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College-Going Culture in an Underresourced Urban High School: Examining Latina/o College Choice and Navigation

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College-Going Culture in an Underresourced Urban High School:
Examining Latina/o College Choice and Navigation

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy in Education

by
Nancy Acevedo-Gil

2014
ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

College-Going Culture in an Underresourced Urban High School:
Examing Latina/o College Choice and Navigation

by

Nancy Acevedo-Gil

Doctor of Philosophy in Education

University of California, Los Angeles, 2014

Professor Daniel G. Solórzano, Chair

This qualitative case study examined the college-going processes at an underresourced urban high school with a large Latina/o student population. This dissertation addressed gaps in the college-going culture literature and shortfalls in college choice models. At the organizational level, this dissertation revealed the conceptualization and application of college-going efforts within the larger school culture. At the student level, this dissertation identified how college-going efforts shaped the college choice, transition, and navigation pathways of Latina/o students who aspired to earn a bachelor’s degree.

I merged three theoretical frameworks to guide this study. First, Critical race theory in education served as the overarching frameworks for this study to challenge deficit discourses on race and racism as they relate to education. Second, to examine college-going efforts, I utilized a school culture lens, which I defined as a set of actions informed by the intersections of structures, climates, and individual agency. Third, college-choice organizational *habitus* bridged the school
and student-level processes by revealing how college-going efforts influenced the college expectations, choices, and enrollments of the participants. Grounded theory and critical race grounded theory served as guiding methodological frameworks in the data collection and analysis stages. Sources of data included oral histories with 57 students at two different points in time. The first round of interviews occurred during the twelfth grade in high school, and the second round occurred approximately six months later, after the participants’ first college term. Data also came from semi-structured interviews with 17 practitioners and administrators, who supported college efforts, and from observations of college preparation events during one school year. Data analysis occurred through contextual analysis, coding, triangulation, and theoretical memos.

The first finding established that policies and funding resulted in a school culture of continuous change, instability, and marginalization. Four climates occurred as a manifestation of the school culture, which included four overlapping climates: high aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance and control. Climates of high aspirations occurred in spaces where educators aspired for students to succeed in college. College-going climates resulted within climates of high aspirations depicted by educators integrated college-going activities into schooling processes. Educator participants also created climates of low expectations, which were rooted in deficit ideologies. The climate of low expectations resulted in a climate of surveillance and control, which entailed the use of security measures and regulations that aimed to control student behavior. The climates of low expectations and surveillance and control inhibited college-going efforts by not equipping participants with the skills required to navigate post-secondary educational institutions.

The second finding determined that college-going climates resulted from individual
educator efforts and entailed preparing students for postsecondary pathways. The college-going climate included several elements, such as: a college and career center, collaborative efforts with college outreach programs, community college outreach, college-going teachers, college visits, engaging with students’ identities, and internships. College-going climates included sub-climates that focused on vocational or four-year college pathways. Student participants were more likely to access an in-depth college-going climate, which focused on preparing for admission to a four-year postsecondary institution, if the student participant maintained a high grade-point-average. On the other hand, the student participants who planned to attend a two-year college were more likely to receive information and support to enter a vocational pathway—regardless of the aspirations to transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college.

The third finding revealed the processes that Latina/o participants experienced when establishing college-going and college-navigating identities. In the third finding, I integrated Gloria Anzaldúa’s (2002) pathway to conocimiento to bridge the participants’ college choice and college integration process by establishing the conocimiento colegial framework. I defined conocimiento colegial as a seven-stage process that resulted in a reflective collegial consciousness where Latina/o participants used their ethnic/racial identity and social positionalities to successfully navigate college. The non-linear stages included participants: aspiring to attend college, searching for college information, questioning abilities to succeed in college, applying to colleges, choosing a college, clashing with college, and then navigating college successfully. Within each stage, the college-going climate supported and hindered the participants’ conocimiento colegial pathways.
This dissertation of Nancy Acevedo-Gil is approved.

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2014
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to the future generation of college graduates, especially Karen, Migy, Natalie, Abby, and Diana Isabella—may you always set high goals and believe in yourself.
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SELECTED PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS


CHAPTER ONE
STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Introduction

Projections indicate that by 2025, California workforce will lack one million college graduates (Johnson & Segupta, 2009). Since the United States’ gross domestic product depends heavily on California, the state’s economic vitality has nationwide implications (Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2012). If Californian’s hope to meet the college-educated workforce demands, stakeholders must ensure the educational success of Latinas/os, who represent over half of all students in the K – 12 system (California Department of Education, 2013; Reed, 2008). However, schools with large populations of Latina/o students offer inferior academic resources (Rogers, Fanelli, Freelon, Medina, Bertrand, & Del Razo, 2010). Therefore, it is not surprising that Latinas/os are underrepresented dramatically in four-year colleges (Fry, 2004; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005). Moreover, only 10 percent of California’s Latinas/os possess a bachelor’s degree, compared with 32 percent of whites (U.S. Census, 2012). Nevertheless, survey data reveals that the majority of Latina/o high school students aspire to earn a college degree (National Women’s Law Defense & MALDEF, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). Findings from this dissertation provide insight to meet the demand for college graduates and support the educational success of Latinas/os.

The underproduction of a college-educated workforce results in economic loss and income inequality but a college education would help close the income gap (Carnevale & Rose, 2011). In 2005, individuals with a college degree earned on average 62 percent more than those who possessed a high school diploma (Baum & Ma, 2009). In California, 23 percent of Latinos live in poverty, compared to less than 10 percent of whites (Bohn, 2011). California
demographics reinforce previous studies, which note that the majority of Latina/o students come from low-income backgrounds and will be the first in their family to attend college (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Hayward, Brandes, Kirst, & Mazzeo, 1997; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

After California voters eliminated affirmative action with Proposition 209, stakeholders attempted to address the underrepresentation of Latinas/os, and other Students of Color, in four-year colleges through college outreach programs (University of California, 2010). College outreach programs aim to increase the number of underrepresented, low-income, and first-generation students who pursue college. In addition, researchers call for the implementation of a college-going culture in the K–12 sector to address the low college-going rates of underrepresented, low-income, and potential first-generation college students (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2004). A college-going culture entails all students in a school being informed, prepared, and supported to make postsecondary decisions (Jarsky, Nunez, & McDonough, 2009 2009). Both college outreach programs and college-going culture target underresourced schools. However, there is a need for studies to examine college-going culture more in detail and through a qualitative case study methodology (Jarsky, et al, 2009; Tierney, et al., 2004).

This study took a closer look at the college preparation strategies that Academies High School (AHS) educators implemented, by analyzing college-going culture from both the organizational and student-levels. At the organizational level, this study examined the attempt by educators in an underresourced high school to build a college-going culture. At the student level, this study explored how the college-going culture, along with other factors, influenced the college choices and transitions of AHS Latina/o students.

This chapter continues by reviewing several institutional obstacles that prevent Latina/o students from preparing for a college education. The obstacles include: 1) academic preparation,
2) lack of counseling, 3) admission policies, and 4) limited financial assistance. I then emphasize that in spite of existing barriers, Latina/o high school students maintain high educational aspirations. The chapter proceeds by sharing statistics, which reveal Latina/o postsecondary enrollment patterns do not reflect the high educational aspirations. This sets the stage for the next section to examine the educational pipeline of Latinas/os. Finally, I conclude the chapter by stating the problem and the research questions.

**Institutional Obstacles Preventing Latina/o College Access**

It is important to establish the institutional obstacles that hinder Latina/o high school students in their attempts to access higher education. A review of the literature reveals that the most pressing barriers for Latinas/os entail institutional processes. The barriers to access college include: 1) academic preparation, 2) admission policies, 3) lack of counseling and 4) limited financial assistance. The following sections summarize the findings of previous studies related to the four topics.

**Inequitable Academic Resources**

Previous studies establish a gap between the level of academic resources available in schools with high populations of Latina/o students, compared to schools that serve predominately whites (Oakes, 2004; Rogers, et al., 2010). Authors of the annual California Educational Opportunity report find that schools with a high percentage of Latina/o students are overcrowded, lack qualified teachers, and “have severe shortages of college preparation teachers and advanced placement classes” (Rogers, et al., 2010, p. 7). A lack of resources contributes to Latinas/os having limited access to college preparation curricula and college information (Oakes, et al., 2006; Zarate and Gallimore, 2005). Studies establish that Latina/o students who experience poor curriculum and tracking into non-college preparatory courses are more likely not
to begin their postsecondary career at a four-year college (Gonzalez, Stone & Jovel, 2003). Researchers find that academic preparation is the most essential component when students apply for admission and enroll in a postsecondary educational institution (Adelman, 1999; Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Nunez, McDonough, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2007). Gonzalez and his colleagues (2003) argue that neglect in K-12 public schools is the largest factor that limits student admission into a selective college directly after high school. Furthermore, Gándara and Bial (2001) conclude that high expectations from adults in schools are essential for academic achievement and enrollment in college. Therefore, a lack of access to advanced placement courses, rigorous curricula and quality schooling experiences hinder the abilities of Latina/o students to prepare adequately for college. Instead, schools serving Latinas/os offer limited and inferior opportunities to prepare for college admission, resulting in reduced access to higher education (Rogers, et al., 2010).

**Lack of College Counseling**

The problem with limited academic resources in K – 12 schools for Latinas/os extends to the availability of counseling services. The California Department of Education (2011) reports that California maintains the worst counselor to student ratio in the nation, with one counselor serving 945 students. Furthermore, 29 percent of California schools do not have a counseling program (California Department of Education, 2011). Unfortunately, McDonough (2004) explains that nationwide, the schools with the highest concentrations of Students of Color maintain on average ratios of one counselor to 1,056 and higher. Her findings are supported by other studies, which assert the counselor-to-student ratios are highest in under-resourced public schools, many of which Latinas/os attend (Corwin, Venegas, Oliverez, & Colyar, 2004; McDonough & Calderone, 2006).
Even with access to a counselor, studies find that counselors often track Latinas/os into non-college preparation courses (Oakes, 2004). This occurs partly because the responsibilities of school counselors do not focus only on academic or college counseling (McDonough, 2004). McDonough (2004) explains that counseling textbooks define counselor job responsibilities as: “1) coordination of administrative tasks, 2) counseling across academic, career and personal domains, and 3) consultation with all school personnel on guidance tasks” (McDonough, 2004, p. 14, citing Hannaford, 1987). According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook, high school counselors are also required to “advise students regarding college majors, admission requirements, entrance exams, financial aid, trade or technical schools, and apprenticeship programs” (as cited in McDonough, 2004, p. 14-15). However, with large caseloads, counselors spend the majority of time on interventions and administrative tasks, not college counseling (McClafferty, McDonough, & Nunez, 2002; Oakes et al., 2006). On average counselors spend 13 percent of their time providing college counseling services (Moles, 1991).

Combined, the lack of a primary responsibility assigned to counselors and the low number of counselors available to students contribute to Latinas/os not receiving adequate college counseling and college information (Cabrera & La Nasa, 2000; Corwin et al., 2004; Perna & Thomas, 2006). Thus, Latinas/os are likely to experience a counseling system, which tracks them out of college preparation courses and fails to provide adequate guidance and information to prepare for college.

**Inequitable Admission Policies**

Admission policies also play a critical role in obstructing access to college enrollment for Latinas/os. To maintain competitiveness, four-year colleges reduce the number of admitted students and increase the grade-point-average (GPA) and entrance exam scores of incoming
classes (Meredith, 2004). In addition, McDonough (1998) highlights that the corporate sector sells college preparation information through CDs, websites, books, magazines, and private counselors. Since high-income students use the information sold, the lack of college access contributes to social-stratification (McDonough, 1998). Latina/o high school students who have access to college-preparatory courses, meet the minimum admission requirements, and receive college admission information, still have to compete for college admission with wealthy students who receive private counseling services. A study conducted by Alon and Tienda (2005) establishes that Students of Color are more likely to complete a college degree when attending a selective college. However, if admission policies do not provide equitable access to selective colleges, low-income Latinas/os are at a disadvantage when competing with high-income applicants who can afford to purchase supplemental college preparation services.

**Increasing Financial Burdens**

Nonetheless, even if a student overcomes the aforementioned barriers, he or she must still meet a guideline that is indispensable to earn a college degree—paying for college. Researchers unanimously agree that without adequate financial support, students cannot access a college education (Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance, 2002; Gladieux, 2004; Heller, 2002). The continual rising college prices hinder all low-income students from accessing a postsecondary degree if their financial need is not met (Heller, 2002). Between 2001 and 2011, the University of California (UC) Regents increased tuition fees by almost 350 percent, from $3,834 to $13,200 a year (Asimov, 2009; University of California, 2011). In 2011, the total UC student expenses were over $30,000 a year (University of California, 2011). Meanwhile, in 2010, only 69 percent of UC students received grants and scholarships, which averaged less than $15,000 (University of California, 2011). When tuition costs rise, students resort to subsidized
and unsubsidized loans to cover unmet needs (McPherson and Shapiro, 1998). This results in further financial stratification between wealthy and low-income students upon graduation (McPherson and Shapiro, 1998). St. John (2002) reports that 22 percent of students from low-income backgrounds who meet academic admission requirements are influenced by financial need not to attend college. Moreover, financial concerns for low-income students present a hindrance because students do not want to increase parental financial burdens (McDonough, 1997; St. John, 2002). Combined, the increasing costs of a college education and limited financial aid restrict the colleges that low-income Latina/o students can access.

**Summary of Institutional Obstacles**

When considering the academic, counseling, admission, and financial institutional obstacles that Latinas/os face, it is no surprise that they are underrepresented in higher education. As a result, only 10 percent have college degrees. When preparing for college, Latinas/os encounter institutional obstructions, such as the lack of academic preparation and counseling, biased admission policies, and limited financial assistance. Combined, these institutional barriers diminish access to higher education for Latinas/os.

**Latina/o Postsecondary Aspirations & Expectations**

Despite the numerous institutional barriers, studies reveal that Latina/o students understand the value of earning a college degree, maintain high educational aspirations, and would like to pursue a college education (NWLD & MALDEF, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). Furthermore, students attribute their high aspirations to their parents (Ceja, 2001, 2004; Perez & McDonough, 2008). College degree aspiration data represent a stark contrast to the statistic that only 10 percent of California Latinas/os (and 13 percent nationwide) possess a bachelor’s degree (U.S. Census, 2012). In a national study,
Venezia and her colleagues (2003) find that over 80 percent of the Latina/o students surveyed hoped to enroll in postsecondary education.

