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## **The Relationship between Student Generational Status and College Adjustment among Hispanic Community College Students**

April Anita Watson

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The relationship between student generational status and college adjustment among  
Hispanic community college students

By

April Anita Watson

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of  
Mississippi State University  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in Community College Leadership  
in the Department of Educational Leadership

Mississippi State, Mississippi

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2016

The relationship between student generational status and college adjustment among  
Hispanic community college students

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The purpose of this study was to determine the effect generational status had on the overall college adjustment experiences of Hispanic community college students. A total of 75 Hispanic students enrolled in their 1<sup>st</sup> year of study at a comprehensive community college located in south Texas agreed to participate in the study after being recruited using a convenience sampling method. Participating students were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire and the self-report Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). Mean difference scores across the 4 subscales of the SACQ were compared using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) design. The results of the MANOVA analysis indicated significant differences existing between first-generation and continuing-generation students on 2 of the 4 SACQ subscales, with social adjustment and institutional attachment being the only areas in which significant differences did not exist after applying the Bonferroni correction. Results are interpreted in terms of their impact on community college leaders' efforts to retain and support minority students. In addition, considerations for future research are presented and discussed.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project to my precious family: Josh, Kaylee, and Cara. Thank you for your love and support and for being my biggest fans. There is no way I could have finished this great undertaking without you. Thank you, and I love you the most!

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Saving the best for last, I want to thank my precious family. There are no adequate words to describe how much you mean to me and how much I love you. Josh, you amaze me every day with your unending energy to not only take care of everything, but master it all. I thank God for you every day. Without your support and encouragement, none of this would have been possible. To my awesome and sweet girls, you are my reason for living. Thank you for your patience as there have been times when I have had to put schoolwork ahead of the fun stuff. Guess what?! I'm done!

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of the Study**

For many students, the transition to college represents one of the most significant challenges they will face in their lives (Feldt, Graham, & Dew, 2011). While attending college provides students with multiple opportunities for personal growth and development, the research literature (Cohorn & Giuliano, 1999; Friedlander, Reid, Shuppak, & Cribbie, 2007; Toews & Yazedijian, 2007) highlights a myriad of potential stressors related to the transition to their new environment. Focusing on the adjustment experiences of first-year students is important because the ability of students to successfully cope with the stressors associated with the transition to college and display positive outcomes has important implications for their long-term psychosocial well-being as well as academic success (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). In addition, researchers (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2005; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 1991) have noted that adjustment to college is a multidimensional construct predictive of positive academic outcomes and an unusually good predictor of student retention.

Much of the research on college adjustment is based on the theoretical taxonomy presented in Baker and Siryk's (1984) model of college adjustment. In their model, Baker and Siryk conceptualize adjustment to college as being multifaceted and requiring students to adjust to a variety of demands. To assess student adjustment, Baker and Siryk

developed the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, or SACQ. The SACQ measures four distinct categories of student adjustment: Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and Institutional Attachment. In the SACQ administration manual, Baker and Siryk (1989) present evidence attesting to the psychometric soundness of their instrument. Studies in which the SACQ has been used often fall into three main categories: descriptive, correlational, or group comparison. Of the three, correlational studies appear most frequently in the literature (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). In their review of the extant literature, Credé and Niehorster (2012) note that the variables most often correlated with student adjustment can be grouped into eight broad categories including: demographic characteristics, prior achievement, experiences at college, core self-evaluations and traits, state and trait effect, coping style, social support, and relationship with parents.

While the majority of published studies utilizing the SACQ involve U.S. students, the addition of studies (Abe, Talbot, & Greelhoed, 1998; Beyers & Goossens, 2002; Strage, 2000) identifying the efficacy of the SACQ with both international students and students of color supports the generalizability of the instrument to examining the adjustment experiences of diverse student populations. However, according to Lascher (2009), the extant research exploring adjustment experiences and degree persistence among Hispanic students lacks both breadth and depth. Given that Hispanics have become the most represented minority group on college campuses (Fry & Taylor, 2013), this represents a noticeable gap in the literature.

In an effort to build the knowledge base on Hispanic student adjustment and identify culture-specific aspects of adjustment, researchers have conducted studies that

either present a profile of Hispanic student adjustment (González & Ting, 2008; Rivas-Drake, 2011), or compare Hispanic students to the majority culture (Huynh & Fuligni, 2012; Toews & Yazedjian, 2007) or other minority group students (Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Young, Rennick, & Franco, 2014). A consistent theme across these studies is the fact that cultural experiences were an important predictor of college student adjustment. In a study of 227 Hispanic students, Rivas-Drake (2011) found that students who were socialized by their parents around issues of ethnicity and race at an early age were more likely to report a positive adjustment experience than less socialized students. Similarly, Huynh and Fuligini (2012) found that students who reported experiences that ran counter to their native cultural beliefs indicated more challenges in their adjustment process.

While the aforementioned studies lend credence to Llamas and Ramos-Sánchez's (2013) findings that acculturative stress is a significant predictor of college adjustment, there are some design limitations that should be noted and taken into context when generalizing results. For one, each of these studies were conducted on campuses where Hispanic students were in the minority. Adjustment experiences may differ greatly for those students who choose to attend Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs) where they are likely to encounter a campus culture similar to what they have known throughout their lives (Lopez, 2005). In addition, studies such as the one conducted by Rivas-Drake (2011) drew their samples from large, urban universities with highly selective admissions procedures. The students who attend these schools may have adjustment experiences that greatly differ from those of students who might attend community colleges. The lack of

information on the experiences of Hispanic students at these institutions represents an additional gap in the literature in need of addressing.

Tinto's (1993) longitudinal model of institutional departure serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Tinto's model was first published in 1975, with revisions in 1987 and 1993 (Henningsen, 2003). The model is arguably the most cited and tested model for student persistence in higher education (Ukoha, 2006). According to this model, student persistence is enhanced when students become integrated into both formal and informal academic systems and social systems. The more connected the students, the more invested they become in their academic success and degree completion. A review of the literature shows that Tinto's model has been used as the theoretical framework for numerous studies (D'Amico et al., 2014; Halpin, 1990; Henningsen, 2003; Ukoha, 2006) examining the construct of student persistence across a variety of student populations (e.g., first-generation, non-traditional, minority students, returning veterans, etc.). The original 1975 model was designed to explain student departure in 4-year residential universities; however, with the revisions made on Tinto's 1987 and 1993 designs, the model may now be applied to community college students as well (Henningsen, 2003).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Current literature related to students' adjustment to college is limited in terms of its findings related to Hispanic students. Studies that have been conducted with these students have often occurred at colleges and universities where Hispanic students were in the cultural minority. Studies examining the college adjustment experiences of Hispanic students at HSIs at the community college level are underrepresented in the literature.

With an estimated 2.5 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education nationwide, and the number of Hispanic high school graduates applying for college now outnumbering the number of White applicants (Pew Research Center, 2013), the lack of studies identifying factors predictive of student adjustment and ultimately degree persistence among Hispanic first-year students is problematic and hinders efforts of university officials to develop appropriate strategies and interventions designed to support students' collegiate success. The problem of this study is the extent to which there is a relationship between adjustment to college factors (based on SACQ four subscale scores) and the generational status (first-generation or continuing-generation) of Hispanic college students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this survey study was to determine the extent to which there is a relationship between adjustment to college factors and the generational status of Hispanic college students with the goal of adding to the professional literature related to students' adjustment to college. Specifically, this study was conducted to further understand how Hispanic students view their adjustment experiences. To add richness to the results, comparisons were examined between Hispanic students who identify as first-generation students and those who identify as continuing-generation students. This new knowledge will be useful to higher education administrators as they examine policy issues and curricular offerings designed to best serve the changing demographics of today's college student body. The research was conducted at a south Texas comprehensive community college with a majority of its student population being of Hispanic ethnicity. The researcher surveyed volunteer students through clubs/organizations on campus. The

researcher continued to attend club/organization meetings until a sufficient number of surveys had been collected. The instrument utilized for this survey study was the SACQ.

