer/Co-Workers, Extended family, and other. A sample of all the survey questions is provided below:

1. Age?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your ethnicity? (Select all that apply)
4. What is your college year?
5. Are you a first generation student?
6. What language do you speak at home? (Check all that apply)
7. What is the highest level of school completed in your household?
8. What is the highest academic level achieved by one of your siblings?
9. Where did you get most of your information about college?
10. What sort of information did your high school or middle school provide you with?
11. List all the place or people where you gained information about college:
12. Were you part of any college outreach programs? If so, which?
13. If you participated in a college outreach program, what type of support did you receive in regards to college?
14. What type of support did your parents provide you in regards to college?
15. What type of support did your guidance counselors provide you in regards to college?
16. What type of support did your peers (friends and/or fellow students) provide you in regards to college?

17. What type of support did your teachers/administrators provide you in regards to college?

18. Who else provided you with support and/or college information?

Design of the Qualitative Research

The focus group discussion sessions were guided by a questionnaire of ten open-ended questions. Students were asked to fill out the questionnaire in preparation for the group discussion. While most students were unable to participate in the focus group sessions twenty-four students responded to the questionnaire. I hosted two focus group sessions in the EOP conference room. The first focus group consisted of three students and the second focus group consisted of four students. The students were asked questions in regards to their feelings about the support they received in regards to preparing for higher education. They were asked to talk about their experiences working with guidance counselors, college outreach programs and their parents. Students were asked how prepared they felt when entering CSU Chico and what could have better prepared them for this experience. The questionnaire questions helped students talk about their experiences when they prepared for college. During the focus groups each student was given a chance to reply to each question or pass. The following ten questions were part of the questionnaire:

1. What could have provided you with more information about college?

2. What type of information about college were you given?

3. Did you feel prepared for college?

4. What do you know now that you wished you would have known before college?
5. When do you think students should start preparing for college?

6. What influenced your decision to attend college?

7. How did your family support your decision to attend college?

8. How much support did you receive from your guidance counselors?

9. What was your high school like? For example the number of students in your high school.

10. How available did you feel college resources were to all students?

Data Analysis Procedures

Data gathered from the quantitative survey was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) data system. This data system helped identify trends in student’s use of key resources as well as which other resources and people assisted students.

Qualitative data gathered from the questionnaires and the focus group sessions was analyzed to find common themes and experiences. Students submitted written responses of the questionnaire and both focus group sessions were audio recorded. This data was reviewed and key themes or experiences were tallied to find major trends. Direct quotes will be used to reflect these trends.

Glaser and Strauss’s (1967) Constant Comparison method was used to code and review the qualitative data. The Constant Comparison method is used to “identify a few local concepts, principles, structural or process features of the experience or phenomenon of interest” (Glaser and Strauss, 1967 p. 28-52). For each of the open-ended questions I reviewed each of the student responses. I was able to find the most frequent responses and a quote or two that represented the
majority or that deviated from it. This method was able to provide an good overview of the students’ experiences.

Conclusion

This chapter focused on providing a description of the tools used for data gathering and analysis. Two types of data were collected, qualitative and quantitative. The combination of these two types of data provided this study with more depth and understanding of the population and of their personal experiences when preparing to attend a higher education. The fourth chapter reviews the data collected from the survey, questionnaire and focus group discussions. It will provide an overview of the major finding and implications from each of the data collection methods.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

In chapter three the methods used to gather and analysis the data were reviewed. SPSS and the Constant Comparison method helped analysis the quantitative and qualitative data. This chapter provides an overview of the data gathered and major findings. Each section will highlight major findings and provide an overview of all of the data collected relating to each research question. The chapter will conclude with the implications based on this data. 

Quantitative Data

Quantitative data was acquired through the use of a survey. This survey was designed and conducted to gather general information about the participants. This data was able to provide demographic information such as their age, gender, ethnicity, primary language at home, and family history with the educational system. They were also asked to evaluate their relationship with different types of college outreach methods and resources.

A survey was designed and conducted to gain an understanding of participants’ educational and personal backgrounds. Students were emailed the link for the survey and encouraged by their advisors to take it. The survey link was also posted in the EOP and SSS computer lab. The survey consisted of 18 questions. A total of 103 students took the online survey. Of the 103 students 65 were females and 35 were males. The mean age of the students was 19.81, the standard deviation is 1.59. This means that students’ age ranges between 18 and 21. Table 1 demonstrates the age differences of the survey participants.
The chart in Table 2 outlines the ethnicities of the participants. The majority of students identified themselves as 44% Mexican following with 23% Latino, 14% African American, and 13% Hmong. Some of the percentages align with the demographics of the EOP program. The EOP program’s demographic for 2014-2015 school year were 54% Mexican Americans, 20% Asian Americans and 7% African Americans.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White/European</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black/African American</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino (Other)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian or Alaska Native</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian (South Asia)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this survey initially targeted first year, EOP students the majority of respondents were first year students. There was also second, third, fourth and fifth year students participants. First and second year students were more aware of the survey because they are more active
participants in the EOP and SSS program. These students were emailed and informed about the survey when they met with their EOP advisors. The EOP staff members assisted me in gathering data by keeping their student caseloads informed about the survey, and focus groups. Table 3 outlines the school year of the participants.