Unfortunately, another national study establishes that a trend exists in Latina/o students lowering their goals. The National Women's Law Defense (NWLD) and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund (MALDEF) conducted a nation-wide study to examine the barriers to Latina students successfully graduating high school. A key finding in the study was that Latina students have high academic aspirations—80 percent of study participants wanted to at least graduate from college (NWLD and MALDEF, 2009). However, when MALDEF researchers asked the participants what they would achieve realistically, one-third of participants lowered the level of education they believed that they would complete. The Pew Hispanic Center (2010) conducted a similar study such as the one above and aimed to understand the experiences of Latino male youth in the U.S. The report highlights contradictions between 89 percent of Latino students agreeing that a college degree is important with less than 50 percent expecting to earn a Bachelor’s degree. Given the aforementioned institutional barriers in accessing higher education, it is possible that they influence student expectations. Therefore, it is essential to understand the stark contrast between aspirations and expectations.

**Latina/o Postsecondary Enrollments**

Considering the aforementioned inequities experienced when accessing higher education and the established high educational aspirations, this chapter examines the postsecondary enrollments of Latinas/os. A study conducted by the Pew Hispanic Center (2005) finds that when comparing whites and Latinas/os who maintain an average level of college preparatory curriculum, Latinas/o are more likely to attend less selective postsecondary institutions. Furthermore, studies conclude that high achieving Latina/o students are more likely to attend a
community college, when compared to all other students who achieve at similar levels (Kurlaender, 2006). Even after accounting for variances in gender, costs, and financial resources, Latina/o students are less likely than white students to enroll in a four-year college directly after high school (Perna, 2000). Moreover, a large number of Latina/o high school students are overqualified for the postsecondary institutions they attend (Bowen et al., 2009; Fry, 2004; Nunez, et al., 2007). Bowen and his colleagues (2009) identify this phenomenon as “undermatching.” The level of an institution’s selectivity matters since research reveals that when Latinas/os attend more selective institutions, they complete college at higher rates (Alon and Tienda, 2005). Given the complexity of Latina/o postsecondary decisions, this chapter provides a clearer picture of the enrollments within California.

An overview of the postsecondary enrollment decisions of California Latinas/os reveals an alignment with the aforementioned literature. Rogers and his colleagues (2010) reveal that in 2009, 16 percent of Latina/o students who enrolled in ninth grade graduated from public high schools and completed the minimum required coursework needed to apply for admission to a public four-year college. In other words, 84 percent of Latina/o high school graduates did not receive the adequate support to prepare for college. However, a gap existed between the percentage of graduates who met the minimum coursework for admission to a four-year college and those who enrolled in a four-year college. Only six percent of graduates enrolled in the California State University (CSU) system and two percent in the UC system. Therefore, approximately half of all Latinas/os who completed the required courses for admission to a public four-year college did not enroll in a four-year college upon graduating high school. The findings of this dissertation study shed light on what happened to Latinas/os who met the
minimum course admission requirements and aspired to graduate from college but did not enroll in a four-year college directly after graduating high school.

**Latina/o Educational Pipeline**

The lack of access to higher education and the postsecondary enrollment outcomes, shape the K – 20 educational pipeline trajectories of Latinas/os (Perez Huber et al., 2006). Therefore, Latinas/os maintain the lowest educational rates as a racial group in the U.S. (Fry, 2004; Perez Huber et al., 2006). When compared to whites, Latinas/os experience disparities in high school graduation, college enrollment, and college graduation rates. Using U.S. Census Data, researchers conclude that less than 53 percent of Latina/o students who begin elementary school will graduate high school, compared to about 83 percent of whites (Perez Huber et al., 2006). Of those who graduate high school, the difference between the percentage of Latinos and whites that complete the minimum recommended coursework for college admission is small. For instance, 33 percent of Latinas/os and 36 percent of whites enroll in the recommended courses (NCES, 2007). However, the gap between whites and Latinas/os who complete high school and enroll in college immediately after graduation is strikingly large. Among Latinos, only 54 percent enrolled in college after completing high school, contrary to 73 percent of whites (NCES, 2007).

The majority of Latinas/os that pursue a postsecondary education enroll in community college, 66 percent enroll in community college, and 44 percent enroll in a four-year college (Rivas, Perez, Alvarez, Solórzano, 2006). A national study, examining community college student goals, reveals that when compared to other racial groups, a higher percentage of Latinas/os set a goal to transfer (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2007). The study finds that 79 percent of Latinas/os in community college aspire to transfer, obtain a baccalaureate degree, and earn a graduate degree (Bailey, Jenkins, & Leinbach, 2007). Therefore, the high educational
aspirations maintained by Latinas/os in high school continue once students enroll in community college. Research shows that various institutional obstacles inhibit the majority of Latinas/os from fulfilling their goals, resulting in about five percent of those who enter the community college transfer to a four-year college (Rivas et al., 2007). Exclusionary practices contribute to the reality that upon entering college, students are most likely to withdraw during their first year after experiencing (Bradburn, 2002; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). Thus, out of the Latina/o students who begin elementary school, less than 11 percent will earn Bachelor’s degree, as opposed to 26 percent of whites (Perez Huber et al., 2006). The data again reinforce the notion that institutional roadblocks prevent Latinas/os from bridging aspirations with outcomes.

**Statement of the Problem**

By 2025, California will experience a shortfall of 1 million college graduates (Johnson & Segupta, 2009). Since at least 53 percent of the K – 12 population in California consists of Latinas/os, it is important to ensure their educational success (California Department of Education, 2013). Latinos experience several institutional barriers, which contribute to their underrepresentation in higher education and low college degree rates (Fry, 2004; Perez Huber et al., 2006). Nevertheless, Latina/o students maintain high educational aspirations (MALDEF & NWLC, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2009; Venezia et al., 2003). Due to institutional obstacles, Latinas/os are: 1) more likely to attend a community college, 2) less likely to enroll in a four-year college, 3) more likely to postpone college enrollment, and 4) more likely to attend a less-selective college, despite meeting the admission requirements (Hearn, 1991; Kurlaender, 2006; Perna, 2000). The initial postsecondary institution in which a student enrolls has long-term implications on the likelihood of completing a degree (Alon & Tienda, 2005). Since various
researchers call for the implementation of a college culture as an attempt to increase access to postsecondary education for low-income and underrepresented students, it is important to examine the formation of such a culture. Furthermore, since Latinas/os are more likely to attend underresourced schools, it is imperative to understand how educators in such schools build a college-going culture. Finally, it is essential to analyze how a college-going culture can bridge Latinas/os’ high educational aspirations with college choices and enrollments.

**Research Questions**

To examine how an underresourced high school that serves a majority of Latina/o students builds a college-going culture and to understand how the college-going culture informs the college choice process of Latina/o high school students, the following research questions guided this dissertation study:

1. What is the structure and culture of Academies High School (AHS)?

   Rationale: Prior to examining the college-going processes in AHS, it is important to understand the overall context and culture of the school.

2. How do AHS educators utilize policies, resources, and practices in Academies High School to develop a college-going climate within the larger school culture?

   Rationale: This question determined the ideologies and strategies that AHS educators utilized when attempting to build a college-going climate. This is especially important given that AHS is a large high school with limited institutional resources. Upon establishing an understanding of the college-going climate, the study can then examine the college choice process more in-depth.

3. How do AHS Latina/o students with high educational aspirations develop college-going and college-navigating identities?
Rationale: This dissertation defined a college-going identity as occurring when the participants applied and planned to attend a college. On the other hand, a college-navigating identity occurred when a participant was confident in their decision and abilities to pursue a college education, despite unforeseeable and foreseeable obstacles. By understanding the processes that allowed Latina/o participants to reach a college-going and college-navigating identity, it will inform essential elements required to develop a more effective college-going climate in high schools where Latinas/os compose the large percentage of the student population.

a. How does the college-going climate inform the college-going identity development of Latina/o participants?

Rationale: The sub-question examined how AHS educators supported and hindered the pathways of Latina/o participants as they attempted to establish a college-going identity.

**Significance of the Study**

To improve college-going rates, high schools aim to build a college-going culture (Jarsky, McDonough, & Nunez, 2009). Although researchers have produced various toolkits to maintain a college-going culture, the toolkits rarely account for the financial limitations of under-resourced, inner-city schools, which increasingly enroll a majority of Latina/o students (Tierney, Corwin, & Colyar, 2004). My dissertation responds to the need for studies to examine a college-going culture more in detail and through a qualitative case study methodology (Jarsky, et al., 2009; Tierney, et al., 2004). This dissertation also addresses the gap between college aspirations and attainments, which is defined as the “most vexing problem in education today” (Roderick, Ngaoka, & Allensworth, 2006). This study elucidates the dearth in literature that examines the early college transition experiences for Latinas/os in order to understand the difficulties and strategies for success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora, Barlow, & Crisp, 2006; Nuñez, 2009). The
goal is to understand if and how a college-going culture can bridge the high aspirations of Latinas/os with college enrollments and transitions. As a result, my research provides approaches to address the growing demand for a college-educated workforce in California.

**Dissertation Outline**

Chapter One establishes the need to address the underrepresentation of Latinas/os earning college degrees. Chapter Two examines two strategies implemented to assist students with preparing for college and examine the college choice of Latina/o high school students: college outreach programs and college-going culture. Chapter Two also provides a review of the previous literature that examines the college choices of Latinas/os and the transitions to college. Chapter Three describes the theoretical frameworks, methodology, and methods to examine college-going culture as a strategy to improve the educational pathways of students and how Latinas/os are impacted by the strategy. Chapter Four shares the findings for Research Question One and explains the general school culture and the climates within the school. Chapter Five details the college-going climate. While Chapter Six shares the findings for research question three by discussing the college aspirations, expectations, choices, enrollments and transitions of Latina/o participants. In addition, Chapter Six also establishes a college-going and college-navigating theoretical framework, entitled *conocimiento colegial*. Given the findings of the dissertation, Chapter Seven concludes by providing an overview of the theoretical and methodological implications, as well as, recommendations for policy and practice by implementing a culture of *conocimiento colegial*. 
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

While Chapter One discussed the institutional obstacles that prevent Latinas/os from accessing a bachelor’s degree, Chapter Two provides an overview of scholarly literature that examines college outreach programs, college-going culture, how Latina/o students select a college, and their transitions to college. This chapter begins by defining and critiquing two approaches that educational institutions use to address the institutional barriers presented in Chapter One: college outreach programs and college-going culture. This chapter then presents three types of college choice models but highlights Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) widely used three-stage college choice model to understand how students choose a college. The chapter continues by reviewing several variables that impact Latinas/os during the three stages of college choice (predisposition, search, and choice). Chapter Two concludes with discussing the theories and research that addresses college transitions for low-income, first-generation, and Latinas/os.

College Outreach Programs

Legislators and educators use college preparation programs as an attempt to ease the limitations of K-12 underresourced schools by providing college information to students. In 1965, Congress approved funding for the establishment of TRiO Programs nationwide. McDonough (2004) explains that TRiO programs “were originally developed to expose low-income and first-generation college-bound students to college and available academic support” (p. 18). However, pre-college outreach programs are not a systemic solution but rather intervention programs that provide schools and communities with supplemental resources to prepare students for college admission (McDonough, 2005). Since the establishment of TRiO
programs, similar outreach programs have developed nationwide. As of 2008, more than 1,000 college outreach programs exist throughout the U.S (Domina, 2009).

Nevertheless, research argues that most college outreach programs target low-income, Students of Color, including Latinas/os, whose parents have not graduated from college (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2004). The programs generally take place in two different stages, the pre-college stage and the transition stage. The pre-college stage spans from middle school to high school. In this stage, students receive information and assistance to apply to colleges and financial aid. The transition stage occurs the summer after high school graduation. In this stage, some outreach programs assist students with enrolling in courses as well as preparing students academically. According to Perna (2002) the basic purpose behind programs is to assist students to 1) aspire to attend, 2) prepare for, and 3) enroll in college. However, each college outreach program serves different students and offers various resources and information (Gándara & Bial, 1999; Perna, 2002).

**Strengths of College Outreach Programs**

Previous studies find that college outreach programs especially benefit students who attend disadvantaged schools. The programs assist to increase: 1) educational aspirations, 2) academic achievement, 3) cultural capital, 4) college enrollments, and 5) college graduation rates (Gándara & Bial, 1999; McDonough, 2004; Perna, 2000; Perna and Swail, 2002). A study by Gándara (2002) reveals that college outreach programs increase student aspirations, which are necessary to pursue a college education. In addition, the programs can also increase students’ cultural and social capital by providing information to prepare for college (Gándara & Bial, 1999). Horn (1997) finds that college outreach programs can double the possibility of students enrolling in college. College outreach programs are found to be especially effective among low-
income students who initially have low expectations (Myers & Schrim, 1999). This is important given that a large portion of Latinas/os with high aspirations maintain low expectations (NWLD & MALDEF, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Although the research is limited, several positive results occur from students participating in college outreach programs.

The positive results are also reflected in the Early Academic Outreach Program (EAOP) sponsored by the University of California. The EAOP website claims that “EAOP is effective at putting students on track to college.” To qualify for a California public university, students must complete at least 15 required courses with a grade of C or better. In California, during the 2004-2005 school year, 34 percent of high school graduates completed the required coursework to apply for public universities (Quigley & Leon, 2003). However, 72 percent of EAOP participants graduated with the minimum required coursework (Quigley & Leon, 2003). Of those who take the required courses, 25 percent enroll in a California public university. Furthermore, during the same year, only 14 percent of California high school graduates met the minimum requirements to apply for a UC, compared to 34 percent of EAOP participants (Quigley & Leon, 2003). In addition, EAOP students are twice as likely to take the SAT or ACT exam, required for university admissions, when compared to non-EAOP students (University of California, 2006). The review of the literature only provides descriptive statistical research on the effectiveness of EAOP assisting students with academic preparation. In addition, it is not clear if program success varies by site.