### **Research Question**

The primary research question for this study is to examine whether college student generational status (independent variable; IV) significantly affects Hispanic student adjustment to college as measured by the four subscales of the SACQ (academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and attachment). To assess this question the following research question was addressed:

Does student generational status (first-generation or continuing-generation) have a significant effect on academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment among Hispanic students enrolled in their first year of community college?

### **Operational Definitions**

1. Academic adjustment – a subscale of the SACQ that measures a student’s success in coping with the various educational demands characteristic of the college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1989).
2. Adjustment to college – all attempts by a student to cope with the standards, values, needs, course work, and lifestyles within the university environment as measured by the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ; Baker & Siryk, 1984).

3. Attachment – a subscale of the SACQ that measures a student’s degree of commitment to educational-institutional goals and degree of attachment to the particular institution the student is attending, especially the quality of the relationship or bond that is established between the student and the institution (Baker & Siryk, 1989).
4. Community college – a 2-year accredited institution of higher education that offers 1-year and 2-year vocational certificates and 2-year career technical and academic programs of study (Vaughn, 2000).
5. Continuing-generation college student – a student whose parents have attended formal education after a high school or equivalent (GED) degree has been earned. Formal education includes technical schools and training as well as 4-year colleges and universities (Knutson, 2012).
6. First-generation college student – a student whose parents have not attended formal education after high school (Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Ramos-Sanchez & Nichols, 2007; Wang & Castaneda-Sounds, 2008).
7. First-time degree-seeking freshman – a first year entering freshman who is seeking a bachelor’s degree in one or more academic disciplines (Vergara, 2012).
8. Four-year university – an educational and research institution that provides degree programs in a variety of subjects at the undergraduate and graduate levels (Rüegg, 2003).

9. Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) – colleges, universities, or systems/districts where total Hispanic enrollment constitutes a minimum of 25% of the total institutional enrollment (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 2009).
10. Personal-emotional adjustment – a subscale of the SACQ that focuses on a student’s intrapsychic state during his or her adjustment to college, and the degree to which he or she is experiencing general psychological distress and any concomitant somatic problems (Baker & Siryk, 1989).
11. Social adjustment – a subscale of the SACQ that measures a student’s success in coping with the interpersonal-societal demands inherent in the college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1989).

### **Overview of Method**

Participants were recruited from a comprehensive community college located in south Texas using a non-probability, convenience sampling method. At mutually agreed upon times, this researcher attended club and/or organization meetings and introduced the study to those students in attendance. After describing the study and what was being asked of students should they choose to participate, students were then asked whether or not they would like to participate. Those indicating a desire to participate were asked to sign a consent form attesting that they were voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. Participants then were given a copy of the SACQ and demographic questionnaire and instructed to answer each item as honestly as possible. When participants finished their surveys, they were told to deposit them in a provided collection box. The researcher attended meetings for four groups at the beginning of the semester. Two groups were

social groups, one an academic group, and the other a student government-sponsored back to school meeting. The process was scheduled to continue until an adequate sample size was reached. However, due to time constraints the actual number of participants recruited fell short of the sample size indicated by an a priori analysis conducted.

Once data collection ended, survey results were entered into the computer and analyzed. To address the research question identified for this study, all statistical analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS; version 22.0) statistical software. First, descriptive statistics and alpha coefficients were computed for both the full scale and four subscale scores produced by the SACQ. The descriptive statistics allowed for a comparison of scores between participants in this study and the normative sample reported on in the SACQ administration manual while the alpha coefficients served as a measure of the reliability of these scales for this particular group of sample participants.

Next, the primary research question was addressed using a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) design in which generational status (first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students) served as the independent variable (IV) and adjustment to college factors (SACQ four subscale scores) as the dependent variables (DVs). Because the MANOVA design contained four dependent variables, a Bonferroni correction was made to control for the family-wise error rate. This corrective procedure resulted in an alpha level of .0125 being used to determine between group statistical significance. Effect sizes and 95% confidence intervals (Cis) also were computed for each statistically significant difference to address practical significance.

### **Study Delimitations**

To control the scope of this project, a number of delimitations were established. First, this study only examined first-year college students. This student population was chosen after a review of the college adjustment literature revealed that a student's first year in college is the primary period of adjustment. A second delimitation relates to the restriction of data collection efforts to only one south Texas community college. Because this study focuses on the adjustment experiences of Hispanic college students, and the institution from which participants were sampled is classified as a Hispanic-serving institution, sampling from other institutions was not warranted to achieve adequate sample size. Additionally, because the study focused only on the college adjustment experiences of Hispanic students, the inability to generalize the results to other ethnic groups represents a third delimitation of this study. Finally, a fourth delimitation was the definition of college adjustment and the instrumentation assessing this construct utilized in this study. The components of college adjustment assessed in this study are those identified by Baker and Siryk (1989) in their SACQ. Additional factors associated with college adjustment that other researchers have identified were not assessed in this study.

### **Study Limitations**

One significant limitation of this study was that the population of students being surveyed were students who were involved in clubs/organizations on campus. Their involvement in extracurricular activities might suggest that they are more adjusted to college than students who have not yet chosen to participate in clubs/organizations. Ideally, the general population of freshman students would be surveyed; however, due to limitations set by the college administration, student access was granted only through

clubs/organizations. A second limitation of the study was that one must rely on the honesty of the participants and their answers on the SACQ. For various reasons, students may not be completely truthful when disclosing information regarding their personal adjustment to college. Lastly, the survey was conducted at a commuter college that does not have facilities for students to live on campus. Students who do not live on campus may be at a disadvantage regarding adjustment to college as they may not be as immersed into the campus culture as students who have the option of living on campus.

### **Significance of the Study**

Although enrollment numbers for Hispanic students has grown exponentially in the past decade, this growth has not equated to academic success for all students. Graduation rates for Hispanic students still lag behind those reported for White students on college and university campuses nationwide. According to recent National Center for Education Statistics (U.S. Department of Education NCES, 2014) data, the 6-year graduation rate for all students in 2012 was 59% compared to only 51.9% for Hispanic students. Furthermore, researchers note that this disparity holds true no matter the ability of the students nor the reputation of the schools they attend. In light of these sobering statistics, additional research exploring why more Hispanic students fail to graduate than their White peers is needed. Given that previous researchers (Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2005; Pascarelli & Terenzini, 1991) have noted a significant relationship between student adjustment and retention, the examination of first-year Hispanic students' college adjustment experiences might provide data that can be used to bolster retention efforts and develop services and programs specific to the needs of these students.

## **Organization of the Study**

In this chapter, the argument was made for why an investigation into the college adjustment experiences of first-year Hispanic students is needed. Data were presented that illustrates how record numbers of Hispanic students are enrolling in postsecondary education, yet a large number of these students drop out before completing their studies. As a result, the current study was proposed to shed light on this problem and help college administrators and student support staff better support their Hispanic students. In Chapter Two, relevant literature related to the variables included in this study is presented and previous findings critically analyzed to determine where gaps in the literature might exist. Chapter Three details the method used in this study including sampling approach, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and statistical analyses employed. Chapter Four includes the results of the study, and conclusions and recommendations are presented in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides a review of the most commonly cited, representative, and empirical studies in the peer-reviewed literature related to Hispanic student adjustment to college that inform the present study. The chapter begins with a review of demographic shifts in the United States population and the impact these shifts have on state and federal policies. This is followed by a discussion of how an increased Hispanic population is being seen across our national public education system at the elementary, secondary, and postsecondary level. Finally, from the perspective of Tinto's (1993) theory of institutional departure, the construct of college adjustment is defined followed by a critical analysis of the college adjustment experiences specific to Hispanic or Latino/a students.

#### **The Diversification of America**

A significant transformation in the United States populace has been occurring over the past several decades. Sparked by surges in immigration (legal and illegal) reaching record levels of over one million people per year in the 1990s, the nation's reputation as the world's melting pot has never been more appropriate. According to 2010 U.S. Census statistics (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), nearly 40 million people, or a record 13% of the total population, identified as being foreign born. As more individuals

look to America as the land of opportunity, this number is sure to rise. By 2060, Brown (2015) notes that population forecasts indicate foreign-born citizens accounting for 18.8% of the total population (nearly 78 million people).