![Table 3: School Year of Participants](image)

The survey targeted first generation students, a total of 96 students were first generation, and only 5 were not. One possible reason for non-first generation students taking the survey was that due to the high traffic in the computer labs it is difficult to ensure that only EOP and SSS students had access to it. Most students expressed that the main language spoken at home was English or Spanish. One of the main barriers for students and their families is the lack of familiarity with the educational system and the higher education admissions process. This barrier is made more difficult due to the inability to speak or read English. Families are unable to access the right resources, people, or information in a language that is familiar. Table 4 demonstrated students’ home language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language Spoken at Home</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hmong</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armenian</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mien</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bangla</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjabi</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 4: Language Spoken at Home)

Students were asked about the level of education each of their parents attained. They were given the following options; some high school, graduated from high school, some college, graduated with an Associate’s degree, graduated with a Bachelor's degree, graduated with a Master’s degree, graduated with a Ph.D. degree, or none/ not applicable. Most student placed both of their parents in the none/not applicable section. Other students stated that their parents had attended some high school with only a limited amount graduating or attending college. Table 5 shows the highest level of education attained by parents.

This question revealed the limited levels of personal experience parents had with the higher education system. Most of their parents had not attended high school or college leaving them with little experience on how to best assist their children. The educational system can be confusing and although parent want their children to attend college, often they possess limited knowledge on how to best support them (Auerbach, 2004 & Pstross et al, 2014& Walsh, 2010). Parents can be provided with more support from middle schools, high schools and college outreach programs. Educating parents about the educational process would be one way that
schools could help increase the number of low income, first generation, minority students. They could help empower parents to be a vital college resource for their children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Some high school</th>
<th>Graduated high school</th>
<th>Some college</th>
<th>Graduated with an Associate's degree</th>
<th>Graduated with a Bachelor’s degree</th>
<th>Graduated with a Master’s degree</th>
<th>Graduated with a Ph. D degree</th>
<th>None/Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 5: Highest Level of Education Parents Accomplished)

The next question asked students about the level of education that their siblings had attained. Most students stated that their siblings had graduated from high school or had some college experience. In a separate question students also expressed that their siblings and other family members provided them with guidance when applying to higher education. Having a sibling that has experience with the educational system provides students with guidance and support. Unfortunately it was difficult to find any literature on this topic. This could be a great future research topic. Table 6 shows the highest academic level achieved by siblings of participants.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Education Achieved by a sibling?</th>
<th># of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not have any siblings</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some high school</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated from high school</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated with an Associate degree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated with a Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated with a Master’s degree</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduated with a Ph.D</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 6: Highest Academic Level Achieved by One of your Siblings)

In question nine students were asked to fill in where they got most of their information about college. Most students stated that their high school was the main source of information. College outreach programs and guidance counselors followed in importance. Other resources mentioned were teachers, siblings, friends and the internet. Since students were able to write in their response some of the resources overlap such as high school, guidance counselors and teachers. Students got most of their information from high schools, college outreach programs, and guidance counselors. This supports the previous assumption that the top resources for low income, first generation, minority students are their high schools, guidance counselors, and college outreach programs. Table 7 demonstrates the top resources that provided students with the most information about college.
The following question asked students to check off the different types of information that was provided to them by their middle school or high school. They were provided with the following options; college tours, college fairs, informational workshops or events, brochures, guest speakers/assemblies, counseling or other. The top three types of information they were provided with were counseling, college tours, and guest speakers. While these were the most popular, a large number of students selected brochures, college fairs, and informational workshop/events. These findings highlight the types of resources that were provided by schools and the value they hold for first generation students in accessing this information. Table 8 shows the types of information high schools or middle schools provided students with in regards to higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources:</th>
<th>High school</th>
<th>Guidance Counselor</th>
<th>Outreach Program</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 7: Resource that Provided Students with the Most Information About College)

Table 8 shows the types of information high schools or middle schools provided students with in regards to higher education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College Tours</th>
<th>College Fairs</th>
<th>Informational Workshops or Events</th>
<th>Brochures</th>
<th>Guest Speakers/Assemblies</th>
<th>Counseling</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 8: Information Provided By High Schools and Middle Schools)

Students were requested to list all of the places or people where they received information about college. Table 9 shows the number of different types of resources used by students to gain information about college. Overall the top resource for them was college outreach programs. They listed a variety of different college outreach programs such as AVID, EOP,
Upward Bound, GEAR UP, and Educational Talent Search. The top three college outreach programs students were involved in were EOP, AVID, and Educational Talent Search.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outreach Program</th>
<th>High school</th>
<th>Counseling</th>
<th>Siblings</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>Friends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 9: Resources That Provided Students With Information About College)

The following questions asked students to identify the different types of information they gained from each of the resources available. The following resources that were evaluated were college outreach programs, their parents, their guidance counselors, their peers and teachers/administrators. Students evaluated each based on the following criteria; guidance in the application process, guidance with admissions requirements, guidance in applying for financial support for college, guidance in regards to what high school classes to take, developing study skills, emotional support and none.