**Drawbacks to College Outreach Programs**

Despite noted success, several improvements must occur for college outreach programs to increase their level of effectiveness. For example, enhancing program evaluation strategies can result in changes to: 1) facilitate serving a larger student population, 2) establish strong
relationships with schools, and 3) impact policy on several levels (McDonough, 2004; Perna, 2000; Perna and Swail, 2002; Tierney et al., 2004). This would address the critiques that college outreach programs only assist a small percentage of students and are not a systemic solution (McDonough, 2004). Furthermore, outreach program staff members do not have time to work with college partners and community members are not invited to make critical decisions (Oakes, et al., 2006). These limitations present a challenge to programmatic success and can sever relationship with schools (Sanders & Harvey, 2002). In addition, family involvement is not identified as an essential component in many programs, despite it being a critical factor in college choice (Perna, 2000; Perna and Swail, 2002). If outreach programs do not consider family involvement, they are missing a component, which is an essential influence on college choice. Therefore, although college outreach programs might be effective for a small number of students, addressing the established limitations can increase the level of success by impacting a larger population.

Moreover, Villalpando and Solórzano, (2005) conclude that outreach programs help underrepresented students only if they 1) develop the cultural strengths and academic skills of students, 2) meet student needs, and 3) provide several types of services. However, cultural strengths and providing several types of services are not required among college outreach programs (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2004). This limitation is reflected in the various obstacles that exist within the programs. The limitations include unequal gender distribution within programs; males are underrepresented in programs with only one-third of participants identify as male (Gándara & Bial, 1999). In addition, programs are non-systemic, and often only concentrate on the educational sector that they work for, leaving students without support in higher education levels (Gándara & Bial, 1999). Finally, these programs are deemed inequitable
because they only supplement information to select individual students and do not improve structural barriers to provide college information for all students (McDonough, 2008). Swail (2000) reports that college outreach programs assist only about 10 percent of students who need the services. Although various flaws limit the programs, at the moment, these programs represent a possible avenue for Latina/o students to access college information. Even so, McDonough (2004) calls for the education system to move beyond fractured program services and instead implement “universal programs for all students” (p. 19). Tierney (2002) notes that more research is needed to identify the level of effectiveness of college outreach programs and to understand what components are most beneficial in increasing access to higher education.

**College-Going Culture**

A more recent response to address the lack of resources in high schools includes the call for schools to implement a college-going culture. McClafferty and her colleagues (2002) argue that students who have families with limited college knowledge often resort to school as a resource to 1) understand the value of college, 2) receive advice on appropriate classes, and 3) obtain assistance with college choice. Since counselors cannot commit the time to help every student, several studies argue for schools to establish a college-going culture (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Pathways to College Network, 2006). The following sections examine three frameworks for college-going culture.

McClafferty and her colleagues (2002) define college culture occurring in a school that maintains an environment where all students are prepared to make informed postsecondary decisions. A college culture entails four objectives: 1) school leadership needs to be committed to building a college culture, 2) all school personnel must provide continuous messages to all students that support their quest for a college preparatory K-12 experience, 3) every counselor is
a college counselor, and 4) parents, counselors and teachers have a partnership to prepare students for college (McClafferty et al., 2002).

In addition, the authors explain that a college culture consists of nine guiding principles. The first principle is *college talk* and entails communicating with students why college is important and how to be on a college path. The second principle entails setting *clear expectations* that all students will prepare to attend college. The third principle is providing all students with access to *information and resources* required to prepare for college. The fourth principle is maintaining a *comprehensive counseling model* that allows all school counselors to be college counselors. The fifth principle is *testing and curriculum*. Meaning, the school curriculum prepares students to take the required college admission exams by providing college preparation courses. In addition, the fifth principle entails the school assisting students with signing up for the required college admission exams. The sixth principle is sustaining *faculty involvement* through active involvement in the implementation of a college culture. The seventh principle is to ensure *family involvement* by informing family members in the college planning process. The eighth principle entails establishing *college partnerships* with local colleges to facilitate college activities. The final principle is clear *articulation* from kindergarten to high school that supports a college culture and prepares students for the next educational levels. McClafferty and her colleagues (2002) note that, it is important to involve school staff and administrators as well as students and parents when implementing the nine principles. They advocate that a college-going culture occurs school-wide and is not the responsibility of only the college counselor (McClafferty et al., 2002). However, establishing a college culture requires organizational change.
Similar to the college culture as defined by McClafferty and her colleagues, the Pathways to College Network (2006) report establishes guidelines to implement a school-wide college-going culture and argues for the importance of expectations, values, and activities. In order to have an effective college-going culture, teachers, counselors, and administrators must maintain high expectations of students’ academic capabilities. In addition, a college-going culture provides all students with a rigorous curriculum supplemented with the appropriate academic and social support services (Pathways to College Network, 2006). However, given the limited resources available to schools, the authors do not state how underresourced schools implement a college-going culture.

In a third example of college-going culture, Corwin and Tierney (2007) assert that, “college culture in a high school cultivates aspirations and behaviors conducive to preparing for, applying to, and enrolling in college (p. 3). They explain that all students should benefit from a tangible and pervasive college culture. Considering previous research, Corwin and Tierney (2007) identify five elements needed to implement an effective college-going culture. The five elements include the school maintaining: “1) Academic momentum; 2) An understanding of how college plans develop; 3) A clear mission statement; 4) Comprehensive college services; and 5) A coordinated and systemic college support” (p. 3). The authors note that the five elements result in a college-going culture and aim to increase access to higher education for all students.

Research supports the need to establish a college-going culture to assist students during the college choice process (McDonough, 1997; 2004). Furthermore, several toolkits exist to guide high school administrators and counselors in implementing a college-going culture (McClafferty, et al., 2002; Tierney, et al., 2003). However, the amount and type of resources available to a school influences how effectively schools can implement a college-going culture.
for all students (Tierney, et al., 2003). Therefore, more research is needed to examine how an underresourced high school builds a college-going culture and how it influences the college choice process of students.

**College Choice Models**

College choice is defined as “a complex, multistage process during which an individual develops aspirations to continue formal education beyond high school, followed later by a decision to attend a specific college, university or institution of advanced vocational training” (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989, p. 234). Hossler and Gallagher (1987) identify college choice as a decision process at the individual-level. However, they note that parents, socioeconomic status and other outside factors can influence the individual’s decision. College choice models attempt to explain how individuals make those decisions. Jackson (1982) explains that the college choice models fall under the category of econometric, sociological or combined model. There are two types of econometric models (Hossler et al., 1989). The first, predicts college enrollments with the unit of analysis being “institutions, states, and the nation” (Hossler et al., 1989, p. 234, citing Fuller, Manski, and Wise, 1982). The second focuses on the individual student as a unit of analysis. Sociological models identify the factors that influence students to aspire for a college degree (Hossler et al., 1989). The sociological models also examine the interrelationships of the influencing factors (Hossler et al., 1989). The combined model unites econometric and sociological models and examines the process of selecting a college and the effects that interventions have on student decisions (Hossler et al., 1989). A three-stage college choice model, proposed by Hossler and Gallagher (1987), is part of the combined model category. This three-stage model serves as an abridged version of several combined models.
**Three-Stage College Choice Model**

Several frameworks examine how high school students choose a college. Hossler and Gallagher’s (1987) three-stage college choice model is widely used by education researchers. The model includes the predisposition stage, search stage and choice stage (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987). The predisposition stage occurs from sixth grade throughout tenth grade. During this stage, students develop an interest in college and decide if they will pursue a higher education. The search stage occurs during eleventh grade. In the search stage, students gather information on various colleges and consider preferred attributes of a college. Students experience the choice stage during twelfth grade. In this third stage, students choose, apply, and select an institution that they will attend upon graduating high school. Hossler and Gallagher (1987), explain that students experience the stages during different times, depending on individual circumstances.

Although the three-stage model does not summarize the complexities of choosing a college as other models might, it does include the major stages found in the college choice process (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989). In addition, the three-stage college choice model combines variables found in the econometric and sociological models of college choice (Hossler et al., 1989). Moreover, as Hossler and his colleagues (1989) explain, the three-stage model “suggests that institutional variables have an impact on the student college choice” (p. 248). Examining how institutional variables influence college choice is important because as Chapter 1 reveals, Latinas/os experience various institutional barriers when accessing higher education. Since most Latinas/os will be the first in their family to graduate college and come from low-income backgrounds, the following sections will provide a summary of variables that affect low-income and potential first-generation college students.
First-Generation College Student Choice

Hossler and his colleagues (1989) reveal a correlation between several variables and a student’s decision to attend and select a college. The variables include the student’s race, family background, academic ability, teachers, counselors, peers, the state of the labor market and the quality of a student’s school. In the predisposition stage, research suggests that first-generation students are less likely to develop postsecondary aspirations because they receive less familial support and are less academically prepared for college (Choy, 2001). This is important given that, Hossler, Schmit, and Vesper (1999) conclude that in the predisposition stage, parental encouragement and academic preparation are more important than family income. In the search stage, low-income students rely on peers and counselor(s) to receive information about college, as opposed to high-income students who rely on parents (Hossler, et al., 1999). Parental education and family income have a large impact during the choice stage for students. As a result, first-generation students are more likely to choose a two-year college (Berkner & Chavez, 1997; Choy, 2001). In the choice stage, financial costs also matter to first-generation students and low-income students. Researchers determine that when choosing a college, students consider the amount of financial aid received, proximity to home, and being able to work while in college (Nunez, & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998).

Latina/o College Choice

Since a student’s race and gender influence the college choice process, this section highlights the variables relevant to Latinas/os during the three-stages of college choice (Kim, 2004; McDonough et al., 2004; Perna, 2000). In the predisposition stage, I discuss family, counselors, and financial aid information. In the search stage, I explain the influence of family and counselors. In the choice stage, I review the effects of financial aid, gender, and peers.
However, each section also examines how variables intersect with one another. In addition, the literature reveals that cultural and social capital interweave with several of the variables. Therefore, cultural and social capital will not be presented in its own section but instead as it relates to each variable.

**Cultural and Social Capital**

Before examining the three college choice stages as they pertain to Latinas/os it is important to define cultural and social capital. Bourdieu (1986) establishes cultural capital as a person’s accumulated cultural knowledge, knowledge of how systems work, and having values that a specific system deems worthy. In terms of higher education, cultural capital entails a student having the knowledge needed to prepare for, apply to and enroll in college. On the other hand, Coleman (1987) defines social capital as having access to social networks, which society values and that enable positive outcomes. In other words, social capital allows students to access networks that provide the needed information to guide their college choice process. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue that cultural and social capital can be acquired through family members or schooling experiences.

However, Yosso (2005) challenges the dominant definitions of cultural and social capital through the concept of community cultural wealth. Yosso (2005) presents community cultural wealth as a framework that explains how Students of Color tap into forms of capital present in their family and community. She conceptualizes that this capital stems from “accumulated assets and resources in the histories and lives of Communities of Color” (p. 77). Yosso (2005) identifies six forms of capital that Students of Color access regularly that go unacknowledged: aspirational, familial, social, resistant, linguistic, and navigational capital. Yosso (2005) explains that the forms of capital are not mutually exclusive; instead, they inform one another. This
aligns with research that finds cultural and social capital as informing the educational outcomes of Latinas/os (Ceja, 2001; Perna, 2000; Yosso, 2005). In the following sections, I discuss these forms of capital more in detail as they apply to each variable.

**Predisposition Stage**

A review of the literature reveals that family, counselors, and financial aid information influence Latinas/os during the predisposition stage. As summarized earlier, the predisposition stage generally occurs from sixth grade until the end of tenth grade. In this stage, students become interested in college and decide to pursue a college education. This section shares how family, counselors, and financial aid information influence Latinas/os when deciding whether or not to pursue a college degree. In addition, I also discuss aspirational capital within the family section.

**Family and aspirational capital.** During the predisposition stage, parental support is essential for a student to establish the mindset of pursuing college (Hossler et al., 1999; Pérez & McDonough, 2008; Perna, 2000). Research establishes that Latina/o parents discuss with their children the value of pursuing a higher education (Ceja, 2001; Gonzales et al., 2003). Moreover, Latinas/os attribute their pursuit of higher education to parental support (Ceja, 2001, 2004; Perez, 2008). Parents motivate Latinas/os to do well in school and to view college as an attainable goal (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Ceja, 2004; Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005; Yowell, 2000). Latina/o parents teaching their children to value education represents a form of aspirational capital.

Drawing from Gándara’s (1995) work, Yosso (2005) defines aspirational capital as the ability to maintain “hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers” (p. 77). Several studies provide examples of aspirational capital. These studies find that despite low levels of education, Latina/o parents send messages that motivate students to
develop college aspirations and educational resiliency (Arellano & Padilla, 1996; Ceja, 2004; Sánchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2005; Yowell, 2000). Gándara (1995) interviewed 50 low-income Chicanas/os who earned an advanced degree and found that parents encouraged students to pursue a postsecondary education and they established a “culture of possibility.” The study finds that parents enabled students to have a high academic performance, practice literacy in the home, and maintain a work ethic (Gándara, 1995). Ceja (2001, 2004) examined the college choice process of Chicanas and finds that parents share messages with their daughters about the value of education. A family’s current and future limited social opportunities informed the messages and established a culture of possibility. Ceja (2004) concludes that parents were an essential support system to encourage and motivate Chicana students by “displaying a sense of moral and emotional support” (p. 101). However, studies confirm that students are successful due to receiving additional college guidance and accessing a college preparatory curriculum (Arbona & Nora, 2005; Ceja, 2001; Gándara, 1995).

**Counselors.** In addition to parents establishing college aspirations, school counselors also assist students during the predisposition stage. Studies find that counselors play an important role in reassuring students that they are capable of attending and graduating from a college (Choy, Horn, & Chen, 2000; Gonzalez et al, 2003; Perez & McDonough, 2008). Unfortunately, Martinez (2003) finds that high school counselors have low-expectations for low-income Latina/o students. In a study that interviewed high achieving Latina/o students, Vela Gude and her colleagues (2009) find that counselors lowered expectations for Latina/o participants. In addition, the counselors also underestimated the students’ academic potential and attempted to limit the educational aspirations of students. These findings are important because researchers establish the link that the low expectations from counselors result in lower
educational outcomes for Latina/o study participants (Davison Aviles, Guerrero, Barajas Howarth, & Thomas, 1999). Therefore, Latina/o students have to negotiate the low expectations from counselors with the high aspirations established by parents. Thus, both variables influence the student’s decision to pursue college.