With a population growing increasingly more diverse, experts predict the United States is on pace to become a plurality nation where no single group constitutes a majority by the year 2051. Should we achieve statistical plurality, Kenneth Prewitt, former director of the U.S. Census Bureau, believes the U.S. will become the first country in history to be comprised of persons from every part of the world (Swerdlow, 2001). Contributing to this increasing diversity in America are the large number of citizens of Mexican and Latin American descent. At an estimated 50.5 million people, these citizens, known collectively as Hispanics, now represent the largest minority group in the United States and are considered the fastest growing of any population demographic. Currently, one in seven U. S. citizens (16%) is of Hispanic origin (Fry, 2011).

Historically, immigration has played an important role in the growth of the U.S. Hispanic population. Hispanic immigrants came to the U.S. for either economic or political reasons. Large numbers of Mexican and Puerto Rican immigrants came to the U.S. in search of work as labor shortages in their homelands made it difficult to support their families. The recruitment of migrant workers and the potential for nearly year-round work in the southern states led to large numbers of Mexicans and Puerto Ricans taking up permanent residence in the U.S. from the late 1970s through the 1990s. For other Hispanics, America represented an opportunity to escape unsettled political situations due to civil wars, oppressive dictatorships, and military interventions. Such was the case for

many Hispanics emigrating from the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Cuba, and Panama.

In addition to immigration, increasing birth rates also play a significant role in the growing U.S. Hispanic population. In 2013, the fertility rate, defined as the average number of children born to each adult woman, of 2.15 for women of Hispanic origin was higher than the 2.1 replacement level needed to maintain population size, and significantly higher than the national average of 1.86 (Girdusky, 2015). In fact, since 2000 the U.S.-born Hispanic population has grown at a faster rate than the immigrant population (Krogstad & Lopez, 2014). As a result, the increase in birth rates among U.S.-born Hispanic citizens now accounts for more than half of all Hispanic population growth (Durand, Telles, & Flashman, 2006). Collectively, this combination of immigration flow and increased fertility is expected to result in Hispanics accounting for more than 30% of the U.S. population by the year 2060 (Pew Research Center, 2013). As numbers continue to grow, Hispanics will become an increasingly significant presence in several aspects of U.S. society including public education.

### **Hispanic Student Enrollment in Public Education**

Hispanic children comprise a significant percentage of the youth population in the U.S., with recent U.S. Census statistics showing that approximately 25% of children under the age of 10, and nearly 20% of children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 20, are of Hispanic origin (Kurtzleben, 2010). Consequently, Hispanic children have become a highly represented population within the U.S. public education system. According to Krogstad and Lopez (2014), by 2014, approximately 13 million children, a figure constituting slightly more than one in four students, enrolled in grades PK-12 were

of Hispanic origin. Projecting into the future, Hispanic children are expected to account for one in three students enrolled in public education by the year 2036 (Fry & Lopez, 2012).

Growth in the nation's Hispanic population also has been felt on the campuses of colleges and universities nationwide (Hernandez, 2000). Between 2001 and 2011, Hispanic student enrollment at degree-granting institutions rose from 4% to 14%. In 2012, for the first time ever, the percentage of Hispanic high school graduates enrolled in college was greater than that for White high school graduates (49% to 47%). With an estimated 2.5 million students enrolled in 2- and 4-year institutions nationwide, Hispanics have become the most represented minority group on college campuses (Pew Research Center, 2013). Historically, colleges and universities have seen increases in enrollment during times of high unemployment and economic recession (Fry, 2009). This has been true since the Great Recession in 2007 as colleges and universities have continued to see record-setting enrollment numbers each year. However, there is no clear explanation as to why Hispanic enrollments have grown so much more than did the enrollments of other racial and economic groups (Fry, 2011).

Despite record enrollment numbers, disparities in degree attainment still persist for students of color, particularly Hispanic students. According to U.S. Department of Education data, the 6-year graduation rate for all students in 2012 was 59% compared to only 51.9% for Hispanic students. This trend remains static even when controlling for such variables as student ability and the reputation of the postsecondary schools they attend. While nearly 40% of White 25-29 year-olds have a bachelor's degree, among Hispanics of the same age less than 15% hold a bachelor's degree (National Center for

Educational Statistics, 2010). As a result, a concerted effort has been made to better understand the reasons why more Hispanic students fail to graduate than their White peers.

### **Barriers to Degree Attainment among Hispanic Students**

The path to degree attainment is filled with many challenges for minority students, especially Hispanics. Arbona and Nora (2007) classified the challenges affecting Hispanic degree attainment into three distinct categories: precollege, college-related, and environmental. In terms of precollege challenges, a consistent finding among researchers has been the influence students' demographic characteristics, skills, and attitudes brought to college have on their academic achievement and persistence in higher education (Arbona & Nora, 2007). One of the most significant precollege factors predictive of bachelor degree attainment noted in the literature is the academic preparation students bring to college, measured primarily in terms of the quality and rigor of their high school curriculum as opposed to class rank, grade point average (GPA), or test scores (Adelman, 1999; Warburton, Bugarin, & Nuñez, 2001). According to Adelman (1999), a quality academic high school education has a greater impact on African-American and Latino students than any other precollege indicator. Furthermore, Warburton et al. (2001) have noted a strong correlation between students' high school curriculum rigor and their collegiate GPA, amount of remedial coursework needed, rate of persistence, and rate of degree attainment. Students exposed to a rigorous high school curriculum are more prepared for college-level coursework and better able to meet the demands of their professors. In contrast, students who have not experienced difficult classes or material are not able to adjust as easily, may lack the skills and resiliency

needed to succeed, and ultimately may not be as successful academically. In fact, Klepfer (2012) noted that high school students in college preparatory classes need not even be successful in those classes in order to reap the benefits associated with success and persistence in college. The simple exposure to higher-level academics in high school is enough for students to benefit later in college. Additionally, community college scholars have found similar findings as high school preparation serves as a strong predictor of community college students transferring to a 4-year college or university and obtaining a bachelor's degree (Hoachlander, Sikora, Horn, & Carroll, 2003; Lee & Frank, 1990).

Additional precollege variables such as parental support and level of education also can have a significant effect on a student's likelihood of degree attainment. In a study conducted by Horn and Chen (1998), students who had help from parents with the college application process were more likely to persist through college than students who did not have help from parents. Findings from the Warburton et al. (2001) study add to this line of reasoning by positing that a strong correlation exists between parents' level of education and rates of students' retention and persistence in college, even when controlling for factors such as academic preparedness. Students whose parents had earned a bachelor's degree were more likely to persist to degree completion themselves as opposed to first-generation students who were not as likely (Warburton et al., 2001). Parents who are college graduates are better able to prepare their children as they go to college in areas such as expectations, the college application process, and academic rigor. Having obtained a degree themselves, they also are more likely to value education and support their children in their academic endeavors than parents who have never attended school beyond high school.

Certain college-related factors are equally as influential in determining whether or not a student obtains a degree. The decision to remain in college by Hispanic students is mitigated by a myriad of factors including commitment to their goal of obtaining a degree, the extent to which they engage in academic discussions and activities both on- and off-campus (Cabrera, Nora, & Castañeda, 1993), and their first-year academic performance (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). A student's academic involvement on campus is significant in impacting his/her persistence, transfer, and degree attainment (Arbona & Nora, 2007). Additionally, Hispanic and African-American students' persistence in college is three times more likely to be affected by their cumulative grade point average at the end of their first year of college than that of their White counterparts (Nora & Cabrera, 1996). Researchers show that students' full-time attendance status also positively impacts persistence and graduation rates as opposed to less traditional attendance patterns (Wassmer, Moore, & Shulock, 2004; Lee & Frank, 1990; Lee, Mackie-Lewis, & Marks, 1993).