College outreach programs provided students with support for applying for financial aid, admissions requirements, and in completing college applications. More than half of the students felt they gained valuable guidance in all three of these types of support. Students also stated that they gained other types of support too such as developing study skills and what high school classes to take. Table 10 shows the type of information students received from college outreach programs.
Parents provided students with emotional support. Very few students expressed that their parents were able to provide them with guidance in the other aspects of preparing for college. Some students, however, did express that their parents provided them with guidance in applying for financial support. Table 11 demonstrates the types of information about college provided by students’ parents. This supports the literature information that expressed that parents of low income, first generation, minority students have difficulties providing with students with information about the educational system. They lack of experience with the educational system and language barriers limit the types of support they can provide students. But many parents do provide students with emotional support and encouragement, this type of support is also extremely important and value to students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did not participate in an Outreach Program</th>
<th>Guidance in the application process</th>
<th>Guidance with admission requirements</th>
<th>Guidance in applying for financial support</th>
<th>Guidance in regards to what high school classes to take</th>
<th>Developing study skills</th>
<th>Emotional Support</th>
<th>None</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 10: Types of Information Received from College Outreach Programs)
Guidance counselors provided students with guidance in the admissions requirements, the application process, in regards to eligible high school coursework, and with applying for financial aid. High school guidance counselors also provided students with other types of support, too.

Peers provided students with emotional support but they also provided students with guidance in all the other categories too. Table 13 outlines the different types of information peers provided.
Teachers and administrators provided students with support in developing study skills, guidance in regards to what classes to take, and guidance with college admission requirements. This sections shows that not all student felt they were provided with emotional support from teachers and school administrators. This information provided information for the second research questions, how high schools and middle schools can improve their efforts to increase the number of students attending higher education.

The last questions asked students who else provided them with support and college information. Students stated that they were helped by neighbors/family friends, extended family
(e.g. cousins, uncles, aunts, and grandparents) and mentors. Students heavily rely on their community for support and information about college. Table 15 shows the other people that provided students with support and college information. A similar research by Yosso (2005) highlighted how members of a community can assist students in achieving their goal of higher education. Yosso looks at how community cultural wealth can help students through their educational process. She expressed that communities work together to assist students by providing them with mentors and advice (Yosso, 2005). She looks at the different types of capital that community members can provide for each other (Yosso, 2005). One was aspirational capital, the ability to maintain hope and dreams even through dire situations (Yosso, 2005, p. 77). Another is social capital, which is a network of people and community resources to assist students (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). One of the ways that high schools and middle schools can provide students with more help is by advertising different community resources available for students interested in continuing their education.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neighbors/ Family Friend</th>
<th>Religious Leaders</th>
<th>Mentors</th>
<th>Coach</th>
<th>Employer/Co-workers</th>
<th>Extended family (e.g. cousins, uncles, aunts, and grandparents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Table 15: Others Who Provided Students with Support and/or College Information)

The level of income was not requested from students in any of the data collection methods. This was because all students in order to be eligible to participate in EOP or SSS needed to show proof on family income that is considered to be historically low income by the program guidelines. This is calculated by looking at the number of people per household and their total annual income. The survey provided this research with the ability to survey a large number of
students and have them evaluate resources by the services they provided students. The survey supported some of the literature review findings.

**Qualitative Data**

Students were asked to fill out an open-ended questionnaire to help provide more information about their experiences. This questionnaire allowed students more space to express themselves. The Constant Comparison method was used for coding student responses. Each form was reviewed and the responses to each question were tallied up to provide a better understanding of common experiences.

The first question, “What could have provided you with more information about college?” had diverse responses from students. Some noted the importance of getting information about college sooner and for being taught how to research and seek information about college on their own. Other students mentioned wanting more college representatives and college students with personal experiences as guest speakers. One student responded that students needed counselors to provide students with more information about college:

> Counselors at school should better inform students about college and their opportunities. It is important to tell students what they can do with their future and tell them about how college can get them there, regardless of whether or not the student brings it up first.