**Financial aid information.** Family and counselors also intersect in shaping student aspirations through the misinformation about financing college. As noted in Chapter One, Latinas/os are likely to come from low-income families, which results in financing a college education being a sensible worry. After surveying students in southern California, Post (1990) finds that Latina/o students and parents do not estimate the costs of college accurately. A study by McDonough and Calderone (2006) reveals that counselors can decrease the misinformation of parents and students by providing accurate and accessible information. However, the lack of accessibility to a college counselor limits the financial knowledge that Latina/o students and parents receive (McDonough & Calderone, 2006; Gonzalez et al., 2003). Misinformation regarding how to finance college reduces the college aspirations of Latina/o students (Gonzalez et al., 2003; Perna, 2000; Post, 1990). Thus, financial aid information influences the predisposition, search, and choice stage for Latina/o students. The predisposition stage for Latinas/os is complicated and entails students negotiating various influences when establishing their aspirations. Nevertheless, as Chapter 1 revealed, the majority of Latinas/os maintain high educational aspirations and want to attend college.

**Search Stage**

Following the complex predisposition stage, students enter the search stage. The search stage generally occurs during eleventh grade (Hossler, Braxton, & Coopersmith, 1989). As shared in Chapter One, the majority of Latina/o high school students are low-income and have
parents without a college education, which contributes to a multifaceted search stage. This section examines how family and counselors influence the search experience for Latinas/os. In addition, this section discusses the role of social capital and navigational capital.

**Family.** Although in the predisposition stage parents represent a primary influence, during the search phase, Latina/o students turn to siblings and extended family members for guidance. When searching for college information, students enact Yosso’s (2005) social and navigational capital. In the community cultural wealth framework, Yosso (2005) defines social capital to include “networks of people and community resources” (p.79). Examples of students utilizing social capital during the search stage includes extended family members and siblings serving as primary information sources when applying to college and financial aid (Perez & McDonough, 2008). Since oftentimes parents are not able to provide information about college, Latina/o high school students turn to siblings for assistance with college information (Ceja, 2001; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Talavera-Bustillos, 1998).

In the search stage, extended family members, such as aunts, uncles, cousins, and godparents, who have gone through the college choice process, share navigational capital with Latina/o students. Yosso (2005) explains that navigational capital allows individuals to maneuver “through institutions not created with Communities of Color in mind” (p. 80). This occurs through extended family members providing valuable information to students during the planning process and sharing navigation skills (Perez & McDonough, 2008). Ceja (2006) finds that family members who attended college also assist Chicanas by preparing to overcome possible hardships in higher education. Yosso’s concept of community cultural wealth serves as a lens to avoid the deficit assumption that Latinas/os lack social capital. A dearth remains in the literature that examines the strengths shared among Latina/o families during the search stage.
Counselors. During the search stage, counselors are an essential resource for students to learn about colleges. Considering the limitations in the availability of counselors noted earlier, they are not a dependable resource. Immerwahr (2003) finds that counselors fail to provide adequate guidance and do not show interest in the futures of Latina/o students who are not on the college track. This results in counselors negatively influencing the college search stage for many Latinas/os. Furthermore, in a study conducted by Auerbach (2004), interview data reveals that oftentimes counselors do not inform parents about the college choice process. Finally, McDonough and Calderone (2006), find that counselors oftentimes misinform parents regarding college costs. In addition, some counselors assume that Latina/o parents cannot afford college and have an aversion to loans (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Instead of informing parents and students about college costs and financial assistance, this perception leads counselors to advise students and parents that attending a community college is the only affordable option (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Thus, regardless of academic achievement, during the search stage, counselors can limit the process to community college as the only feasible pathway to access a degree. As noted in Chapter One, the level of selectivity affects college graduation rates. Therefore, a lack of access to cultural and social capital through a counselor restricts the Latina/o college choice. The intricate search stage, informed by family and counselors, sets the context for the choice stage (Hossler et al., 1989).

Choice Stage

The final stage includes students choosing a college. However, Hossler and his colleagues (1989) note that in this stage, students experience two different phases. The first phase entails students selecting colleges and submitting applications. The second phase includes students being admitted to colleges and deciding what college to attend. This section highlights
how financial aid, gender, and peers influence and intersect with other factors to guide the overall college choice stage for Latinas/os.

**Financial aid.** A review of the literature finds that the availability of financial aid intersects with the socioeconomic status of a student’s family and influences the first phase within the choice stage. A higher socioeconomic status has a positive effect on the level of college selectivity that Latinas/os choose (Nunez et al., 2007). On the other hand, research concludes that financial concerns push students away from four-year colleges and towards a community college (Baker & Vélez, 1996). As noted in Chapter One, the lack of financial assistance is a major obstacle that low-income Latina/o students overcome in order to meet their high educational aspirations. Therefore, the amount of financial aid a college offers the student mediates the college choice process for Latina/o high school students (Nunez et al., 2007). The lack of financial aid steers students to choose a community college, where the likelihood of transferring to a four-year college is nominal (Baker & Velez, 1996). Thus, as noted in Chapter One, financial aid is a variable that dictates and limits the college choice stage for Latinas/os.

**Gender.** Gender also intersects with family to steer the choice stage for Latinas/os. Research finds that gender influences the location and type of postsecondary institution that students select (McDonough, et al, 2004). For example, a student’s gender informs the type of advice parents give, which results in Latinas choosing to attend less selective colleges in order to stay close to home and support the family (Ceja, 2004; Nunez et al., 2007). The findings in a qualitative study by Ceja (2001) confirm that Chicanas consider distance from home and having to leave home as the most influential factor in the college choice stage is. Although staying close to home might seem like a negative influence, researchers conclude that the opposite is true. A study by Arbona and Nora (2007) demonstrates that after graduating high school, Latinas were
more likely than Latinos to enroll in a four-year college as opposed to a two-year college. In addition, Cerna, Pérez, and Sáenz (2006) conclude that Mexican American women who choose a college close to home are more likely to earn their bachelor’s degree when compared to white females. Thus, these studies reveal that the family represents an essential source of support even beyond the college choice phase and reinforces Yosso’s (2005) concept of community cultural wealth.

**Peers.** Peers affect the college choice stage for Latina/o students (Kim, 2004). Studies conclude that peers have a larger effect on the college choice of Latinas/os than any other racial group (Fletcher, 2011; Kim, 2004). Nunez and her colleagues (2007) highlight that if students lack other sources of information, peers might have a larger influence when selecting a college. Kim (2004) also finds that peers are especially important when Latinos/as choose a college that is not her/his first choice. The likelihood of establishing plans to attend a selective four-year college increases when the Latina/o student has friends who plan to attend college (Arbona and Nora, 2007; Gonzalez, Stone, & Jovel, 2003). Therefore, peers also constitute a highly influential variable to consider during the Latina/o college choice stage.

**Summary of Latina/o College Choice**

After examining the various factors that influence Latinas/os when selecting a postsecondary educational institution, it is clear that the three-stage college choice process is complex for Latinas/os. In addition, a review of the literature reveals that cultural and social capital, family, financial aid, counseling, peers, and gender all guide the complex process of college choice for Latinas/os. A review of the literature also reveals that more studies are needed to understand the college choice process of predisposition, search, and choice for Latinas/os.
The following section will provide an understanding about previous literature that examines the experiences of students once the transition into college.

**College Transition, Integration, and Persistence**

The most critical year in a student’s postsecondary educational trajectory is the first year, when students are most likely to withdraw from college (Bradburn, 2002). Although the distinction between when a student transitions and integrates into college is unclear, researchers agree that the transition stage is fundamental to student success (Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Previous literature examines college transition using econometric and sociological models (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). The models focus on student-level explanations, such as students’ socioeconomic status, previous academic preparation, and college-choices (Oliva, 2008). This section continues by discussing econometric models, sociological models, and higher education models to examine college transition, integration, and persistence. In this section, I also share previous studies that examine college transitions for first-generation and Latina/o students

**Econometric Models**

For the most part, economic models apply human capital theory and rational choice theory to higher education (Melguizo, 2011). Human capital theory argues that society and individuals benefit from financial investment in the development of individuals, such as in higher education (Sweetland, 1996). On the other hand, rational choice theory begins with the premise that individuals consider utility maximization and make decisions after calculating the costs and benefits of an action (Scott, 2000). This section identifies two foundational econometric models used to examine college transitions and persistence.

Manski and Wise (1983) were the first to integrate human capital theories into higher education. Using the national longitudinal surveys created by the National Center of Education
Statistics (NCES) and rational choice theory, Manski and Wise (1983) developed the econometric model of student behavior. The model defines five sets of decisions that students make: applying to college, gaining admission to college, evaluating the financial cost associated with attending an institution, deciding whether or not to enroll in a college, and persisting and obtaining a degree. The authors also establish five factors that influence a student’s postsecondary pathway, which include: academic aptitude, family income, cost and aid, quality of the high school the students attend and decisions of their peers, and labor market conditions. However, the authors explain that the study is limited due to the lack of controlling for high school academic preparation. Melguizo (2011) argues that the econometric model of student behavior can assist current researchers to address various research questions related to college persistence and attainment.

Cameron and Heckman (1998) provide another example of an econometric model with the life cycle schooling and dynamic selection bias model. The model goes against the traditional notions established by piece meal models of family background characteristics influencing students less upon entering higher education. With their model, Cameron and Heckman (1998) include previously omitted variables and find that family background influences students in higher education. An example of their implemented model finds that offering financial aid to students does not have an effect on whether students enroll in higher education (Cameron & Heckman, 1998).

Although some researchers advocate for the use of individualized level analysis provided by econometric models (Melguizo, 2011; Paulsen, 2001), Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) provide strong critiques against the use of econometric models to examine Latina/o persistence. First, the models fail to address how context and access to information can influence college
persistence, which previous researchers establish as important for Students of Color (Knight, Norton, Bentley, & Dixon, 2004; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Second, they argue that econometric models take individualized decisions to represent a group but given the heterogeneity among Latinas/os, having one econometric model would not be helpful. Finally, Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) contend that econometric models assume individuals have a set of options when selecting a postsecondary institution, which is not always the case for Latinas/os given schooling contexts. In turn, Rios-Aguilar and Kiyama (2012) advocate for the use of sociological models, which consider social contexts. The following section continues by defining how sociological models address the shortcomings of econometric models to understand college transition, integration, and persistence.

**Sociological Models**

As opposed to economic researchers who focus on human capital models, sociological models oftentimes engage with the status attainment model and social stratification (Deil-Amen & López Turley, 2007). The status attainment model concentrates on the effect of socioeconomic status on individuals’ educational attainment (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). Unlike econometric researchers, sociologists assume that social structures restrict access to information address the shortfall of econometric models (Melguizo, 2011). The focus on structures and stratification is evident in the use of various sociological models that use the work of Bourdieu who argued that societal structures determine an individual’s place in society. By acknowledging the roles of structures, Manski (1993) argues that unlike econometric models, sociological models allow us to understand how individuals gather information.
**Higher Education Models**

Education models that account for a student enrolling and transitioning into college focus on student experiences once in the higher education system. Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student integration identifies three major sources of student departure from college: academic difficulties, the inability to resolve educational goals, and the failure to incorporate in the institution. Tinto’s model establishes that pre-college academic preparation, influences college persistence for traditional college students. Although academic performance is important, the model highlights a need for student integration into formal and informal academic and social systems within the college. The goal is for students to maintain a sense of inclusion and belonging on the college campus. Tinto’s model of student integration (1987) informed the establishment of various models (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1983; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1980). However, researchers critique the foundational models for not being applicable to students from diverse backgrounds (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

On the other hand, Nora’s (2003) conceptual model of student engagement integrates theoretical perspectives and empirical studies from the field. Nora’s model considers six main components: 1) precollege/pull factors, 2) sense of purpose and institutional allegiance, 3) academic and social experiences, 4) cognitive and non-cognitive outcomes, 5) goal determination/institutional allegiance, and (6) persistence. The model identifies factors that are relevant to Latinas/os, which affect a student’s academic experiences, perceived and actual intellectual gains, and sense of self-esteem and efficacy, resulting in whether the student persists in college. Although the model is purely conceptual and does not use data to support the argument, it identifies a number of variables, which affect college withdrawal/persistence decisions of students.
Variables that Influence Transition to College

Although Latina/o first-generation college students face barriers that prevent college enrollment (Bui, 2005; Choy, 2001; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996), they also maintain high levels of resiliency (Boden, 2011; Borrero, 2011; Pérez & McDonough, 2008). Studies indicate that precollege characteristics, as well as, academic and social experiences during college influence college integration and persistence (Bean, 1990; Lang, 2000; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Tinto, 1993). Students whose values align with the postsecondary institution experience increased satisfaction and are likely to persist (Ray, 1992; Williams, 1984). Moreover, student engagement enhances student retention rates (Tinto, 2000; Upcraft, Gardner & Barefoot, 2004). However, it is unclear how to increase student engagement among different groups of students. In the following section, I provide more information about the transition experiences of first-generation college students.

First Generation College Students

First-generation college students are students whose parents who did not graduate from college. As opposed to students with college-educated parents, first-generation students are more likely to: come from lower-income backgrounds, be older, have dependents, identify as women, and identify as Hispanic (Choy, 2001; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007; Terenzini et al., 1996). Several studies find that first-generation students are less likely to complete a college degree compared to non-first-generation peers (Choy, 2001; McCarron & Inkelas, 2006; Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998). Furthermore, McCarron and Inkelas (2006) find that a gap exists between the high aspirations and educational outcomes of first-generation college students. Since first-generation college students likely come from lower-income families, they identify potential financial security as the primary motivation
for seeking a college degree (Bui, 2002; Nuñez & Cuccaro-Alamin, 1998; Saenz et al., 2007). In addition, first-generation students are also more likely to work a larger amount of hours off campus compared to non-first generation students, which could contribute as a pull-factor leading to college withdrawal (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004; Terenzini et al., 1996). Finally, first-generation students, especially those in the community college sector, are more likely to attend part-time (Richardson & Skinner, 1992).

Since first-generation students are more likely to attend part-time, they also complete fewer credit hours and struggle with academic integration (Pascarella, et al., 2004). In regards to academic integration, first-generation students enter college with lower levels of academic self-confidence, compared to their peers (Bui, 2002; Huber & Marks, 2005; Saenz et al., 2007). Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin (1998) find that first-generation college students maintain lower levels of academic integration. In other words, first-generation students are less likely to: attend career-related events, meet with academic advisors, participate in study groups, attend events with peers from school, and participate in school clubs. In a more recent study, Pascarella and his colleagues (2004) support the findings by Nuñez and Cuccaro-Alamin and argue that first-generation students maintained less extracurricular involvement, athletic participation, volunteer work, and non-course-related interactions with peers (Pascarella et al., 2004).