Environmental factors also play a role in Hispanic student degree attainment as they have the potential to heavily influence a student's decision to stay in college. Students who have family responsibilities or have to work off-campus must devote much of their time away from on-campus social and academic integration activities (Nora & Wedham, 1991). According to Nora et al. (1996), Hispanic and African American women who reported taking care of a family member were 83% more likely to leave college than their counterparts without such responsibilities.

A variable often studied in relation to retention is adjustment to college (Estrada, Dupoux, & Wolman, 2005). In their meta-analytic review ( $k=237$ ,  $N=44,668$ ) of the

professional literature, Credé and Niehorster (2012) found that adjustment to college is a multidimensional construct predictive of positive academic outcomes and an unusually good predictor of student retention. However, a general lack of agreement exists among scholars as to the magnitude of this relationship. While researchers (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Gerdes & Mallinckrodt, 1994; Pasacarella & Terenzini, 1991; Townsend & Wilson, 2009) found college adjustment to be a moderately strong predictor of student retention, others (Jackson, Pratt, Hunsberger, & Pancer, 2005; Leong & Bonz, 1997) indicate that the relationship may be weaker than previously reported. In this section, the literature on adjustment to college will be reviewed with a specific focus on the adjustment experiences of Hispanic students.

### **Adjustment to College**

For many students, the transition to college represents one of the most significant challenges they will face in their lives (Feldt, Graham, & Dew, 2011). While attending college provides students with multiple opportunities for personal growth and development, the literature highlights a myriad of potential stressors related to students transitioning to their new environment. The ability of students to successfully cope with the stressors associated with this transition stage and display positive outcomes has important implications for their psychosocial well-being as well as academic success (Leary & DeRosier, 2012). As such, adjustment to college factors prominently in the college student literature as a variable often related to the issue of student retention.

When students are able to successfully adapt to the challenges of college life, they are more likely to stay in school and eventually obtain a degree. In 1975, with the creation of his student integration model, Vincent Tinto brought national attention to this

concern of undergraduate retention. Tinto is recognized as developing the most inclusive and pertinent retention model used as a theoretical foundation for conducting research to determine the reasons students leave college (Pascarella & Chapman, 1983; Metz, 2005). Tinto (1975) notes that students come to college with a variety of attributes and experiences having both a direct and an indirect impact on their performance in college. Additionally, Tinto argued that students' social experiences in college are just as important in contributing to their retention as are their academic experiences, grade point average, and test scores. Tinto's (1975) theory suggests that students who integrate themselves into the campus community develop a greater sense of institutional commitment and are more likely to graduate than those students who do not become involved on campus. Critics of Tinto's (1975) theory point out that the basis of the theory does not include minority, non-traditional, or 2-year college students (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Metz, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, Tinto revised his theory in 1997 and included greater detail about the connection between students' behaviors and perceptions as they become more integrated in both their social and academic environments (St. Pierre, 2011). The most notable change in the theory is the inclusion of motivational variables including goal commitment (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011).

Although Tinto has revised his theory over the past 40 years, the basic tenets of the theory remain relevant as researchers continue to utilize it in their studies concerning the challenge of retention. The focus of the theory continues to involve six components including pre-entry attributes (family background, skills and abilities, prior schooling); goals/commitment (student aspirations and institutional goals); institutional experiences

(academic performance, faculty/staff interaction, extracurricular activities, peer group interactions); integration (both academic and social integration); goals commitment (intentions and external commitments); and outcomes (departure decision – graduate, transfer, dropout; Tinto, 1975). Tinto's purpose in developing his theory was to be able to identify students who are at-risk for dropping out based on factors others than academics (Balkcum, 2014). Because of Tinto's influential theory, undergraduate retention is one of the most widely studied areas of higher education today (Berger & Lyon, 2005; Tinto, 2007). Additionally, studies of student adjustment to college are often conducted to better understand the potential factors related to students' decisions to either stop out or drop out of school before degree attainment.

Much of the research on college adjustment is based on the theoretical taxonomy presented in Baker and Siryk's (1984) model of college adjustment. In their model, Baker and Siryk conceptualized adjustment to college as being multifaceted, requiring students to adjust to a variety of demands. To assess student adjustment, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire, or SACQ, was developed. Encompassed in a 67-item self-report inventory, the SACQ measures overall adjustment to college as well as focuses on four specific areas of college adjustment. The four distinct categories of student adjustment include: Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and Institutional Attachment. According to Baker and Siryk (1984), if students are assessed early in their first year of college, characteristics that may put them at risk for dropping out can be identified and actions can be taken to help students better adjust, leading to greater retention rates. In the SACQ manual, Baker and Siryk (1989) present evidence that the instrument is psychometrically sound. While the majority of published studies

utilizing the SACQ involve U.S. students, the addition of studies (Abe, Talbot, & Geelhoed, 1998; Beyers & Goossens, 2002) identifying the efficacy of the SACQ with international students supports the generalizability of the instrument to diverse student populations.

In a study conducted by Abe, Talbot, and Geelhoed (1998), the college adjustment of newly admitted international graduate and undergraduate students was assessed. Researchers measured the effectiveness of peer programs on international students' adjustment to college. Although one of the limitations of the study was that the SACQ instrument had not been normed on international students, results of the study followed a similar pattern of a 1994 study involving 34 international students' adjustment (Kaczmarek, Matlock, Merta, Ames, & Ross, 1994). This similarity in pattern of scores provides confidence in the SACQ being used for international students even though it has not been normed for this population (Abe et al., 1998). Another limitation of the study was the small sample size. In order to confidently apply what was learned in this study to other populations of international graduate and undergraduate students, a larger sample size is needed (Abe et al., 1998).

Another study testing the validity of the SACQ was conducted by Beyers and Goossens (2002) in an assessment of 368 European college freshmen. During the study, Beyers and Goossens (2002) established concurrent validity through significant correlations in the expected direction with alternative measures of student adjustment such as academic motivation and general adjustment to the university, as well as through moderate associations with students' engagement in social activities and self-reported use of on-campus psychological services. Although the results of this study supported

researchers' expectations, the Academic Adjustment subscale of the SACQ presented concerns that were attributed to the differences between European and North American systems of higher education. Otherwise, the SACQ appears useful for measuring the college adjustment of college students in Europe in addition to North America (Beyers & Goossens, 2002).

Studies in which the SACQ is used often fall into three main categories: descriptive, correlational, or group comparison. Of the three, correlational studies appear most frequently in the literature (Credé & Niehorster, 2012). In their review of the literature, Credé and Niehorster (2012) note that the variables correlated with student adjustment can be grouped into eight broad categories: demographic characteristics, prior achievement, experiences at college, core self-evaluations and traits, state and trait effect, coping style, social support, and relationship with parents.

### **First-generation student adjustment to college**

Over the past three decades, researchers have discovered significant differences between first-generation and continuing generation college students in multiple areas including college readiness, financial and emotional support from family, and attrition (Jean, 2010). Another difference these two groups experience is the likelihood of their integration into campus activities. Pike and Kuh (2005) found first-generation college students less likely to be socially and academically engaged within the college environment, ultimately leading to college withdrawal. Additionally, Sax, Gilmartin, Keup, DiCrisi, and Bryant (2000) found that students who are poorly integrated into the academic and social environment of the institution are more likely to drop out of school than those students who fully engage in the campus community.