For the second question, “What type of information about college were you given?” students received different types of information. Most students expressed that they were mainly given the basic information such as their high school graduation requirements and the different types of colleges. Other students were given more detailed college information such as
admissions requirements, tuition information, and information about majors through guest
speakers, brochures, and college fairs. A few students mentioned getting little to no information
about college. One student mentioned “I was told in high school that it was extremely difficult
and that nobody would be there to help you with work, homework, registration, etc.”

For the third question, “Did you feel prepared for college?” some students felt they were
prepared for college but others were confused and scared. One student wrote, “No, I am the
oldest of the three and was the first one to go. I felt lost, overwhelmed, and [I] was motivated to
go, but [I] just needed more guidance.” Another student expressed, “I felt prepared to come and
take classes but I was scared to ask for help because I had no one to look up who could guide me
since I’m first generation to attend college.”

In the fourth question, “What do you know now that you wish you would have known
before college?”, students expressed they would have liked to have had a better understanding of
the college system. Students explained that they would have liked to have more information
about classes and majors. Most students felt they did not know enough about the classes they
needed to take or how to register for them. Others felt they were unprepared for what professors
expected from them such as study skills, work ethics, attending office hours and seeking
tutoring. Many expressed they could have gained from developing more study skills from high
school. One student explained that they were unaware they could apply to a four year university
right after high school, “That I could have applied to college my senior year, I was told I had to
attend community and then go to a four year, which is not true.”

When asked “When do you think students should start preparing for college?” students felt
that the best time for youth to start preparing for the college is when they entered high school.
This would allow students to start exploring their options and begin academically preparing for college classes:

“I think students should start preparing for college their freshman year of high school so that when it’s actually time to apply the students will feel comfortable knowing that they can easily transition from high school to college.”

Informing students about their educational options at an early age helps foster their desire to pursue higher education (Graham, 2011; Walsh, 2010).

When asked “What influenced your decision to attend college?” students expressed that their parents were a big influence. Students also expressed that they wanted to improve on their family’s current economic situation. Many are being motivated to improve their social status through the use of education. They aspire for a better future in which they are able to provide for themselves and their families. One student wrote:

Being a child of immigrants who have struggled so much in this country I decided to attend college so I could have a successful life and in the future be able to help my parents and thank them for all they did for me.

Another student replied:

My family background and my career choice. I have parents without a high school degree and their living situation conveys that and I wanted better for myself and a great job was the only thing that would change that.

In the seventh question “How did your family support your decision to attend college?” students expressed they received encouragement and emotional support from their parents. Most were encouraged to seek a better future than their parents. One student wrote “For as long as I could remember my parents have told me to go to college so I wouldn’t have to struggle like they
did/are.” While another student expressed “My mom was the supportive one and she always told us our education was the most important thing and to focus on school and go to college.”

In the survey many students expressed that their parents had provided them with emotional support. These quotes show how much support parents gave their children and how their own financial situation motivated their children to aspire to do more. Even though parents have limited knowledge about the educational system they heavily influence their children’s desire to attend higher education.

In the eighth question, “How much support did you receive from your guidance counselor?” a majority of the students stated that their counselors did provide them with support in their classes and in applying for college. Other students expressed they received minimal to none. The amount of support students received varied from student to student and school to school. A few students mentioned getting assistance with the college application process, “I received constant support from my counselors, they check up on my progress with college transcripts, application and scholarship applications.”

In response to “What was your high school like?, students attended different types of schools. One student’s:

High school was/ is very small. Not much diversity. Mainly white and Hispanic. There was always “favorite” students in all the Ag. classes (all of the favorites were non-Hispanic). A very small graduating class sizes (about 80).

While another student wrote their school consisted of “about 1,600, many students stay behind at the junior college because it is a good school in our hometown. Some go to college though, but mainly white middle/upper classes.” Another student expressed:
My high school consisted of about 510 students, I come from a very small town located in the Napa county area. It was a public school which consisted of most Hispanics and white American students. Most families come from agriculture based communities, there a lot of opportunities our school provides for students.

The size, location and demographic of students attending a school influence the types of resources available to students. Bangser’s research expressed that school funding influenced the amount of support students received from their school (Bangser, 2008). Unfortunately this question was not written clearly enough for students to provide sufficient information about the type of school they attended.

In response to the tenth question, “How available did you feel were college resources to all students?”, most students felt resources were available for students. A few students mentioned that students needed to seek the information they wanted:

They were there, there was a lot of resources the students who didn’t take advantage it was pretty much on them. There was college tours different activities in order to get involved and attend college.

Other students mentioned their school did not provide them with sufficient information. Students had to search for information about college on their own. “We didn’t have any programs like AVID available. I didn’t know much about college and I wouldn’t have ever if I didn’t seek it.”