**Latina/o College Students**

Similar to first-generation college students, Latinas/os tend to enroll in college part-time (Benitez, 1998; Crisp, Nora, & Taggart 2009). In addition, Latinas/os receive high levels of financial aid (Benitez, 1998; Crisp et al., 2009) but work long hours (Longerbeam, Sedlacek, & Alatorre, 2004). Latina/o students experience several obstacles when transitioning to campus. Upon entering college, students encounter various forms of exclusion in higher education that
hinder the development of college integration and persistence (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, & Spuler, 1996; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009). For example, a racially hostile campus climate contributes to a decreased sense of belonging for Latinas/os (Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler, 1996; Nora and Cabrera 1996). Moreover, Latinas/os often experience racial microaggressions in college settings, which create a sense of not belonging on the college campus (Yosso, et al., 2009). The following section provides more details about how Latinas/os successfully navigate the transition to college to overcome several obstacles.

**Supporting successful college transitions of Latinas/os.** Although the literature on first-generation college students contends that they are less likely to integrate within college, studies find that Latinas/os integrate within college through non-traditional approaches (Hurtado and Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009; Yosso, et al., 2009). Attinasi (1989, 1992) establishes that Mexican American students become integrated through cognitive mapping, or getting to know the campus but do not share the values of majority students. Attinasi reports that Latinas/os form small communities to learn the skills required to navigate the social, cognitive, and geography of the campus. Hurtado and Carter (1997) find that both cognitive mapping and skills to manage resources (such as time, money, and schedules) contribute to experiencing a successful transition stage. Similarly, Yosso and her colleagues (2009) note that participants in their study respond by building communities but these experiences remain unaccounted for in Tinto’s (1993) model. Studies argue that social support networks also support students with integrating to college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009). Individual-level interactions in social-community organizations, community service, religious clubs, student government, sports teams, in-class
and out-of-class discussions with peers and faculty, and tutoring can contribute to higher senses of belonging for Latinas/os (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nuñez, 2009).

In particular, having faculty members show genuine interest in students’ development and display a sense of obligation to community positively impact the sense of belonging for Latinas/os, even within a hostile campus climate (Nuñez, 2009). Nuñez (2011) proposes that Chicano studies courses can provide counterspaces for Latina/o first-generation college students and serve as comfort zones within alienating college campuses. However, Torres, Reiser, LePeau, Davis, and Ruder (2006) find that Latina/o students depend primarily on peers and pamphlets for information to make academic decisions. Only after experiencing cognitive dissonance do Latina/o students turn to academic advisors and faculty members for assistance (Torres et al., 2006). Combined, the studies highlight the importance of college faculty and staff members to conduct outreach and create welcoming environments, which allow Latinas/os to seek support.

Moreover, family serves as a strong support system for Latinas/os during the transition to college. Despite parents generally lacking formal experiences with higher education, they represent a main source of support (Laden, 2001; Perna & Titus, 2005). Hurtado and Carter (1997) find that “maintaining family relationships are essential aspects of the transition to college” (p. 339). For example, similar to Latinas/os attributing the establishment of aspirations to pursue a postsecondary to pursue a postsecondary education to parents, once in college, Latina/o students with strong writing skills attribute their success to parental support (Early, 2010). In addition, first-generation Latinas/os depend on their families as a source of support and encouragement (Early, 2010; Gloria & Castellanos, 2012). In particular, first-generation Latina/o college students view the work ethic and determination demonstrated by their parents as
a model of strength (Early, 2010). Unlike traditional college integration models, such as Tinto’s (1975) model, which argue that students must separate in order to integrate, Latinas/os who transition into college successfully maintain strong familial relationships. As mentioned earlier, Mexican American women who choose a college close to home are more likely to earn their bachelor’s degree when compared to white females (Cerna, et al., 2006). Combined, these studies reveal that the family unit represents an essential source of support even beyond the college choice phase and reinforces the community cultural wealth present in Latina/o families (Yosso, 2005).

Since family represents a strong role of support for Latinas/os during the transition to college, social networks that resemble family on college campuses are also key to creating an environment for successful transition (Gloria and Castellanos, 2012). In order to counter unwelcoming experiences within college, Gloria and Castellanos (2012) find that Latino first-generation college students form networks, which provide support, refuge, and validation for students. The participants in Benmayor’s (2002) study rely on cultural social networks for support, including student organizations and affirmative action programs. As a result, the participants in the study found an extended familia, family, where they served alongside peers as advocates and community builders.

Summary of College Transition and Integration Literature

In the previous section, I provided an overview of college transition and integration models, which focus on student-level explanations (Oliva, 2008). The majority of econometric models apply human capital theory and rational choice theory to higher education (Melguizo, 2011). On the other hand, sociological models engage with the status attainment model and social stratification (Deil-Amen & López Turley, 2007). Education models that account for a
student enrolling and transitioning into college focus on student experiences once in the higher education system. Education researchers use Tinto’s (1975, 1987, 1993) model of student integration, which identifies three major sources of student departure from college: academic difficulties, the inability to resolve educational goals, and the failure to incorporate in the institution. On the other hand, Nora’s (2004) conceptual model of student engagement integrates theoretical perspectives and empirical studies from the field and focuses on how Latinas/os experience transition. Although various econometric and sociological models exist to examine college transition, the majority do not account for the experiences of Latina/o first-generation low-income college students (Rios-Aguilar & Kiyama, 2012). A review of existing literature that examines college transition, integration, and persistence for Latinas/os and first-generation students reveals that more research is needed in those areas (Nuñez, 2011). Moreover, the first year represents the most critical year for a student’s college trajectory (Bradburn, 2002). Therefore, in this dissertation I examined not only college choice but also followed the college transition of participants.

Summary of the Literature

This chapter began with presenting two strategies—college outreach programs and college-going culture—to provide college information and improve access to higher education for all students. Since Latina/o high school students partake in the two strategies, I content that it is essential to understand the implications of such approaches on their college choice process. Then, I introduced the three-stage college choice model to conceptualize how students select a postsecondary institution. This chapter concluded by discussing how the three-stage college choice model serves to consider several variables such as family, peers, and counselors, when examining the complexity in the college choice process for Latinas/os. The final section
provided examples of foundational models that examine college transition and integration. In addition, I discussed literature that examines the transitions to college for first-generation and Latina/o students. Chapter Three will detail how the proposed study intends to examine the intersection of college outreach programs with college-going culture and how they influence the Latina/o college choice process.
CHAPTER THREE
THEORY, METHODS, AND DATA

Introduction

I examined the college-going efforts of AHS educators and the college choice and integration processes of Latina/o students. I analyzed the topics from an organizational and individual level. I aimed to understand how educators in an under-resourced school developed a college-going climate to inform the postsecondary expectations and enrollments of Latina/o high school students. With this study, I answer the following research questions:

1. What is the structure and culture of Academies High School (AHS)?
2. How do AHS educators utilize policies, resources, and practices in Academies High School to develop a college-going climate within the larger school culture?
3. How do AHS Latina/o students with high educational aspirations develop college-going and college-navigating identities?
   a. How does the college-going climate inform the college-going identity development of Latina/o participants?

I begin Chapter Three by establishing the integration of three guiding theoretical frameworks: critical race theory in education (CRTE), school culture, and college-choice organizational *habitus*. Then, I introduce grounded theory and critical race grounded theory as the guiding methodologies. The chapter continues by outlining the data collection methods, which entailed: school observations and interviews with students, administrators, and practitioners. I also describe the case study site and the study participants. I conclude by providing an overview of the data analysis process of coding triangulating data.
Theoretical Frameworks

This dissertation utilized three theoretical frameworks to conceptualize and answer the research questions. As shown in Figure 1, the overarching framework was critical race theory in education (CRTE). CRTE guided the school culture and college-choice organizational *habitus* to ensure that this study accounted for issues of race, racism and other forms of potential subjugation. CRTE also allowed for the centralization of participants’ experiences to examine structural barriers and sources of support. A school culture framework provided a lens to analyze the distribution of college-going information within the high school site and to account for other experiences that influenced the college-going efforts. College-choice organizational *habitus* allowed me to view how college-going efforts influenced college expectations, choices, and enrollments of the participants. In Figure 1, I situate college-choice organizational *habitus* within the school culture circle with a dashed line, to account for school culture as an influence on the college choice processes of the participants.

*Figure 1. Integration of three guiding theoretical frameworks: Critical race theory in education, school culture, and college-choice organizational *habitus*
Critical Race Theory in Education

To understand how CRTE contributed to this study, it is important to define the framework first. Critical race theory began in the legal field during the 1970s. However, education scholars began to utilize CRT as a research tool during the 1990s (Valencia, 2008; Yosso, 2005). Solórzano (1998) defines critical race theory in education as a framework, which “challenges the dominant discourse on race and racism as they relate to education by examining how educational theory, policy, and practice are used to subordinate certain racial and ethnic groups” (p. 122). Furthermore, CRTE scholars explain that CRTE serves to reveal how dominant ideas of colorblindness and meritocracy “disadvantage People of Color while further advantaging whites” (Solórzano, et al., 2005, p.274; see also Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Solórzano (1998) identifies five principal tenets of CRTE after drawing from several fields, including: ethnic studies, history, law, psychology, sociology, and education. The tenets call for scholars to: 1) centralize race and racism, 2) challenge the dominant perspective, 3) commit to social justice, 4) value experiential knowledge, and 5) conduct interdisciplinary research.

The first tenet highlights that “race and racism are endemic and permanent” in the U.S. (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122). Within this tenet, researchers examine the concepts of race and racism as they intersect with other forms of subordination, such as gender and class. This tenet guided the study to examine the disparities in educational resources offered to Latina/o students. In addition, the tenet centralized the intersectional experiences of the low-income student participants.

The second tenet aims to challenge dominant ideologies in the educational system such as “objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal
opportunity” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122). CRTE serves to understand how these concepts perpetuate white privilege. As Chapter Two revealed, the majority of college outreach programs aimed to provide students with cultural and social capital and do not work with families. This tenet informed the methods to include observations of the curriculum, implemented workshops, and the purpose of a college-going culture at AHS to reveal if dominant ideologies limited the college-going climate.

The third tenet is a commitment to social justice and an aim to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination. The third tenet informed the research design and recommendations of this study. I was committed to social justice and chose to examine AHS due to the school demographics. AHS maintains a high concentration of Latinas/os from low-income background, which represented an ideal setting for a case study since it reflected the demographics of other high schools in California, (Orfield & Lee, 2007, Rogers et al., 2011). My goal was for the school site to reflect the demographics of other California high schools for the recommendations to inform similar schools. Moreover, this tenet informed the recommendations for policy and practice to be critical and committed to social justice so that educators can enhance college-going environments in similar California high schools.

The fourth tenet explains that examining the experiential knowledge of People of Color is fundamental when discussing issues of race and racism in education. This tenet was essential to the study because it guided the methods to ensure that I centralized experiences of student participants. The goal of this dissertation was to understand how Latina/o students experienced college-going culture and the college choice process to address potential shortcomings and highlighting strengths. However, this could not be accomplished without centralizing student experiences, which the study did through student oral history interviews.
The fifth tenet calls for CRTE scholars to utilize an interdisciplinary scope when conducting research. This tenet challenges the ahistoricism found in the analysis of research and situates race and racism in a “historical and contemporary context” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 123). In order to do so, this study utilized several qualitative methods and integrated the Chicana/o studies theories of Gloria Anzaldúa. The use of multiple qualitative methods provided the historical and contemporary context that shaped the college-going efforts at AHS. This also allowed the study to understand better how the culture influenced the college choice process of Latinas/os. Moreover, data analysis revealed an alignment in the college choice processes of the Latina/o participants with Anzaldúa’s (2002) theories of borderlands, conocimiento, and nepantleras. Therefore, the fifth tenet allowed for the integration of interdisciplinary theories.

In addition, since this study focused on Latinas/os, LatCrit, a branch of critical race theory also informed the study. A LatCrit theoretical framework enables researchers to understand, analyze, and articulate the specific experiences of Latinas/os through a closer examination of the unique forms of oppression that Latinas/os encounter (Solórzano & Delgado Bernal, 2001). A LatCrit framework acknowledges the particular needs of Latina/o communities, such as issues of immigration status, language, ethnicity, and culture. In particular, the integration of LatCrit facilitated the analysis of student participants who experienced educational inequities due to an undocumented immigration status.

The implementation of LatCrit and CRTE frameworks also challenge contemporary deficit thinking in educational research. Valencia and Solórzano (1997) define three different types of contemporary deficit thinking research. The first, genetic bases for human behavior, attributes differences in levels of intelligence to genetic variations. The second, culture of poverty paradigm, blames the poor for their failures. The third, cultural and accumulated
deficits, blames the problems experienced by racial groups on inadequate parenting. Therefore, CRTE and LatCrit served as theoretical frameworks to challenge the potential contemporary deficit thinking enacted by AHS educators.

School Culture

In addition to CRTE, the concept of school culture informed this study to examine the college-going efforts at AHS. A review of the literature revealed that few authors define general school culture and instead use the term college-going culture. Chapter Three continues by reviewing how previous researchers define school culture and climate. Then, I establish my conceptualization of school culture and climate.

Researchers generally examine culture from an anthropological perspective, which comprises the values and norms of the school (Hoy, 1990; Heck and Marcoulides, 1996). On the other hand, Geertz (1973) argues that culture entails “historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in (explicit and implicit) symbols” (p. 89). In other words, Geertz (1973) accounts for how historical policies influence current policies or practices within a school. Rodríguez and Brown (2009) define school culture as a set of actions informed by the intersections of school "structures, cultures, and individual agency." Brown and Rodríguez (2008) highlight the value in classifying the type of culture. Using a qualitative case-study methodology of interviews and observations, Brown and Rodríguez (2008) examine how school culture shapes the relationships between adults and students in high schools. The authors conclude that in order to reform schools and commit to the education of Students of Color, it is essential for schools to maintain cultures of success. These cultures of success include structures of support through relationships with adults that include respect, encouragement, support, and are personal.
A review of the literature reveals a relationship and overlap between school culture and climate (Miner, 1995). Generally, researchers view climate from a psychological perspective as individual behavior (Hoy, Tarter, & Kottkamp, 1991). Steele and Jenks (1977) define school climate as “what it feels like to spend time in a social system.” According to Steele and Jenks’ (1977), school climate emphasizes personal ideologies and experiences, over policies. Similarly, Brookover and Lezotte (1979) define school climate as the fusion of “norms, expectations, and beliefs, which characterize the school social system as perceived by members of the social system” (p. 19). In other words, climate focuses on the experiences by individuals within the institution or organization. Stolp and Smith (1994) explain that “culture includes climate, but climate does not encompass all aspects of culture” (p. 16). The authors contend that climate explains the shared perceptions of the organization, while culture includes “the assumptions, values, and beliefs that give the organization its identity and specify the standards for behavior” (p. 15). In other words, culture is the product of historical relationships, which establish expectations, while climate entails how individuals today view those relationships (Stolp & Smith, 1994). Similarly, Schein (1985, 1996) argues that culture manifests through norms, values, and climate.