Because many first-generation students lack an understanding of what to expect in college, they may not be adequately prepared to achieve college success (Jean, 2010). Additionally, researchers (Choy, 2001; Terenzini, Springer, Yeager, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1992) have demonstrated there to be a direct correlation between students' academic preparedness and their parents' educational backgrounds. Historically, there has been a significant gap in the graduation rates of first-generation students and continuing generation students. Nunez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) revealed that first-generation students have a 55% chance of degree attainment while students who had at least one parent with a bachelor's degree had a 76% chance of degree attainment. In 2008, Glenn reported that first-generation students had a 44.9% graduation rate compared to a 59% graduation rate for continuing generation students. This large of a difference in these two situations is very telling of the struggle first-generation students face as they pursue a college education. Since they are the first in their families to attend college, first-generation students turning to their parents for help with trials they may face while transitioning to college are unable to receive first-hand advice as their parents are unfamiliar with the challenges of college. They also may be less likely than continuing generation students to receive encouragement from their families as they pursue educational goals (Thayer, 2000). First-generation students, more so than their counterparts, face many challenges that include conflicting obligations, false expectations, and lack of preparation or support (Hsiao, 1992). Additionally, first-generation students have lower SAT scores and lower grade point averages (Riehl, 1994) than their continuing generation counterparts. However, Balemian and Feng (2013) reported that while first-generation students do perform at a lower level than continuing

generation students on the SAT, first-generation students who had taken Advanced Placement courses had higher SAT scores than first-generation students who took only the SAT. Another challenge that some first-generation students may face, especially in the Hispanic community, involves placing education ahead of family, which runs counter to their beliefs. According to Tinto (1975), first-generation students may have to separate themselves from the norms and beliefs of their families and assimilate more to the college culture. Banks-Santilli (2015) noted that some parents may view their child's going to college as a break in the family system rather than a continuation of his/her educational career. Feeling that they are leaving their families and responsibilities behind, many first-generation students also experience guilt (Banks-Santilli, 2015). This evolution into a new lifestyle is very difficult for first-generation college students and may contribute to the issues they face within higher education (Jean, 2010). Furthermore, a study conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute (2005) indicated that first-generation college students are more likely to live at home and commute to campus, which suggests that a complete separation from their home culture is unlikely.

### **Hispanic student adjustment to college**

In an effort to both build the knowledge base on Hispanic student adjustment and identify culture-specific aspects of adjustment, researchers have conducted studies that either present a profile of Hispanic student adjustment (González & Ting, 2008; Rivas-Drake, 2011), compare Hispanic students to the majority culture (Huynh & Fuligni, 2012; Toews & Yazedjian, 2007), or compare them to other minority group students (Wilton & Constantine, 2003; Young, Rennick, & Franco, 2014). A consistent theme across these studies is the fact that cultural experiences were identified as an important predictor of

college student adjustment. In a study of 227 Hispanic students, Rivas-Drake (2011) found that students who were socialized by their parents around issues of ethnicity and race at an early age were more likely to report a positive adjustment experience than less socialized students. Through cultural socialization, parents instill ethnic pride and value for their heritage in their children. This type of cultural socialization is positively related to students' adjustment to college. Similar to Rivas-Drake's findings, Huynh and Fuligini (2012) noted that students who reported experiences that ran counter to their native cultural beliefs indicated more challenges in their adjustment process. For example, the Hispanic culture places great emphasis on the institute of family and holds it above all else. However, when students go off to college, they may be forced to place studies and their education ahead of their families, creating an internal struggle for students raised to view family as the most important aspect of their lives.

While the aforementioned studies lend credence to Llamas and Ramos-Sánchez's (2013) findings that acculturative stress is a significant predictor of college adjustment, there are some design limitations that should be noted and taken into context when generalizing results. For one, each of these studies were conducted on campuses where Hispanic students were in the minority. Adjustment experiences may differ greatly for those students who choose to attend Hispanic-serving institutions where they are likely to encounter a campus culture similar to what they have known throughout their lives (Lopez, 2005). In addition, studies such as the one conducted by Rivas-Drake (2011) drew their samples from large, urban universities with highly selective admissions procedures. The students who attend these schools may have adjustment experiences that greatly differ from those of students who might attend smaller rural universities or

community colleges. The lack of information on the experiences of Hispanic students at these institutions represents a gap in the literature in need of addressing. As such, the current study is being developed to begin addressing this gap.

### **Summary**

This literature review was conducted to further our understanding of the college adjustment experiences of Hispanic students. This review of the literature included studies in which correlates of student adjustment were examined for Hispanic students in an attempt to identify any gaps in the extant literature. Empirical research was reviewed to determine what researchers in the field already know about Hispanic student adjustment and what may still need to be investigated. Articles that address the same constructs that will be used in the proposed study identify potential gaps in the literature and better conceptualize the research in a manner that could potentially fill these gaps.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this non-experimental study was to explore possible adjustment differences between first-generation and continuing-generation Hispanic students attending a 2-year community college using Baker and Siryk's (1984) student adjustment theory as the theoretical framework due to its proven validity and reliability in student adjustment research. Included in this chapter are sections describing the search strategy utilized in conducting the literature review, a review of the purpose of the study and the problem it addresses, the research question and research hypothesis to be addressed in the study, the population and sampling methods utilized to select study participants, the instrumentation and data collection procedures that were employed, and the data analyses that were performed. A brief summary concludes the chapter.

#### **Problem and Purposes Review**

Current literature related to students' adjustment to college is limited in terms of its findings related to Hispanic students. Studies that have been conducted with these students have often occurred at colleges and universities where Hispanic students were in the cultural minority. Studies examining the college adjustment experiences of Hispanic students at HSIs at the community college level are underrepresented in the literature. With an estimated 2.5 million students enrolled in institutions of higher education

nationwide, and the number of Hispanic high school graduates applying for college now outnumbering the number of White applicants (Pew Research Center, 2013), the lack of studies identifying factors predictive of student adjustment and ultimately degree persistence among Hispanic first-year students is problematic and hinders efforts of university and community college officials to develop appropriate strategies and interventions designed to support students' collegiate success.

The purpose of this survey study was to add to the professional literature related to students' adjustment to college. Specifically, this study was conducted to further understand how Hispanic students view their adjustment experiences. To add richness to the results, comparisons were examined between Hispanic students who identify as first-generation students and those who identify as continuing-generation students. This new knowledge is useful to higher education administrators as they examine policy issues and curricular offerings designed to best serve the changing demographics of today's college student body.

### **Research Question**

The primary purpose of this study was to examine how college student generational status (IV) influences Hispanic student adjustment to college as measured by the four subscales of the SACQ. To this end, the following research question was addressed:

Does student generational status (first-generation or continuing-generation) have a significant effect on the academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment among Hispanic students enrolled in their first year of community college?

### **Research Hypothesis**

Based on a review of the literature, the following hypothesis was formulated:

Continuing-generation Hispanic students will report a greater degree of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment than first-generation Hispanic students enrolled in their first year of community college.

### **Population and Sample**

The population to which the results of this study can be generalized is Hispanic students attending 2-year community colleges in the United States. According to national enrollment statistics, nearly 2.5 million Hispanic students enrolled in postsecondary institutions in 2013 (Pew Research Center, 2013). Of those students, approximately 46 percent were enrolled in 2-year community colleges (Krogstad, 2014). With Hispanic students now representing 25% of all K-12 public school students nationwide, the number of Hispanic students attending college is expected to rise exponentially in the future.

Sample participants were recruited from a comprehensive community college located in south Texas using a non-probability, convenience sampling method. According to the college's website, 10,439 students were enrolled for the fall 2014 semester; 62.4% ( $n = 6,511$ ) of whom were Hispanic students. To determine the minimum number of participants needed to establish statistical power for the proposed research design at the .80 level given an alpha level ( $\alpha$ ) of .05, an a priori power analysis using the G\*Power 3.1 statistical power analysis software package (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2007) was conducted. Results indicated that a minimum sample size of 86 participants would be

needed to detect a moderate effect ( $f^2 = .15$ ) in between group differences detected among any of the four dependent variables. Current enrollment in the first year of study at the selected community college, identification as a person of Hispanic origin, and an age of 18 years or greater were the inclusion criteria used to accumulate a sample of at least 86 participants for this study. However, due to time constraints placed on data collection efforts, a sample size of 75 was gathered for this study. This lower sample size resulted in a power level of .51 being achieved for the study.