Focus Group Discussions

Students were asked to participate in a group discussion based on a series of ten pre-written questions. These are the same questions as those in the questionnaire. I conducted two group sessions and invited EOP and SSS students. The first focus group session was attended by three
students and the second was attended by four students. Getting a large group of students to stay for an hour focus group was difficult. Most students did not have the time to spare or arrived late to the focus session. Those students wrote their responses in the questionnaire discussed in the earlier section. But the students who did stay for the focus group discussion expressed interest in the session and had a very energetic discussion. Each session was guided by me and recorded through the use of an audio recording application on my tablet. Each session was transcribed and analyzed for common themes and notable replies.

Students who participated in the focus group also filled out a questionnaire before the focus group discussion began. This allowed them to express their experiences without being bias by others’ responses during the discussion session. Due to the low number of participation the information in this section can’t be generalized for all low income, first generation, minority students it is just a representation of those who participated in the discussion sessions.

In the first question, “What could have provided you with more information about college?” most students explain they would have liked more detailed information about specific major requirements or colleges. They would have preferred to have been given the opportunity to talk to an actual college counselor one on one. Students expressed that they gained more from one on one counseling sessions with their counselors. Most students requested more interactions with professors and college counselors to gain more in depth information about the different types of degrees. Also some would have liked to interact with current college students to gain a more personal take on the college experience.

When asked “What information about college were you given?” by their high schools most students expressed that they received the basics information on what college was. If students were part of College Connection they were given more information on what classes to take.
College Connection is an outreach program that assists students in preparing for college. It is similar to AVID or Upward Bound. Other students were given an opportunity to go on college tours. Attending college tours helped students picture themselves actually attending college. Some students received information about the college admission information such as ACT, SAT, class requirements. There was wide variance on the types of information students received. Some students were given the basic information, pamphlets, websites and others were given more in depth information and counseling. This greatly relates to the type of school they attend. Schools vary in size, funding, college outreach programs available and student to counselor ratio. Unfortunately, I was unable to gain enough information about the type of high school students attended.

When asked “Did you feel prepared for college?” most students said they did not feel prepared for college. Most students feared failure and had a difficult time picking a major. Some students expressed they lacked the skills needed to succeed. Other students expressed that being part of college outreach programs helped prepare them for college. College outreach programs focused on helping them develop study skills and habits to help them stay on top of their work in college. Student mentioned they benefitted from attending time management, study skills and note taking skills.

When asked “What do you know now that you wish you would have known before college?” students said they wished that they would have known more about the different outreach programs available for students. Others would have liked to have known more about the college graduation requirements and how to plan out their first year classes. All students mentioned they would have liked to have developed better study habits. Most students were unused to the large amount of homework because they got by in high school without needing to
do work outside of the classroom. Many students felt that they had not developed the study skills needed to be successful. They had to quickly develop better study habits in order to succeed in college.

When asked “When do you think students should start preparing for college?” the responses ranged from junior year in high school to their freshman year. One student expressed they thought students should explore different careers at an early age. Having motivation and knowing what they want to do and whether they want to go to college at the beginning of high school would help them plan ahead. Having students explore their options at an early age will give them more time to plan for the requirements.

When asked “What influenced your decision to attend college?” students expressed they saw college as the key to getting a better future. Some wanted to attend college to motivate their siblings and for personal development. Parents were a big influence; they wanted their kids to do better than them. It was never not an option for some of these students because their families expected them to attend. Students wanted to have a stable, well-paying job doing something they enjoyed.

When asked “How did your family support your decision to attend college?” students expressed they were provided with emotional support from their parents. Some families were supportive but nervous about their children’s ability to navigate through the college system. Some students expressed, their parents were unable to be active in education because of long work hours. Most parents were unable to provide students with financial support but they gave them emotional support and provided them with a safety net.

When asked “How much support did you receive from you guidance counselors?” some students expressed that counselors helped them apply to college and motivate them to attend
college but they lacked an understanding of the college system. Another student stated that she never got an opportunity to have one on one sessions with her counselors. Their counselors served too many students and participated in other activities that limited their availability to students. Other students in a smaller school received a lot of support from their counselors. One student expressed he felt judged based on his behavioral problems.

When asked, “What was your high school like?” students’ high schools variety in size and in the expectations of their students. Most students stated they had a supportive teachers. Another student stated students had to seek help, “if you don’t look for help you're not going to get it.” Some students stated they didn’t feel a lot of the students were interested in going to college. Another student explained their school focused on getting their students to college and therefore most of students received more information about college.

When asked “How available did you feel were college resources were to all students?” student replied that there was support for students to attend to college especially for first generation students. Most students felt there were resources available to students but students had to seek them. Students expressed that if you developed a good relationship with a teacher or counselor you were more likely to get extra support. In some college focused high schools it was mandatory for all students to be actively preparing to college. While resources were available to all students not everyone took advantage of them, sometimes due to the lack of awareness or the students’ lack of ability to ask for help. Students needed to search for information and request it on their own. One student said “the resources are there but who was told, who searched and how it was shared with was not was equal for everyone.” Having an idea of what students want to do helped them ask the right questions. One student said that how student presented themselves to school staff members influenced what information they received about college. For example if a
Discussion of the Findings

The main purpose of this study was to answer the following two research questions: “What resources are most effective for assisting first generation, low income, minority students towards attending a four year university?” and “What efforts can high schools and middle schools put forth to help increase the number of minority, low income, first generation students attending a four year university?” Answering these questions will provide a better understanding of how to increase the number of students attending four year universities.