In this dissertation I merge the conceptualization of Schein (1985, 1996), Steele and Jenks (1977), and Brown and Rodríguez (2008) define school culture as: a set of actions informed by the intersections of school structures, climates, and individual agency. I define school structures to include school history and policies. I define school climate as the prevailing standards, attitudes, and practices enacted by administrators and teachers within spaces in the school and classrooms. Therefore, I use the term college-going climate, as opposed to college-going culture, which is used widely in education research. I define individual agency to include
the ideologies, perceptions, experiences, and actions of students, teachers, and administrators. The three are not separate but rather inform one another.

**College-Choice Organizational Habitus**

To bridge the school and student-level processes, college-choice organizational *habitus* also informed this study. McDonough (1997) expands on Bourdieu’s (1979) concept of *habitus* and develops college choice organizational *habitus*. Bourdieu (1979) explains that *habitus* is a “system of durable, transposable dispositions which functions as the generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices” (p. vii). *Habitus* allows for an individual to internalize the culture of a group and then view the world through those internalized and permanent beliefs (Bidet, 1979). Furthermore, McDonough (1997) explains that *habitus* “shapes an individual’s expectations, attitudes and aspirations” (p. 9). This is relevant when examining the expectations and outcomes for Latina/o students. Bidet (1979) notes that *habitus* entails an objective cycle in which “structures produce *habitus* which determine practices, which reproduce structures” (p. 203). Bidet (1979) highlights that in this cycle structures can represent the relationship between individuals, groups, and institutions.

McDonough (1997) extends the concept of *habitus* by accounting for the role of institutions in shaping individual agency and establishes organizational *habitus*. She describes organizational *habitus* as the “impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual’s behavior, through an intermediate organization” (p. 107). In this dissertation, the “intermediate organization” was AHS. Although groups are primarily categorized through social class, the concept of organizational *habitus* allows race to serve as a critical dimension in how “dispositions, perceptions, and appreciations” are organized (Diamond, Randolph & Spillane, 2004, p. 76). Furthermore, McDonough (1997) defines a college-choice organizational *habitus*,
which refers to the “patterns of college-choices and behaviors that are manifested in schools with similar socioeconomic status environments” (p. 108). In this dissertation, a college-choice organizational *habitus* served to understand the role of AHS processes in reproducing and challenging social inequalities through college choice.

**Methodology: Grounded Theory and Critical Race Grounded Theory**

The methodological framework merges grounded theory and critical race grounded theory (CRGT) methodologies to support that student experiences shaping the findings of this study. The following section provides an overview of the methodological approaches in grounded theory and critical race grounded theory. In this section I also discuss the strengths and shortfalls of the methodologies, as well as, how I apply grounded theory and CRGT.

As Strauss and Corbin (2008) explain, grounded theory is a qualitative research methodology that “seeks not just to understand, but also to build a substantive theory about the phenomenon of interest” (p. 23). In other words, grounded theory methodology allows for the experiences of study participants to produce theory (Creswell, 2009). My aim was to theorize how a college-going climate can inform the postsecondary pathways of Latina/o high school students who have high aspirations. Producing a theory required the data collection to occur in multiple stages, followed by refining categories and establishing the interrelationships of categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Thus, I used multiple methods and an iterative data analysis process. Although traditional grounded theory does not allow for reviewing literature before studying a phenomenon, Strauss and Corbin (1990) argue that reviewing existing literature enhances the use of grounded theory by stimulating theoretical sensitivity and questions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Therefore, I reviewed the literature to guide the formulation of the proposed research questions and methods.
In order to centralize issues of race, this study also used an emerging methodology—critical race grounded theory (CRGT). Malagon, Perez Huber, and Velez (2009) establish CRGT, which is informed by CRT, as an interdisciplinary methodology that challenges white supremacy (Malagon, Perez Huber and Velez, 2009). The authors argue that white supremacy “shapes the way research specifically, and society generally, understands the experiences, conditions, and outcomes of People of Color” (Malagon, et al., 2009, p. 264). During the data collection and data analysis, CRGT enables researchers to build from the knowledge of People of Color. CRGT allows the research process to reveal how “race, class, gender, and other forms of oppression interact to mediate the experiences and realities of those affected by such oppression” (Malagon, et al., 2009, p. 264). Like the fourth tenet of CRT, CRGT aims to “interpret the perspectives and voices of the narratives (of People of Color) that remain unacknowledged, invalidated, and distorted in social science research” (p. 7). Therefore, CRGT enables me to clarify the experiences of Latinas/os with college choice through this study.

Expanding on Strauss and Corbin’s (1990) concept of theoretical sensitivity, CRGT calls for researchers to use cultural intuition. Cultural intuition includes a researcher’s: personal experiences, academic experiences, professional experiences, and an analytical research process (Malagon, et al., 2009). My personal experiences include being the first in my family to attend college, coming from a low-income background, and being a Chicana. Through my positionalities, I was able to connect with the students and share my experience of having to seek out support when preparing for and choosing a college. My academic experiences include training in qualitative methods and critical race theory. Thus, academic preparation equipped me with the research skills needed to design and conduct this study. My professional experiences included having been a college advisor for five years before beginning the doctoral program. As
a college advisor, I worked in under-resourced urban high schools that served a majority of Students of Color. Upon searching for possible high school sites, based on student demographics, I shared the list with a director of several UC outreach programs. The director explained that Academies High School aligned with my research interests of examining college-going culture and Latina/o college choice. He explained that the high school was improving the college-going rates of students and changing how college outreach programs worked with the school. My professional experiences also allowed me to connect with all of the research participants because I have worked in an environment similar to the high school site. Finally, the analytical research process embraces the idea that a researcher’s experiences inform the approaches used when collecting, interpreting, and analyzing the data. This facilitated my use of Anzaldúa’s (2002) Chicana feminist theories after conducting a first round of data analysis.

CRGT calls for the research process to compare the data and literature during each stage of analysis. Through a CRGT methodology, the researcher is compelled to understand the influence of “structural processes of domination” (Malagon et al., 2009, p. 12). This approach can reveal the various forms of racism and oppression. Therefore, CRGT enabled me to highlight institutional barriers that were present for Latina/o participants when choosing, transition, and navigating a college. Combined, grounded and CRGT allowed me to gain insight and develop theory about Latina/o college choice.

Qualitative Case Study Design

In order to utilize CRGT, this qualitative case study employed several qualitative methods. As Yin (1994) notes, a case study design is useful to examine contemporary events as they happen in a natural setting. Education researchers utilize a case study design to gain a holistic understanding of real-life experiences, cycles, and processes among specific groups (Yin,
Furthermore, Yin (1994) explains that the case study design goes beyond external validity, which is concerned with the problem of knowing whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the study population. Instead, a case study design strives to generalize a particular set of results to a broader theory. Wieviorka (1992) states that case studies place priority on analytical categories instead of external validity since "a case becomes the opportunity to discover knowledge about how it is both specific to and representative of a larger phenomenon" (p. 170). My theoretical intent contributes to the areas of college-going culture, college choice, and college transitions.

Yin (1994) explains that limiting a study to a single case is justifiable, "where the case serves a revelatory purpose" (p. 21). Although I designed the dissertation study to include only one high school site, within the site, I include several student participants. To conduct the case study, the research site was a high school in northern California, which I call Academies High School (AHS). The methods included one oral history interview with 57 students and follow-up interviews with 37 of the Latina/o students, semi-structured interviews with 17 AHS educators, and observations of AHS college-going events, during one school year. The following section provides information about the high school site, including the demographics and organizational structure.

Site Description

I collected data at one high school site in northern California—Academies High School (AHS). AHS is located in Monte Rico, a city Comunidad County. Monte Rico was established in 1905 on Ohlone Indian land as an industrial city. Shipyards and manufacturing companies, such as the Ford Motor Company, led the development of the city. After World War II, the

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1 To maintain anonymity of the school and participants, various references with the actual name of the city will not be cited.
shipyards closed and replaced by manufacturing companies. During the 1960s and 1970s, Monte Rico became a suburb. While surrounding cities experienced white flight, the number of white residents increased in Monte Rico. In the 1980s, Monte Rico developed into a city, while surrounding areas became suburbs. This, along with other socioeconomic factors, stirred a shift in racial demographics of the area.

Monte Rico is currently an urban area with concentrations of primarily white, middle-class population, low-income Families of Color, and recent Latina/o immigrant families. Physical barriers, such as highways and overpasses, separate pockets of poverty and low-income families from wealthy and/or professional households. Over the last four decades, the area has experienced an increase in Latina/o population and decrease in white population. The Latina/o population in Monte Rico increased from 10 percent in 1980, to 15 percent in 1990, 23 percent in 2000 and 40 percent in 2010 (Hispanic Population, U.S. Census). Approximately 24 percent of the Monte Rico population has at least a bachelor’s degree, compared with 28 percent of the national population (2010 American Community Survey, US Census). Similarly, 24 percent of the Monte Rico population was not enrolled in school and had not graduated from high school, compared to the US estimated average of 14 percent (2010 American Community Survey, US Census). In addition, 17 percent of the population is at an income below the poverty line. Finally, the per-capita income in Monte Rico is approximately $26,000 compared to $44,000 in the U.S. Various city efforts have recently focused on renovating and improving the physical public spaces, as well as increasing access to quality and affordable health and education resources. Unfortunately, the city of Monte Rico is portrayed in the mainstream media in a negative and deficit perspective, often highlighting incidents of crime or violence.
Demographic Shift in AHS Student Enrollment. Similar to the increase in general population, AHS also experienced an increase in Latina/o student enrollment. As Figure 1 shows, in Fall 1993, the Student of Color population was diverse and well represented by Asian Americans, Blacks, and Latinas/os. During that time, Latinas/os represented 41 percent of student enrollment in AHS. However, within two decades, the student population for Latinas/os more than doubled, while the Asian American and Black population decreased significantly. By Fall 2012, Latinas/os represented 83 percent of AHS student enrollment, Black students represented eight percent, Asian American students represented seven percent, and Whites represented two percent of the total enrollment. Furthermore, as Figure 1 clearly shows, the Latina/o population is at an increase and given state trends, it will likely continue to increase.

![Figure 2: Demographic Distribution of AHS Student Enrollment (Fall 1993 to Fall 2012)](image)

Source of Data: School Enrollment by Ethnicity, California Department of Education

The school site was first selected because of the student demographics and the increase in four-year college admission rates. AHS served over 1,600 students, with 424 of the students enrolled in twelfth grade. Table 3 shares statistics about the student population. With 83 percent of students identified as Latina/o, Latinas/os represented the majority of the student population.
Almost three-quarters of students qualified for free/reduced lunch. The graduation rate for Latinas/os during the 2008-2009 school year was at 70 percent, above state averages (Education Data Partnership, 2011). About 22 percent of AHS seniors took the SAT exam to meet university requirements (Rogers, et al., 2011). However, only eight percent of AHS seniors enrolled in a CSU or UC in Fall 2009 after graduating high school (Rogers et al., 2011). The student demographics also align with the student participant criteria, which I discuss shortly.

Table 1

| Academies High Schools Student, Graduation, College Preparation, and College Enrollment |
|-----------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Total number of students enrolled            | 1,724                            |
| % of Latina/o students                       | 83%                              |
| % students qualify for free/reduced lunch     | 72%                              |
| Latina/o graduation rate                     | 70%                              |
| % Latina/o seniors passing CAHSEE Math       | 68%                              |
| % Latinas/os seniors passing CAHSEE Language | 65%                              |
| % Students who took SAT                       | 22%                              |
| % Seniors enrolled in CSU or UC (Fall 2009)  | 8%                               |

Reorganizing AHS into career academies. During the early 2000s, AHS transitioned to career “houses,” similar to other nearby schools, which transitioned to small schools and career academies. Before Fall 2012, AHS students chose a career pathway by choosing a “house” during the end of their ninth grade year. In California, ConnectEd collaborated with Linked Learning to implement career academies in high schools. According to the ConnectEd website, the purpose of Linked Learning is to connect “core academic classes to challenging career and technical instruction” through various pathways. Linked Learning is viewed as an effective solution to increase college and career readiness among underrepresented and low-income youth.
The larger goal of Linked Learning academies is to prepare students for college (Burgarino, 2013). Linked Learning incorporates rigorous academics, real-world technical skills, work-based learning, and personalized supports.²

On the other hand, Linked Learning also aims to fill vocational career shortages, such as positions in the health care industry (Burgarino, 2013). According to the ConnectEd website, Linked Learning is meant for districts that, “have high school enrollments of at least 5,000 students; 30 percent or more of district students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch; and some existing capacity to develop larger systems of Linked Learning pathways” (Linked Learning, nd). Academies High School offers five different career academy areas to students, including: art, engineering, law, media, and science.

Research Methods

Data collection methods³ included observations and interviews. Sources of data included: 1) Oral histories with 57 students during two points in time. The first round collected during senior year in high school and the second round occurred six months later, during the first semester in college; 2) Observations of college preparation events during one school year; and 3) Semi-structured interviews with 17 practitioners and administrators who supported a college culture. The following sections detail the data collection participants and methods.

Student Participant Description and Selection

I visited all of the 12th grade English classes at AHS to hand out student participant forms and recruit potential participants. When recruiting students, I spent a few minutes explaining my personal and professional background, as well as, my reasons for studying college choice. The students asked often why I selected AHS as my research site and I explained the importance of

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² For more information about Linked Learning Career Academies, see: Kemple, 2001
³ Data for the dissertation derives from qualitative methods approved by the UCLA Office of the Human Research Protection Program.
the student demographics, the school needing more resources, and the changes in approaches to college outreach. As a result, I collected 80 participant forms that were signed by parents and students. I then requested from a school counselor the GPA for the potential participants. During the selection process, I ensured a proper distribution in GPA so that academically low-achieving and high-achieving students were represented well. Given my selection criteria, I ensured that the participants represented at least 10 percent of the twelfth grade population across student race and academy enrollment. In the end, given the time restrictions, I interviewed 57 student participants. Figure 3 shows that out of the 57 participants, 47 were Latina/o, with 26 of them indentifying as female. Of the remaining 10 participants, four identified as Black or African American, four as Asian American or Pacific Islander, and one as white.