### **Data Collection and Instrumentation**

Prior to commencing the study, a protocol was submitted seeking IRB approval to conduct the current study. Following receipt of the letter indicating IRB approval had been granted (see Appendix B) the researcher began plans to solicit potential study participants. At mutually agreed upon times, the researcher attended four club and/or organization meetings and introduced the study to those students in attendance. These meetings represented a mixture of social, academic, and student government-related groups. After describing the study and what was being asked of students should they choose to participate, the researcher asked students whether or not they would like to participate. Those indicating a desire to participate were asked to sign a consent form attesting that they were voluntarily agreeing to participate in the study. Participants then were given a copy of the SACQ and demographic questionnaire created for this study and were encouraged to answer each of the items as honestly as possible. When participants finish their surveys, they were instructed to deposit them in a provided collection box. The decision to have students deposit their own completed surveys into the collection box

rather than turn them in to the researcher was made to further safeguard participant anonymity so that linking individual to submitted survey would be near impossible.

To assess student adjustment, and collect data on each of the dependent variables included in this design, Baker and Siryk's (1989) SACQ was used. The SACQ is a 67-item, self-report questionnaire measuring student adjustment to college. The SACQ yields five scores, a full scale (FS) score and four individual scale scores. Each of the individual scale scores measures a different dimension of student adjustment. Academic adjustment (AA; 24 items) examines the degree to which the student is able to cope with the educational demands associated with college. Social adjustment (SA; 20 items) examines how well the student deals with interpersonal experiences such as meeting people, making friends, and joining groups. Personal-emotional adjustment (PE-A; 15 items) examines how the student feels psychologically and physically. Institutional attachment (IA; 15 items) is designed to measure the student's commitment and sense of affiliation to the institution that he or she is attending. Individuals completing the SACQ are asked to respond to each question using a 9-point scale with responses ranging from (1) "applies very closely to me" to (9) "doesn't apply to me at all."

To score the SACQ, the test administrator must first reverse code certain items. Due to negatively worded response stems, 34 of the items are reverse scored. Once reverse coded, individual item scores are added together. For the full scale (FS) score, values can range between 67 and 603. The ranges of possible raw scores for the SACQ subscales are a) academic adjustment (AA), 24-216; b) social adjustment (SA), 20-180; c) personal-emotional adjustment (PE-A), 15-135; and d) institutional attachment (IA), 15-135 (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Overall, higher scores on the SACQ represent a more

adaptive adjustment to college. For the AA scale, higher scores represent better adjustment to the educational demands of college. In terms of social adjustment, higher scores on the SA scale represent better adjustment to the social and interpersonal demands of the college experience. Better adjustment to the psychological stresses associated with college are represented in higher scores on the PE-A scale. Finally, high scores on the IA scale reflect students' positive adjustment to the college experience in general, and to their particular institution specifically. Because the SACQ is a proprietary instrument, and copyright laws apply, a copy of the actual instrument is not included in this dissertation study. However, sample questions related to each of the four SACQ subscales are included in Appendix A of this dissertation.

In the SACQ test manual, Baker and Siryk (1989) recommend against using the full scale SACQ score in research studies. Their argument is that the concept of college adjustment is complex and multifaceted. Focusing solely on the collective adjustment experience does not allow the researcher to truly understand the subtle nuances involved in student adjustment. In the development of the instrument, and the subsequent validation studies performed using the SACQ, the full scale score was bypassed in favor of examining the relationships among the four subscale scores. Following the recommendation of the instrument's authors, the four subscale scores (SA, AA, PE-A, and IA) were used as separate DVs in the analyses conducted to address the research question posed in this dissertation study.

Initial validation studies involving the SACQ were conducted to determine the psychometric properties of the instrument. Using samples of students enrolled in their first year of college studies, reliability was assessed by using measures of internal

consistency computed for the SACQ full scale score and each of the four subscales. Baker and Siryk (1989) report Cronbach alpha coefficient values ranging from .92 to .95 for the full scale, .81 to .90 for the AA scale, .83 to .91 for the SA scale, .77 to .86 for the PE-A scale, and .85 to .91 for the IA scale. As all values are over .7, the indication is that the SACQ is a reliable instrument. In terms of validity, the accuracy of the instrument in predicting student adjustment was assessed by correlating SACQ scores with established measures of successful student adjustment. For the academic adjustment scale, scores were correlated with student GPA during their first year and with total number of students admitted to academic honor societies (Dahmus & Bernadin, 1992). Criterion-related validity for the social adjustment scale was assessed using a social activities checklist and reviewing whether or not the student became a residential advisor during his or her second year of college. For the personal-emotional adjustment scale, criterion-related validity was assessed by correlating SACQ subscale scores to whether or not students were seeking counseling services from an on-campus mental health provider. Finally, criterion-related validity for the institutional attachment was assessed by matching scores on this subscale to student attrition rates. Additional studies conducted also demonstrate strong relationships between SACQ scores and independent real-life behaviors that may be assumed to reflect the influence of the variables measured by the instrument (Allen, 1985; Baker & Siryk, 1984; Kaczmarek, Matlock, & Franco, 1990; McGillin, 1986). Results of each of these investigations demonstrate that the validity of the SACQ instrument is more than adequate when used to assess first-year student adjustment experiences.

## **Data Analysis**

Following the collection of completed questionnaires, data were entered into the computer and analyzed. To address the research questions identified for this study, all statistical analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 22.0) statistical software. First, descriptive statistics performed on the participant background items included on the SACQ and demographic questionnaire were computed. Frequencies were used to ascertain the composition of the sample obtained for this study across such variables as gender, generational status, current living situation, and employment status. Additionally, measures of central tendency and variability were computed for the demographic variables of participant age and total number of credit hours in which currently enrolled. Second, alpha coefficients were computed for both the full scale and four subscale scores produced by the SACQ. The computation and presentation of the full scale and subscale descriptive statistics (e.g., means, standard deviations, and score ranges) allows for the comparison of scores among participants in this study and the normative sample reported on in the SACQ administration manual while the alpha coefficients serve as a measure of the internal consistency reliability of these scales when used among this particular group of sample participants.

After computing all preliminary analyses, the primary research question addressed in this study was analyzed using a MANOVA design in which generational status (first-generation college students and continuing-generation college students) served as the IV and the four adjustment to college factors (represented by the SACQ subscale scores) served as the DVs. Because this MANOVA design contains four dependent variables, a Bonferroni correction was made to control for the family-wise error rate and reduce the

risk of committing a Type I error when interpreting results. The result of this corrective procedure was a conservative alpha level of .0125 being used to determine whether any statistically significant differences exist between the groups. Following best practices for reporting statistical results, measures of effect size and 95% confidence intervals also were computed for each statistically significant difference to address practical significance.

### **Summary**

In this chapter the purpose of the current study was summarized, and a corresponding research question and hypothesis were developed. The population to which the results of this study can be generalized and sampling methods used to acquire a representative and sufficiently large enough group of sample participants was discussed. The procedures that were utilized in the collection of data and the instrumentation used to assess study variables were introduced and reviewed. Finally, descriptions of the statistical analyses performed and the rationale behind the decision to use each were presented.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of this study designed to further our understanding of the college adjustment experiences of Hispanic first-year community college students in south Texas. Specifically, data were collected and analyzed to determine whether statistically significant differences in college adjustment exist between first-generation and continuing-generation students. For this non-experimental study, one independent variable and four dependent variables were used. The independent variable was student generational status. This variable had two levels, first-generation and continuing-generation. The four dependent variables represented the four subscales of the SACQ (Baker & Siryk, 1989). The four subscales are: SA, AA, PE-A, and IA. In the following sections, sample demographics and results of the analyses run to address the primary research question for this study are presented. A summary concludes this chapter.