From the information gathered through surveys, questionnaires and focus groups it is clear that a number of factors influence students’ ability to continue to higher education. Students need support from multiple resources such as: their parents, teachers, friends, counselors, college outreach programs in order to pursue higher education. Unfortunately these resources are not always present for all students. Students receive different levels of support from each resource depending on how available they were to students. The assistance each resource can provide is influenced by how readily available they are to students and how frequently students seek them. Some resources provide students with enough information to fill in the gaps of other resources. For example college outreach programs provide students with similar support as guidance counselors and parents with educational experience.

College resources vary depending on the school’s funding. Bangser’s research looked at how school’s funding correlated with the amount of resources available for students. He found that schools with limited funding were unable to provide all their students with similar support as
schools that had more funded. They are unable to provide all students with more outreach programs and methods (Bangser, 2008).

The first research question “What resources are most effective for assisting first generation, low income, minority students towards attending a four year university?” Successful methods that are guiding first generation, low income, minority students towards attending a four year university include making students aware that college is a realistic possibility at an early age. Schools that give students information about college at an early age help them begin to prepare and plan for their futures. Students are able to explore their options and can take the classes necessary to successful transition to a four year university. Students that were provided with the opportunity to explore college campuses, attend college fairs, and speak to college counselors are more likely to aspire and prepare for attending a four year university.

College outreach programs like AVID, Upward Bound, College Connection, GEAR UP begin to prepare students for a four year university by exposing students to the college environment. They are able provide students with one on one student counseling about continuing their education from a college advisor. Students in this study expressed that they received most of their guidance about college from a college outreach program. Students throughout the study expressed greatly benefited from having the ability to have one on one personalized session about their college futures. These sessions allowed students the chance to figure out their majors, career and interests.

Participants of the study expressed that they benefited from having someone believe in their ability to get into a four year university. Students received this support from a parent, a teacher, a counselor, and/or an outreach program advisor or mentor. While each student did not get support from all of these resources they were still being motivated by a few. No a single
student who took the survey expressed they lacked support from all of the resources available.
There were variations of the levels of support they received from each resource but each student
still received support from the other resources. Students were not always exposed to each
resource and all these resources were not available to all students.

The second research question was, “What efforts can high schools and middle schools put
forth to help increase the number of minority, low income, first generation students attending a
four year university?” The amount of information that students are provided during their time in
middle school or high school greatly influences their likelihood to continue their education
(Graham, 2011; Walsh, 2010). A large amount of students who participated in this study
expressed that their high school was a major resource for information about attending college.
Students looked to their high school guidance counselors and teachers to guide them in the
college process. They received this information in the form of college fairs, college tours,
educational counseling and guest speakers. While not all high schools were able to provide
students with these types of resources, students were able to seek them through the use of college
outreach programs. Many expressed that college outreach programs helped give them extra
support they were not receiving from their high schools. The college outreach programs provided
students with college tours, one on one college advising and informational workshops. College
outreach programs such as EOP, Upward Bounds, and Educational Talent Search target low
income minority students at public schools that serve a large population of students.

High schools and middle schools should collaborate with parents and college outreach
programs to maximize the amount of information and support students receive about college. In
order to help more low income, first generation, minority students continue to a four year
university, schools need to provide outreach to their parents. Schools need to work with the
students’ parents to help educate them on how to provide their children with more than emotional support. Bilingual and culturally appropriate services can help parents become more informed and involved. There are outreach methods that schools can adopt to engage and teach parents how to help their children prepare and apply to college. For example the Future Families program hosted panels and workshops for parents in their native language. Parents were able to interact with school staff members and other families that have already experienced the college process (Auerbach, 2004).

Guidance counselors are a very helpful resource but many times they cannot assist all students. In order to help more students, especially those in greater need, schools need to increase the number of counselors that they employ and decrease the counselor to student ratio. Schools should also lower the amount of other responsibilities guidance counselors are assigned and have them focus primarily on working individually with students to develop a plan for their futures. High schools could look to college counselors for gathering the information about how to improve their structure for counselors.

Schools should also develop more relationships with college outreach programs that focus on students who might not normally seek guidance. They should seek to make college outreach programs more accessible to students by providing them with more funding and assistance. A large number of student in this research expressed that students did not always seek these college outreach programs. Engaging and advertising them would enticing more students to actively seek these resources. Programs that target low income, first generation, minority students will create and help promote more awareness of college throughout a campus. One surprising finding was the amount of support students gained from their peers. Student expressed that they received
college information from friends who were also preparing to attend college or were currently
attending college.