![Diagram of student interview participants]

**Figure 3.** Student interview participants

The literature explained that the majority of Latinas/os have parents who did not graduate from college and are low-income. Therefore, every student participant selected for interviews met the following three requirements:

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4 Due to the small percentage of white students in the school, I do not identify the gender of the participant.
1) Parents who did not graduate from a four-year college in the U.S.

2) Live in a low-income household (receive free/reduced lunch)

3) Aspire to earn a college degree.

The first requirement of students being potential first-generation college students was satisfied if the parents did not graduate from a U.S. four-year postsecondary institution. The second requisite was determined by asking the student if they received free/reduced lunch. Finally, I defined high educational aspirations as wanting to at least graduate from a four-year college.

The graduating GPA of the participants ranged from a .824 to a 4.06, with 17 participants earning below a 2.0, 19 earning between a 2.0 and 3.0, and the remaining earning above a 3.0 GPA. Of the 37 Latina/o students in the follow-up oral history interviews, 23 were female and 14 were male. During the second interview, 20 enrolled in (or planned to enroll in) a two-year college, six a UC, six a CSU campus, and three a private for-profit vocational college. In addition, two males had stopped attending the local community college and another two were completing a final semester of high school but had enrolled in the local community college.

**Oral history interviews.** To answer the proposed research questions, I conducted oral history interviews with the 57 student participants. Portelli (1981) notes that oral history interviews “not only provide what someone did, but what they wanted to do, what they believed they were doing, and what they now think they did” (p.97). This method allowed me to analyze clearly the three stages of college choice of the participants and the transition to college. In addition, oral history interviews enabled this study to make meaning of how the participant’s personal and educational histories impacted their educational aspirations.

During the first interview, I concentrated on the previous schooling experiences, how students established college aspirations, how they searched for college information, and how
they were choosing a college to attend. On average, the first interview lasted about 50 minutes, or one class period. The interviews were generally conducted at the school but not in the College and Career Center. After the interview, I provided students with a brief college advising session, which would last about 10 minutes. In the session, I provided them with accurate information about their college plans and, if needed, I walked the participant to the College and Career Center to introduce her/him to a college advisor. The goal was for the student to receive support with their decision-making processes.

For the second interview, I contacted only the Latina/o participants to gain insight about their transition to college. I called participants, sent a text message, and/or sent an e-mail message to select a date and time for the interview. Although 40 participants responded, I was able to interview only 37 due to a limitation of time. In the second interview, I reviewed the concepts examined in the first interview, including the previous experiences with schooling, how students established college aspirations, and who supported students with the college search and application process. The second interview emphasized how the student participant chose a college and experienced the transition and integration into college. The second interview lasted at least an hour and was held in a time and place selected by the participant. Generally, the interview occurred in a coffee shop, library, or the participant’s home. The second interview, allowed me to connect the experiences during the college choice process at AHS with the transitions to college.

After the second interview, I asked the participants if they would like my advice about college. All of the participants accepted the offer for college advice. During the college advising session, I spent anywhere from 10 minutes to four hours providing the participants with college guidance information. The participants who required more information were those not in
four-year colleges. After providing college advice, if a scholarship opportunity arose, I would send the scholarship information to participants. If participants contacted me with additional questions, I answered their question, provided them with advice, and/or referred them to resources. My professional training and experience as a college advisor allowed me to support the participants. Overall, the participants were grateful for the information that I provided.

**Administrator and Practitioner Interviews**

I also conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 practitioners and three administrators. As Figure 4 depicts, practitioner interviews included three college advisers and seven teachers who supported college-going efforts. In addition, I interviewed three support staff and one full-time counselor. Finally, I interviewed three high school administrators, including the principal and two vice principals. I conducted informal follow-up interviews with participants to address issues that surfaced during observations. The participants were selected based on their active involvement and participation in building a college-going culture. The purpose of the interviews was to understand the ideologies, policies, and practices of college-going efforts. Ten of the 17 participants identified as Latina/o.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 4. Administrators and practitioner interview participants*

**Observations**

Finally, I observed college-going activities at least once a week to understand how teachers, college advisers, and other educators developed a college-going climate. Observations
included school-wide events, classroom workshops, and individual meetings with college advisors. Observations were guided by a protocol that combined the nine principles of a college-going culture and Kovan (2009). During observations, I was concerned with the type of information given to students and how students responded to the information.

**Limitations of Research Design**

A limitation of the research design included in the examination of only one high school site. However, the majority of Latina/o students attend highly segregated and under-resourced high schools, similar to AHS and this study presents an in-depth understanding of such contexts (Orfield & Lee, 2007, Rogers et al., 2011). Therefore, AHS represented an ideal site to examine how individual and organizational factors were used to promote college preparation in similar contexts through policy briefs. A second limitation included a case study design not being sufficient to build theory (Diaz Andrade, 2009). To address this, I used grounded theory and a strong theoretical foundation to build theory from findings (Yin, 2009). Thus, the data analysis resulted in theoretical frameworks to understand the college-choice of low-income Latinas/os.

**Data Analysis**

This section details the data analysis process I used to develop the findings. Data analysis for this dissertation entailed the use of triangulation to analyze the multiple sources of data. This section explains the use of contextualizing strategies and theoretical memos as part of the triangulation process. Finally, this section describes the use of inductive data analysis to examine structural forces and the interrelationships of variables.

Cohen and Manion (1986) explain that the triangulation of data attempts “to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more

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5 McClafferty, McDonough, and Nunez, 2002
than one standpoint” (p. 254). In other words, triangulation allows for an in-depth understanding of a topic by viewing multiple perspectives. Considering that the college choice process has proven to be a rather complex topic, I found it essential to use multiple methods and to triangulate the resulting data. The student and educator interviews, and the field notes written during college-going observations were triangulated to examine the organizational level of college-going efforts and the individual level of students experiencing the college-going context.

In order to examine the complexity of the college choice process, I also utilized contextualizing strategies to triangulate the data. Maxwell (1996) explains that contextualizing strategies attempt to “understand the data in context, using methods to identify the relationship among different elements of text” (Maxwell, 1996). I used theoretical memos to identify and clarify the relationships between each data category. Glasser notes that, "memos are the theorizing write-up of ideas about substantive codes and their theoretically coded relationships as they emerge” (Glasser, 1998, p. 177). After observations and interviews, I wrote theoretical memos to triangulate the data and examine the relationships between the data.

Since this study was guided by grounded theory and critical race grounded theory, I utilized an inductive data analysis process but I also considered how larger structural phenomena shaped the data (Malagon et al., 2009). This occurred while utilizing the three stages of coding used in grounded theory: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). In the first stage of open coding, I selected and named the categories present when analyzing the data. In the second stage—axial coding—I made connections between categories, while considering institutional processes. In the third stage of selective coding, I identified core categories to answer the research questions. Data analysis was an iterative process and occurred throughout the study until the completion of data collection. The first round of coding occurred
prior to collecting the student interviews, the second occurred after collecting the student interviews, and the third upon collecting all interviews. In the third round, I also aligned findings with relevant theories, such as Anzaldúa’s (2002) concept of conocimiento.

Summary of Chapter Three

Chapter Three detailed how critical race theory in education, school culture, and college-choice organizational habitus guided this dissertation. Grounded theory and critical race grounded theory were introduced as qualitative case study design, methodologies to conduct data collection and analysis. The chapter also outlined the study participants and methods. Finally, the data analysis plan of triangulating data through an inductive coding process was presented.
CHAPTER FOUR
STRUCTURE, CULTURE, AND CLIMATES OF ACADEMIES HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Chapter Four addresses the first research question: What is the structure and culture of Academies High School (AHS)? Chapter Four defines the AHS school culture of continuous change, instability and marginalization. I then elaborate four climates within the AHS culture: high aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance and control. I also highlight the improvements that occurred from 2008 to 2013 in college readiness and college admission rates of AHS. Using a CRT lens, I focus the discussion section on comparing the AHS school culture and climates to previous literature that examines the New Jim Crow, policing of youth in schools, and perpetual lack of resources available to schools that serve Students of Color.

Culture of Continuous Change, Instability, and Marginalization

Data analysis revealed that the culture of AHS is one of instability, change, and marginalization. Historically, district policies and funding structures generate constant changes, which do not allow improvements to be sustainable. The school and district often depend on grants outside of state funding. Moreover, the amount and type of funding offered by the state to the district and the district to the school differ year-after-year. The volatile funding resulted in systemic changes. The culture of marginalization and instability was also shaped by the AHS teacher salary scale being extremely low compared to other school districts in California, considering the high costs of living in the area. This encouraged teachers to find better-paying positions in other districts. Finally, administrators and lead teachers also had a high turnover rate, which contributed to a culture of instability. The following section provides data to establish the culture of continuous change, instability, and marginalization.
When I interviewed teachers and administrators, I asked for their perspective on the school culture. A group of teachers and administrators responded with “the culture is improving,” which did not provide much information. On the other hand, when interviewing Ms. Muñoz, she exclaimed, “We have no culture” and then critiqued various climates at AHS. Data analysis revealed that teachers, administrators, and students often reference the continual changes that occur at AHS—regardless if interpreted as negative or positive.

Ms. Noguera, who had been an AHS teacher for seven years, discussed an example of the constant change:

When I first came, we had just entered the house system—like a mini-academy. Then we got linked up with the academies, we have been through five principals, and now we are on the next one. We had one year that was a bad year—really horrible—all the teachers left because the teachers could not take the climate among the teachers. It seems like there is always a transition…In the school system, that’s the biggest problem; there is no sustainability.

Ms. Noguera recalled that within her years at AHS, she experienced two different organizational systems: academic houses and career academies. In addition, within approximately eight years, the school had five different principals and numerous vice-principals. Ms. Noguera associated the constant changes and lack of administrative support resulting in several “good” teachers transferring out of AHS. As a result of the high turnover rates, the efforts by AHS educators to improve student academic outcomes were not sustainable. For example, at the beginning of my data collection, one of the vice-principals was new. After completing observations, the principal and the senior vice principal relocated to different positions within the district.
Mr. Rivas supported the arguments made by Ms. Noguera and provided further insight, which would likely signify more changes in the following year. He noted,

Supposedly there’s money that’s sun setting (in the district), originally there were millions of dollars set aside for 18 academy programs, now it’s being cut to about $300,000. So it’s enough to fund only 5 academies…Change everywhere—and it’s due to the funding. We don’t know if we’re going to get more grants or if there’s a government initiative…What they are making us do, is there are eight or 10 different criteria that the district is giving us to look at. We have to work on and evaluate by next December and from there we will see who needs to go and who can stay.

Mr. Rivas explained the cycle of organizational change due to the availability of funding. As he explained, the cut in funding would impact the academy programs at AHS. Thus, only two years after the Linked Learning career academy system officially began, it will now likely change due to a shift in funds. Moreover, the administrators and teachers are not sure if more funding will enter the school district prior to evaluation and deciding what career academies to eliminate. Regardless, Mr. Rivas noted that change is imminent.

According to the teacher participants, a lack of adequate funding resulted in low teaching salaries, which was a key problem in keeping teachers and contributed to the culture. Ms. Noguera noted, “I can count ten teachers that have been here since I’ve been here, everybody leaves.” She continued to explain that she remained in the school only because of her commitment to the students. However, with increasing household expenses, she considered if it was time to transition. She argued, “The only reason I would leave is for money, we don’t get paid well for this area.” In 2013, the average high school teacher in California made $69,435 (Sacramento Bee Data Center, 2014). The average salary for a teacher within the school district
in 2013 was $57,253 (Sacramento Bee Data Center, 2014). On the other hand, one hour away, teachers in the highest-paying California district on average made $103,172 a year (Sacramento Bee Data Center, 2014). The AHS school district average teacher pay ranked 671 out of 832 California school districts that shared data publicly, regardless of size (Sacramento Bee Data Center, 2013). In total, six of the seven teachers interviewed noted the low-paying salary scales at AHS.

Interview data from Ms. Muñoz, Mr. Rivas, Ms. Noguera, and Ms. Ochoa revealed the inconsistency and marginalization of the district, school, and the individuals within the school. In doing so, teacher interview data reframed the deficit perspective about AHS and blamed structural policies for low academic student outcomes. Given the constant changes and inability to maintain consistent staff, Mr. Rivas argued that dysfunction stemmed from the school and district level, not from the students:

The school is dysfunctional, it’s not the students, it’s the school, it’s the district…I know businesses and education shouldn’t mix but at the organizational levels, we need some help… We are not appreciated as much as we should be…We don’t have time to build relationships and administrators don’t know how to do that—and the district—doesn’t seem like it can happen…Communication is key and some administrators don’t know how to deal with that…With the type of work we are doing, you definitely cannot have turnover or need teachers who are willing to work in this system, who are flexible, innovative, and willing to learn and work with each other.

Mr. Rivas highlighted the lack of communication, appreciation, and essential skills, which educational leaders lacked in the district and AHS. The high turnover rate in administrators and teachers resulted in a lack of adequate and consistent leadership. Moreover, Mr. Rivas argued
that AHS needed teachers who were innovative, flexible, cooperative, and open to learning. However, without the appropriate administrators at the district and school-level, it was difficult to create that supported teachers who would be willing to stay and invest in AHS.

Teacher participants also argued that teachers had to cope with the implications of the mismanagement of AHS and district administrators. Mr. Rivas explained,

What happens is that with the type of work that we are doing—academies, Linked Learning pathways system—you definitely cannot have turnover or at the least you need teachers that know how to work in the system. Being an academy teacher requires that you go above and beyond that you integrate your styles and work with others. We have veteran teachers who don’t adapt.

Mr. Rivas revealed that as a teacher in AHS, he has adapted to the changes in organization from houses to academies. However, he noted that teacher and administrator turnover represented an obstacle to allow any “solution to result in improved outcomes. Moreover, he explained that having teachers who did not care about the students represented a limitation when reorganizing the school or implementing attempted improvements. When administrators decided to change the school organization, due to the availability of funding, teachers, such as Mr. Rivas, who were willing to invest time and adapt, took on the brunt of the work.