#### **Demographics**

Participants for this study were recruited from a comprehensive community college located in south Texas using a non-probability, convenience sampling method. Utilizing this sampling method, a total of 75 Hispanic students agreed to participation in the study. All participants were in their first year of college studies, and they ranged in

age from 18 to 33 years old. The average age of the participants was 20.95 years with a standard deviation of 2.93. In terms of gender, the sample included 33 male (44%) and 42 female (56%) participants. Examining generational status, 48 participants (64%) self-identified as being a first-generation student and 27 participants (36%) self-identified as being a continuing-generation student. On average, participants reported being enrolled in 10.81 credit hours ( $SD = 1.75$ ) at the time of their participation in this study. Of the study participants, 60% ( $n = 45$ ) were financing their education through student loans, and 80% ( $n = 60$ ) reported that they were planning to continue their education at a 4-year college or university in the future. A complete demographic breakdown of the study sample appears in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

*Sample Demographics for Nominal-Level Variables*

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Gender		
Male	33	44.0
Female	42	56.0
Generation Status		
First-Generation Student	48	64.0
Continuing-Generation Student	27	36.0
Educational Financing		
Student Loan	45	60.0
Working Part-Time (<30 hrs/wk)	10	13.3
Working Full-Time (>30 hrs/wk)	5	6.7
Family Support	15	20.0
Plans Post-Graduation		
Attend 4-year institution	60	80.0
Begin career in the workforce	15	20.0

( $n = 75$ )

Table 2

*Sample Demographics for Ratio-Level Variables*

	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Age	18	33	20.95	2.93
Credit Hour Enrollment	9	13	10.81	1.75

(n = 75)

**Research Question**

The research question addressed in this study is as follows: does student generational status (first-generation or continuing-generation) have a significant effect on the academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment among Hispanic students enrolled in their first year of community college? To address this research question, a MANOVA was used. However, before MANOVA results could be interpreted, model assumptions of the MANOVA design needed to be assessed.

A total of nine assumptions were assessed. The first five assumptions were assessed a priori. By design, (1) the dependent variables used in the study (SACQ subscale scores) each were measured on an interval scale, (2) the independent variable (student generational status) included at least two categorical groups, (3) observations were found to be independent of one another, (4) the sample size was deemed to be adequate for the analyses to be performed, and (5) no univariate or multivariate outliers were detected. The final four assumptions were assessed using SPSS. To assess for multivariate normality, a Shapiro-Wilk test was run for each of the DVs. The results of this test suggest that scores across the two groups on the social adjustment, academic

adjustment, personal/emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment subscales were normally distributed. Scatterplot matrices plotted for each group of the independent variable indicated the study variables to all be linearly related. Homogeneity of the variance-covariance matrices was confirmed by the non-significant Box's M-test ( $p = .809$ ). Finally, no multicollinearity was detected as no more than moderate correlations were found between the study DVs. Having satisfied all model assumptions, a valid interpretation of the MANOVA results could be made.

Based on the results of the MANOVA analysis, when the four subscale factors were evaluated collectively, a significant difference in perceived student adjustment was detected,  $F(4, 70) = 2.83, p = .031$ , Wilk's  $\Lambda = .861$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .14$ . After applying a Bonferroni correction to account for family-wise error rate, follow-up univariate analyses run to assess for between group differences on each the specific subscales individually indicated a significant difference at the .0125 level for the academic adjustment subscale,  $F(1, 73) = 10.84, p = .002$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .13$ ; and the personal/emotional adjustment subscale,  $F(1, 73) = 7.60, p = .007$ , partial  $\eta^2 = .09$ . Between group differences for the social adjustment subscale variable,  $F(1, 73) = 3.41, p = .06$ , and the institutional attachment subscale variable,  $F(1, 73) = 6.33, p = .014$ , were found to be non-significant. According to Cohen's (1992) guidelines, partial  $\eta^2$  values for the academic adjustment and personal/emotional adjustment subscales are indicative of a large and medium effect, with 13% and 9% of the between subjects variance being accounted for by the academic adjustment and personal/emotional adjustment variables respectively. Full descriptive statistics for the four dependent variables are listed below in Table 3.

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics for the SACQ Subscale Variables by Generation Status*

	Min	Max	Mean	SD
<b>First-Generation Student</b>				
Social Adjustment	28	75	45.23	7.09
Academic Adjustment	31	75	49.02	9.81
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	25	71	42.29	11.01
Institutional Attachment	25	56	43.62	6.64
<b>Continuing-Generation Student</b>				
Social Adjustment	33	83	48.79	9.48
Academic Adjustment	33	75	57.03	10.82
Personal/Emotional Adjustment	30	70	51.75	11.84
Institutional Attachment	32	67	47.82	7.58
<hr/>				
(n = 75)				

**Chapter Summary**

The combination of the overall MANOVA results and the finding of significance in the Bonferroni-corrected follow-up univariate tests for two of the four dependent variables provides evidence supporting the research hypothesis for this study. In terms of academic adjustment and personal/emotional adjustment, Hispanic community college students in their first-year of study who self-identified as a first-generation student reported significantly lower levels of adjustment than their peers who self-identified as continuing-generation students. In Chapter V, these results will be interpreted more fully

and their implications for community college leaders and other school personnel working with first-year students will be discussed.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

#### **Introduction**

This chapter summarizes the study on the college adjustment of Hispanic first-year community college students at a south Texas comprehensive community college. The purpose of the study was to further understand how Hispanic students view their adjustment experiences. The researcher originally hypothesized that continuing-generation Hispanic students would report a greater degree of academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal-emotional adjustment, and institutional attachment than first-generation Hispanic students enrolled in their first year of community college. The results provided support of the original research hypothesis, with a statistically significant MANOVA result and Bonferroni-corrected univariate differences for two of the four adjustment subscales. In the following sections, the results will be interpreted, study limitations discussed, practice implications articulated, and recommendations for future research presented.

#### **Summary of Findings**

A MANOVA was used to address the research question posed in this study. MANOVA is used when a researcher is interested in determining whether there are any differences between independent groups on more than one continuous variable. In this study, first-generation and continuing-generation Hispanic community college

students were surveyed and their responses to the SACQ were compared. Results of the MANOVA indicate a statistically significant difference between the groups,  $F(4, 70) = 2.83, p = .031$ . This means that the adjustment experiences of first-generation and continuing-generation students are fundamentally different. In addition, because the SACQ is a multidimensional instrument assessing student adjustment in several unique areas and contexts, follow-up analyses were conducted for each of the four SACQ subscales. The results of these analyses indicated significant differences existing between the groups for the academic adjustment and personal/emotional adjustment subscale variables. In both cases, students who self-identified as being first-generation college students reported less adjustment in these areas than students whose parents had completed a college degree. Collectively, the results of the MANOVA and follow-up analyses indicate that Hispanic first-generation college students experience more adjustment-related difficulties than their continuing-generation classmates, especially when it comes to their academic performance and ability to handle their emotions. A discussion of these results, framed in the context of previous literature and our understanding of the Hispanic culture, follows.

### **Discussion of Findings**

In terms of differences in college adjustment between first-generation and continuing-generation students, the results of this study add to the mixed results found in the extant literature. For example, studies conducted by Dittman, McKinney, and Trimble (1994) and Reynolds-Shaw (2006) found no significant differences between first-generation and second-generation or continuing-generation students in terms of student adjustment as measured by the SACQ. However, studies conducted by Jean (2010) and

Hertel (2002) indicated there might be distinct differences in the adjustment experiences of first-generation college students. All of these studies used sample participants recruited from 4-year colleges and universities, and the majority achieved little diversity in their sample pools. The findings of this study expand our understanding by looking at the adjustment experiences of students attending a community college, specifically students of a Hispanic origin.

Although the MANOVA results indicate a significant difference between first-generation and continuing-generation Hispanic students, differences were not noted for each of the four SACQ subscales. This indicates that the adjustment difficulties experienced by Hispanic first-generation students is localized and not generalized to the entire college experience. Univariate analyses indicated significant differences for academic adjustment and personal/emotional adjustment, but not for social adjustment and institutional attachment. These results likely reflect an interaction between the students' cultural background and generational status.