Schools could develop peer network by creating student to student mentoring programs. One example would be the Freshmen Mentor Program my high school, implemented to assist freshmen into integrating into high school. Freshmen student were given a senior or junior mentor who assisted them in taking the right classes and encouraging them to participate in more extracurricular activities. Mentors were given time to teach mini workshops about time management and note taking skills. Student mentoring programs can help students develop a peer network.

Conclusion

This study focused on gaining an insight into how low income, minority, first generation college students were able to get to college. The types of support they received and key people or resources that assisted them on this path. This provided a better understanding of where high schools and middle school could focus more of their attention. Students listed and evaluated where they gained the necessary support to successfully get to higher education.

Students highlighted that most of their informational support regarding college comes from their high school or middle school. This places the pressure on schools to be able to provide all students with information and guidance about college. By collaborating with other types of resources schools increase their ability to reach out to all students. Students expressed that outreach programs highly influenced their ability to prepare and attend four year universities. High schools develop more relationships with college outreach programs. Students also expressed that parents gave them financial and emotional support.
Based on other studies parents can provide informational support too if outreach programs or schools provide them with information through workshops and guest speakers. The collaboration of different entities will ensure more students are reached and prepared for continuing their education. Working with multiple resources can help high schools develop a pro-college environment for all students, including those less likely to be aware of resources available. The following chapter will focus on the major findings, bias and limitations of the study.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to find ways to better understand the support resources needed by first generation college students as they reflect on their various preparations in high schools. Identifying successful methods that were able to assist students to get to college would help high schools, middle schools and college outreach programs better impact this population of students. The ultimate goal of this research is to increase the number of low income, first generation, minority students who attend higher education.

Given that a college degree has become a necessity in the US economy, those who obtain an undergraduate college degree are more likely to gain a stable career (Pew Research Center, 2012). Unfortunately there is a lack of racial and socioeconomic status diversity in the students enrolled in higher education. The literature reveals that the students who are more likely to attend higher education are those who are better informed and prepared about the higher education process (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009). Yet many low income, first generation, minority students are unprepared due to the lack of information they are exposed to (Pelco, Ball, & Lockeman, 2014, p. 49-50; Walsh, 2010; Cowan Pitre, & Pitre, 2009).

This study was led by two research questions: 1. What resources are most effective for assisting first generation, low income, minority students towards attending a four year university? and 2. What efforts can high schools and middle schools put forth to help increase the number of minority, low income, first generation students attending a four year university? The
purpose of these research questions was to structure a study that focused on helping find the methods necessary for helping more students attend higher education. To answer these questions I conducted a combination of data collection methods. These methods provided this study with qualitative and quantitative data. Current college students were given the opportunity to express their experiences with the different resources and they were also able to evaluate them.

These research questions assisted in the development of the questions for the survey, questionnaire, and focus group. A total of 103 students participated in the survey, 24 students filled out the open-ended questionnaire and 7 students participated the focus group discussion sessions. The data collection process provided this study with the different types of experiences students’ encountered. Each student came from different backgrounds and types of schools. Some students were provided with more information and preparation in regards to college because they attended a private, higher education oriented high school. Other students who attended large public schools with limited resources did not receive the same level of support in regards to higher education. Schools that had less funding but a large amount of students were unable to provide each student with enough guidance from guidance counselors and teachers.

In this study, current low income, first generation, minority college students were asked to identify how the following resources assisted them in preparing for college; guidance counselors, parents, and college outreach programs. Students were able to express what type of support they received from each of these resources. Students received different levels of support from each resource.

Conclusion

The study revealed how heavily students rely on their schools and guidance counselors as the main source for information about higher education. Schools are one of the main liaisons
between higher education information and students. College outreach programs have also served as a substitution or an extra resource for students. Students have gained a lot of their information through these resources. They have been able to provide students with the educational and emotional support they needed in order to continue their education. Through the data collection student expressed that they did not always receive the support they needed from their guidance counselors. A few students expressed that they felt supported by their guidance counselors while others stated that their counselors were too busy with other responsibilities. Some students expressed they never met with their guidance counselors. College outreach programs focus on meeting with students in a monthly or bi-monthly basis as well as provided students with other educational opportunities such as college tours or workshops to help them prepare for higher education. College outreach programs implement strategies to ensure students are active participants.

The collaboration between high schools, college outreach programs and parents would most benefit students. All students who participated in the survey expressed that they were assisted by at least one of the resources. If all of the available resources (guidance counselors, college outreach programs, and parents) worked together a greater number of students would receive information and support. High schools are not always able to provide all of its students with the support they need in order to prepare themselves for continuing towards higher education. Guidance counselors are the main resource high schools provide for students about higher education. Unfortunately the guidance counselors are overworked and have large caseloads. Their ability to serve all of the students is very limited. Educating parents and working with college outreach programs would help high schools better outreach to low income, first generation, minority students.
Limitations of the Study

One of the main limitations of this study was the response rate from the participants. While the final response was high there was a rocky start when the targeted survey population was limited to only EOP freshman students. While they each received an email with an overview of the survey and a link they were not motivated to follow through. After I expanded the target population I also asked EOP and SSS staff members to advertise and encourage their students to participate in the survey. Surveying college students can be difficult because they can be unmotivated to take online surveys. They are swaps by other responsibilities and less likely to respond to electronic requests.

Another limitation of this study was how the questions were written for the survey and interview. Some questions were unclear and students were confused when answering them. This limited the amount and type of data that I was able to receive from my surveys. While I was able to explain the questions during the focus group discussion some students were confused by a few of the questions in the open-ended questionnaire. One example was question nine in the questionnaire “What was your high school like? For example the number of students in your high school.” Unfortunately the responses received from this question were mostly very vague. I was unable to get information on the type and size of the school they attended.

Recommendations for Further Research

While this study provided a better understanding of the experiences of low income, first generation, minority students have when preparing for higher education, further research could focus on an in depth analysis of the strategies that college outreach programs implement to assist students in accessing higher education. College outreach programs are a major resource for many
students. They are often substitute for other resources such as guidance counselors and high school college fairs. Many times these college outreach programs focus on students who are less likely to be receiving support from other resources. There are a variety of college outreach program, each with their own methods for outreaching and supporting their students. Analyzing each specific program and their outcomes would help high schools borrow from and implements their more successful strategies and programs.

Other research that could be beneficial would be to look at the effects that educating parents about higher education has on the likeliness for their children to attend higher education. Schools would benefit from providing parents with more guidance counselors and staff member who speak the parents’ native language. Schools could provide parents with informational workshops and guest speakers who share their cultural background and have encountered similar situations (Auerbach, 2004; Pstross et al, 2014).

This research would help high schools and college outreach programs find effective methods of fostering families with the educational information needed to help their children attend higher education. This has the potential for helping many students continue their education. Many of the parents have the desire to help their children obtain a college degree but simply lack the understanding on how to best guide them. Creating a handbook or a series of informational workshops would greatly benefits families and result in an increase in the number of students who continue to higher education.

Researcher Bias

This research explores the experiences of first generation, low income, minority student. I was raised by a single mother of three who emigrated here from Mexico in hopes of giving her
children a better future. Although my family always pushed me towards going to college, we knew very little about the actual process. I was lucky enough to enroll in the AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination) class in middle school. The AVID class guided me towards taking harder classes and getting to know other students who were also interested in going to a four year university. By the time I got to high school I was taking honor and Advanced Placement (AP) classes. I continued being an AVID student until I graduated from high school. I was also encouraged to participate in other college outreach program such as the Higher Education Mentoring Program.

AVID helped me develop a good relationship with my guidance counselor and teachers. The Higher Education program put together workshops in Spanish for my mother to learn more about how to support me when applying to college. These programs and the support of teachers helped me prepare and apply for college. Regrettably my brothers who were just a few years younger than me did not enroll in these programs. They were not encouraged to attend college nor prepared for going to a four year university by the school. While the family provided them with support, they were not being actively encouraged at school. I feel that one of the main factors that influenced this was how the school tracked them.

Prior to enrolling in AVID, I was denied the ability to take honors classes because of my ELD status. I had to demonstrate to my counselor that I was willing to work hard to keep up with my fellow classmates. From that point on I was able to slowly enter into a different track and take more honors classes. This allowed me to be at a good academic level for when I entered into high school. Unfortunately not many students are persistent enough to push past their track. I was the first in my family to attend college and was unable to provide my brothers with enough guidance early on. Based on my own experience I found that actively participated in outreach
programs like AVID or Upward Bound helps students surpass some of the barriers and begin to prepare for attending a four year university.

I hope to use this research to encourage more high schools and colleges to provide more equitable resources, for all students to be prepared to attend higher education. Schools must work towards resources and supports that specifically target first generation, minority students, especially English Language Learners, as their parents depend on their school for information about preparing for going to college. To increase the number of students from diverse backgrounds that continue to a four year university, schools should collaborate with different entities and resources to provide students with more support and information.

Significance

This research will help high schools better develop methods of outreaching to low income, first generation, minority students. I am personally invested in this research because of my own background as a low income, first generation, minority student who struggled on to the path of higher education. I understand the struggle of having to figure out how to get to higher education with limited guidance from parents and school guidance counselors. Through the participation in multiple college outreach programs I was able to prepare for continuing my education. I believe that college outreach programs provide many students with the opportunity they wouldn’t have otherwise had. They are an important key for helping more low income, first generation, minority students get continue to higher education.
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