Despite increases in enrollment numbers, Hispanic students continue to underachieve academically. Among Hispanic students, 6-year graduation rates are noticeably less (51.9% to 59.2%) than the national average (NCES, 2013). Attempts to explain this phenomenon consistently point to the academic readiness of Hispanic students entering college (Nora & Crisp, 2012; Pyne & Means, 2013). According to the report, *The Condition of College and Career Readiness 2014: Hispanic Students* (Excelencia in Education, 2015), 47% of college bound high school seniors failed to meet any of the four ACT college readiness benchmarks. Furthermore, Hispanic students are less likely to have taken a rigorous high school curriculum (Marisco & Getch, 2009), so

the transition to college-level coursework is likely to be more challenging. Collectively, these factors create a situation where Hispanic students would logically be expected to have academic adjustment difficulties. Instructors may be discussing material above their comprehension level, making it challenging for these students to keep up in their courses. Additionally, the structure of college and increased emphasis on self-motivation and self-monitoring to ensure work is done and class requirements are successfully met might be novel to Hispanic students who lack any college graduate family members serving as role models. The lack of “college knowledge” parents of first-generation students have limits the amount of information they can share related to preparing to get to college and then succeeding once there.

The finding that Hispanic first-generation students reported greater difficulty with the personal/emotional adjustment to college also appears to be expected given our understanding of Hispanic students. In addition to the anxiety and confusion these students face as a result of their perceived academic shortcomings (Boden, 2011), the need to balance life roles also adds to the emotional challenges first-year students face in their new environment. Within the Hispanic community, family is an important social construct, often extending beyond the nuclear, and at times biological, conceptualization of family. Adopting a collectivistic perspective, Hispanics are more concerned with family rather than individual success (Sy & Romero, 2008). However, when they attend college for the first time Hispanic students often find this worldview becomes challenged. Specifically, stress may arise from having to prioritize self over family for the first time. Freshmen students may struggle balancing their need to devote time and energy to their studies with their desire to spend time engaged in family activities. This struggle might

lead to feelings of guilt, anxiety, stress, or even depression, making the college adjustment experience harder for Hispanic students (Del Pilar, 2008; Granillo, 2011). For first-generation students, where no one is available to share insights and provide mentoring through the transition process, the emotional and personal adjustment to college increases as evidenced by the results of this current study.

### **Limitations**

This study was not conducted without limitations. Consequently, the results presented in this paper should be interpreted in light of these limitations. The first limitation involves the manner in which data was collected. The researcher collected data at campus events and club meetings. Students who attended these events naturally would be more adjusted and connected to the institution by way of their involvement in these extracurricular activities. In addition, the data collected were all self-reported. Truthfulness of the participants was assumed but could not be verified. The possibility exists that those individuals who participated in the study might have tried to portray their adjustment experiences in a positive light to avoid possible shame or embarrassment. Furthermore, data was collected at the beginning of the spring semester after students had just finished their between-semester winter break. The time away from school and absence of any academic-related stressors might have skewed the participants' responses. It is possible data collected at alternative times during the first year might have yielded entirely different results. Finally, as noted in Chapter 1, the institution from which participants were recruited was a commuter school. There were no residential facilities for students to stay on campus, and most students were classified as part-time. Off-

campus responsibilities such as jobs and families might contribute more to adjustment difficulties than students' generational status.

### **Implications for Community College Leaders and Other Stakeholders**

The results of this study should be of interest for community college leaders and administrators. Understanding the challenges Hispanic first-generation students face can help in the development of programming aimed at facilitating the transition process for these students at-risk for attrition. With the number of Hispanic students on college and university campuses expected to increase exponentially in the coming years, proactive efforts to instill systematic support systems will be of great value. Buffering the transition process will help students succeed and decrease the likelihood they drop out or discontinue before degree completion. Additionally, increasing the number of Hispanic graduates will allow local economies to flourish and provide businesses and industries with a readily available, educated, and skilled workforce. In doing so, community college administrators position their institutions to fulfill their mission amidst changing times and an evolving student demographic.

To assist with academic adjustment issues, community colleges should consider enhancing partnerships with local high schools to prepare students for college before actually arriving on campus. Dual credit and exam-based courses are one way community colleges can help students acclimate to the rigor and demands of college work. In addition, orientations can be expanded to address the issues pertinent to first-generation students. Topics that otherwise might have been assumed to be common knowledge should be addressed, including study skills, attending class, scheduling times to meet with faculty outside of class and during office hours, and working in small groups or

study partnerships with classmates. Offering services and advertising them to this at-risk population might help for students unsure of who to ask for help or even what they should be asking for in the first place.

To assist with personal and emotional adjustment, support groups can be established for first-generation students. With little to no mentorship and guidance at home, support groups can be a good place for students to ask questions and build relationships with others. Supplementing these peer support groups, college counseling center staff can be introduced to students early in their academic careers, perhaps during orientation sessions, to help put a face with a name and demystify the process of seeking out counseling services. Transitioning to college will always have its challenges and remain an important developmental stage in a person's life. However, with foresight and planning, community college administrators can make the transition less stressful and more enjoyable for all of their students.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Though these findings help further our understanding of the adjustment experiences of Hispanic first-year community college students, future research is still needed in this area. First, future researchers should seek to include a more diverse student sample group. Participants in this study were drawn from a single community college in south Texas. The community college is designated as an HSI and is located in a community with a strong Hispanic presence. Including Hispanic students at institutions in other geographic areas where the Hispanic population is less pronounced might add to the generalizability of the findings.

A second recommendation would be to draw comparisons between students attending community colleges and 4-year universities. The majority of research in the area of college student adjustment occurs at the 4-year university level. Comparing the adjustment experiences of students at this level to students at the community college level will help identify whether interventions specific to the community college milieu are warranted. Given the unique characteristics of the community college, from its mission to its curricular offerings to the students it serves, adjustment might look vastly different than it would on a traditional 4-year university campus.

A third recommendation would be for future researchers to consider using alternative methods of addressing this research question. In this quantitative study, a non-experimental design was utilized. Additional studies employing qualitative or single case research methodologies will add a layer of richness to our understanding of Hispanic community college students' adjustment experiences. Using a qualitative approach will help yield information related to the specific lived experiences of students from their own firsthand perspective. Specifically, qualitative methods might reveal what it is about being a first-generation student that leads to a more challenging adjustment experience. In a study implementing a single case research design, a small cadre of students could be followed over time to see how their adjustment unfolds throughout the course of their first year. Such an approach might reveal particular periods when adjustment is facilitated or hindered. Coupled with the results of the original quantitative inquiry, a holistic view of Hispanic students' college adjustment experiences will begin to emerge.

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APPENDIX A  
SAMPLE SACQ ITEMS

The following items represent a select sample from the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ), copyright © 1989, 1999 Western Psychological Services. Because of the proprietary nature of the instrument, the complete questionnaire cannot be included in this dissertation.

### **Academic Adjustment**

1. I have been keeping up to date on my academic work
2. I'm not doing well enough academically for the amount of work I put in

### **Social Adjustment**

1. I have several close social ties at college
2. I have some good friends or acquaintances at college with whom I can talk about any problems I have

### **Personal/Emotional Adjustment**

1. I feel confident that I will be able to deal in a satisfactory manner with future challenges here at college
2. I've put on (or lost) too much weight lately

### **Institutional Attachment**

1. I wish I were at another college or university
2. I am pleased now with my decision to attend this college in particular

APPENDIX B  
IRB APPROVAL LETTER

From: <ncobb@orc.msstate.edu>  
Date: Tue, Jan 19, 2016 at 3:03 PM  
Subject: Study 16-009: The Relationship Between Student Generational Status and College Adjustment Among Hispanic Community College Students  
To: aam14@msstate.edu  
Cc: ncobb@orc.msstate.edu, sking@colled.msstate.edu

January 19, 2016

April Watson  
Educational Leadership

RE: HRPP Study #16-009: The Relationship Between Student Generational Status and College Adjustment Among Hispanic Community College Students

Dear Ms. Watson:

Thank you for submission of materials related to the study referenced above. After review of these materials, this study has been withdrawn.

The application included an approved exempt level status from the IRB office at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, TX where the research is being conducted, and therefore does not need IRB approval from our office for the same study.

We wish you the best in your research efforts, and please let us know if we can be of any assistance to you in the future.

Sincerely,  
The MSU HRPP Team  
662-325-3994

If you have questions or concerns, please contact me via email or call 325.2238.

Sincerely,

Nicole Cobb  
Compliance Administrator