While Mr. Rivas argued the need for veteran teachers to be flexible, Ms. Noguera provided a detailed critique of newly hired Teach for America teachers at AHS. She explained, “The TFA (Teach for America) teachers, even if we teach them, they take the skills. The teachers who are really good and leave, go on to admin. Then we have to do it again…You have to have a strong team at all levels, it’s imperative.” Thus, by using the TFA program as an avenue to save funds, in the end, the TFA program contributed to the culture of continuous
change, instability, and marginalization. In addition, more veteran teachers at AHS were overburdened by supporting new TFA teachers who, within two years, often left and took the developed skills. Mr. Rivas argued for the need to have strong administration teams within AHS and at the district level but also a strong team of “really good” teachers.

As a result funding, constant changes, and high turnover rates, Mr. Rivas argued: “The kids are marginalized, so is the district, so is the school, so are the teachers.” Thus, by providing AHS with inadequate funding and implementing organizational innovative reorganization of the school, the California Department of Education and the school district use policies and funding structures to marginalize the students, the teachers, the school, and the district. Mr. Rivas argued that the funding structures and the culture of marginalization would likely remain. However, he emphasized: “If we are going to work with this model, we need non-traditional type of teachers who know how to work within the system…one person cant do it all, and we need to take ownership.” Mr. Rivas highlighted the need for quality educators to stay in AHS, in order to create success within the existing culture of marginalization. Ensuring that the staff was prepared and willing to invest in the school and students would contrast the culture of instability and produce a culture of success within the marginalization efforts. However, several climates and sub-climates existed within the culture of marginalization, change and instability. The following sections will discuss how some of the teachers created climates that countered the culture of marginalization.

As can be seen in Figure 5, the school culture of AHS entailed at least four climates: high-aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance and control. The college-going climate was composed of two sub-climates one was geared towards increasing four-year college-going and the other focused on providing vocational postsecondary pathways. As can be
seen by the overlapping circles, depending on the space a student occupies, she may experience multiple climates at once or throughout the day. The following sections define the four climates.

Figure 5. Four climates of AHS: high aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance and control

Climates of High Aspirations

Data analysis revealed climates of high aspirations existed in various spaces within AHS, including in classrooms. Climates of high aspirations focused on motivating students to pursue a postsecondary education. In order to support students in the quest for higher education, teachers integrated college-going materials into coursework and provided a space for students to explore college within the class. The following section provides an overview of the teacher ideologies, which resulted in high aspirations. A representation of teachers maintaining high aspirations was the college-going efforts, which will be highlighted through the pedagogical approaches.
Ms. Murillo was the teacher participant who shaped her curriculum to build a college-going climate. She explained her decision:

Last year I stuck to a teacher’s curriculum, we did it by units, and the CSTs. This year I remember I was like, “What do I do?” I had a mentor, Ms. Greedley, she was like, “Cover your standards but teach what you feel is important.” And I just got a spark in me and right off the bat I was like, “I want them to do college kits”—which is not in the standards at all. Which is so ironic, weird, and stupid, in my opinion, if that’s where they want to take them. There should be a college class, I wish I could just teach about college, we could apply and do personal statements and resumes, instead of having to do that in English. I wish we could just do a college class and you could learn about college and have speakers come, and learn about GPA requirements, that would be beautiful, if we had an advisory period where it was just college stuff—that would get the kids on track…I geared the college kit to what the standards were supposed to cover.

During her first year as a teacher at AHS, Ms. Murillo was following a supervising teacher’s curriculum. However, during her second year, she had the freedom to design her own curriculum. Ms. Murillo’s ideology of having high aspirations and expectations for students became evident given her decision to embed college-going into the course curriculum. Ms. Murillo did not question the abilities of students or whether students would be interested in college. Instead, she believed that they would benefit from attending college and invested time and resources into learning college requirements and aligning a college kit with course standards.

Ms. Ochoa also maintained high aspirations for her students, as indicated by her focus on college-going preparation within her courses. However, when addressing why she focused on
talking about college, Ms. Ochoa referred to other Latina/o teachers at AHS who also maintained high aspirations and explained:

Because we are Latino, I talk up college and the importance of going to college. I know, for me, there was nobody around to tell me, “This is how you do it. This is how you apply”…My parents always pushed school even though they didn’t know how to get there…I was one of the first ones in my family to go so there was no one to turn to…so you have to tell them because you know. Maybe if I came from the background where everybody knew about college I might assume they all know…We double-time and emphasize it more because we know how important it is for them.

Ms. Ochoa did not hesitate when responding and immediately connected her own social identities with the students. She identified as a Latina who was the first in her family to pursue a college degree and lacked guidance during high school. Thus, she used her intuition to establish a climate of high aspirations for students and also take every opportunity available to talk about college in her classroom. Ms. Ochoa emphasized that she had insight into the context of parents and students valuing education but lacking information to support postsecondary pathways. With that knowledge, she did not have a deficit perception, like other teachers who do not talk about college in the classroom. Ms. Ochoa concluded her response by explaining that she, along with other Latina/o teachers in the academy, emphasized college aspirations and information in order to compensate for the lack of support students might experience in other spaces.

Similarly, Mr. Rivas revealed his high aspirations for students, which influenced the level of commitment he had to build a climate of high aspirations in his classroom. He noted,

You just have to build a relationship with them…make it engaging…I want them to become engineers. I want them to be successful. I want them to be productive. I want
my kid to grow up with good bosses—that’s what I always tell them, “Be a good boss to
my son; I want my son to work for you someday.”

Mr. Rivas revealed his ideology of high aspirations and his belief in the potential of students to
succeed academically. He explained that he aimed to make the course material engaging and
establish relationships of trust with students. He did not view students in deficit perspective but
instead set high expectations for them to become leaders in the field of engineering.

However, Ms. Noguera and Mr. Rivas argued all AHS educators to maintain high
aspirations. They each recalled an incident when an educator with low expectations disturbed
the climate of high aspirations established in class. Mr. Rivas explained,

One of our kids came in with the counselor and the counselor was like, “I heard that this
kid is trying to apply to college? I don’t know what’s going on, what are you telling the
students?”—In front of the whole class. I stepped outside and he was like, “You know, a
lot of these kids go to college and drop out, they are in debt, and lose confidence! I don’t
understand why you think this student has the potential.” He had like a 2.7 GPA, he was
qualified to go to state—that was his goal. He had an IEP, so if he carries the IEP though
college, he can get help there. We made sure everybody could apply; we didn’t just have
anybody apply. But you have to have some belief in these kids. His approach was they
are going to mess up. My approach was “Let’s be optimistic, at least we can try.” I
understand his point about failing because I went through that. I think these kids have
that fight or flight, they don’t flight. They have a lot of perseverance, they can adapt to
any situation, that’s something that most of these kids develop growing up in the city, I
wish I had the research and data to back that up…That’s why I have faith that they can be
successful. Some people don’t see it that way, but I do, maybe that’s why we help the kids go to college.

Mr. Rivas and Ms. Noguera reviewed student transcripts to ensure that those who qualified for CSU and UC admission completed the application process. Once an academic counselor learned about Mr. Rivas helping a student apply to CSU campuses, he confronted the teacher in front of a classroom of students. The counselor argued that AHS students were not academically prepared to enter college, which often resulted in students withdrawing from college with loan debt. The counselor engaged in a deficit perspective of students and did not believe that the particular student would succeed in college—despite meeting CSU admission requirements. The counselor perceived students with a deficit ideology and academically unprepared to complete a four-year college degree. In contrast, Mr. Rivas elaborated his high aspiration ideologies and argued that students possessed strengths. He elaborated on his faith in students having the abilities and skills to succeed in college and focused on providing students with an opportunity to pursue a college education. This particular exemplar provided insight into how climates trespass spaces and that individuals ideologies shaped climates.

**Summarizing a Climate of High Aspirations**

Some teacher participants fostered climates of high aspirations established by personal ideologies, which focused on the strengths of students. Teachers who created climates of high aspirations worked to align course standards with college preparation and were willing to invest additional time and resources due to their commitment to students. In particular, the participants attributed the focus on a strength-based approach to sharing backgrounds similar to the AHS students. As a result of high aspirations, teachers and college-going agents also developed a college-going climate, which is depicted in the following section.
College-Going Climate

An additional AHS climate emphasized college-going efforts. To avoid repetition, I only provide a brief overview of the AHS college-going climate and the college-going outcomes but I elaborate on the college-going climate in Chapter Five by answering the second research question (How do policies and practices in Academies High School situate the college-going climate within the larger school culture?). The AHS college-going climate aimed to establish and support postsecondary aspirations for all students. Educator participants who developed a college-going climate at AHS included the director of the College and Career Center, teachers, college advisors, and counselors. During data collection, the tools used to build a college-going climate, included: the College and Career Center, workshops, class curriculum, individual college advising, college visits, and career and college preparation internships. As Chapter Five will reveal, the college-going climate in the school was not distributed evenly among all students. Instead, AHS maintained college-going sub-climates consisting of four-year college-going and vocational college-going. The educator participants tapped into personal ideologies of high aspirations and/or low expectations to shape the sub-climate. The educator participants with high aspirations focused on building a four-year college-going sub-climate, while those with low expectations contributed to a vocational college-going sub-climate.

Outcomes of College-Going Climates

In this section, I provide more information about the college-going outcomes as guided by some of the National College Access Network’s Common Measures for College Access. The college-going climate efforts contributed to a record number of AHS students registering for the four-year college admission exams and receiving admission offers to four-year colleges. Nevertheless, participation in Advanced Placement courses and exams remained low. The
section then provides quantitative data and student interview data to reveal the continual need for improvements in the AP Program at AHS. I then use data reported to the California Department of Education to provide an overview of the increase in SAT and ACT participation rates and in A-G coursework completions. The section concludes by providing a brief overview of the college admission and college-going plans.

**Participation in Advanced Placement.** During the interviews and observations, Ms. Jacobs, teachers, and other college advisors suggested that student participation in AP course increased over the last three years. However, data from the California Department of Education indicates otherwise. Nevertheless, the data does not distinguish between the exact number of students participating in A-G courses. Instead, the data only reports the AP participation defined by the total number of course spaces. Meaning, one student can represent four spaces, if s/he took AP Literature, math, biology, and U.S. history. As displayed in Figure 6, by the line with diamond markers, the data shows that in the 2004-2005 school year, the overall student participation in AP courses was at 830. From there, the participation rates dropped in the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. However, by 2007-2008, they began to increase and peaked by 2010-2011, with 843 spaces in AP course. By 2011-2012, the participation in AP courses decreased to 755 students.
Similarly, as depicted by the line with square markers in Figure 6, the participation of students taking AP exams follows a trend similar to the participation in AP courses. However, exam participation has increased, as shown by the decreased gap between the number of AP course participation and the number of AP test participation. Unfortunately, the preparation offered in AP courses does not align with the increase in test participation. The line with the triangle markers reveals that while 182 tests were taken in the 2011-2012 school year, only 58, or less than one third of tests taken, earned a score of three or above, which results in college credit. The increase in AP test participation rates could be attributed to a push by teachers and college advisors but the academic preparation, alluded to by June, continued to be a problem, represented by the low passing rates.

Data from student participants revealed two key improvements needed in the AHS AP program. They include increasing the number of AP courses and ensuring the consistency with
the teaching staff. Juan explained his experience with AP chemistry, which reflected the experiences of the participants who enrolled in the course. He recalled,

I took AP chemistry last year. It was interesting. I passed the class with straight Bs. The test (scoffs) was very difficult. Everyone had a difficult time because we had to transfer teachers because the teacher left in the middle of the school year…During the middle of the school year when she was absent for a month we had different subs. They didn’t teach, they just told us to do handouts. After a month we got a new teacher who teaches regular chemistry and AP physics…The test was very difficult everyone had a difficult time and it was very stressful.

As Juan noted, he and the other students did not have a teacher for a month in AP chemistry. The participants who stayed in the course felt ill prepared for the AP exam. However, the participants noted that about half of the class dropped the course and did not take the exam. Not having access to resources and a qualified long-term substitute hindered the quality of education that students received in the AP course.

Another example of the school lacking adequate resources for AP students occurred in the AP Literature and AP Economics courses. The Literature course was held in a computer lab without desks. During observations, I walked into the room and saw the lack of space for students and the inaccessibility for group work. Participants who attended the course argued that the computers were a distraction for them but that they were also useful when they had to write an essay.

In addition, there was a high demand for the AP economics course, which resulted in one large class and not enough desks. Vanessa explained how that affected her education:
We actually have two people that don’t get desks but some people don’t go to class so they get those desks but we are really crowded. That’s happened a couple of times when everyone is there. We have a table in the back that’s used for work but they usually sit there…it’s uncomfortable knowing that sometimes one of us will have to sit on the floor or stand…How am I supposed to learn?

Vanessa explained that too many students were enrolled in the AP course. As a result, not enough desks were available. Vanessa and the other participants who were part of the course recalled the random process for deciding who would not get a seat. Every month, different students would not have a guaranteed seat. Instead, they would hope for someone to be absent so that they could have a seat.

When discussing the lack of comfort without enough seats, Nydia critiqued the decision to fund surveillance measures as opposed to invest resources in AP courses. Nydia argued,

They wasted so much money on the cameras, on the gates. They haven’t wasted money on us, we have to buy our materials; teachers don’t have any materials or paper. Our seats, we don’t have enough seats in our classes. At the end of the day, people are standing up. They should have spent more money on us because at the end of the day, the school is not safe 100 percent.

Nydia argued that AHS administrators invested financial resources on surveillance mechanisms, as opposed to supporting academic preparation. She reasoned that the security measures do not guarantee a safe campus and the academic readiness of students was a better investment. Nydia’s comments connect the climate of surveillance and the college-going climate. By choosing to invest funds in security measures, the school administrators sent a message about
priorities and expectations. Administrators expect the need to reprimand student actions through security measures but do not expect students to benefit from a quality schooling experience.

**College readiness.** This section examines the college readiness rates of AHS. I define college readiness as participating in college admission requirements, including: SAT, ACT, and A-G course completion. As Figure 7 indicates, A-G course completion rates improved over the last eight years and remain consistent since the 2008-2009 school year. In 2011-2012, 39 percent of those graduating from AHS completed an A-G curriculum, compared to the state average of 37 percent. In addition, the percentage of graduates taking the SAT increased from 28 percent in 2004-2005 to 44 percent in 2011-2012. While in California, the percentage of high school graduates taking the SAT exam increased slightly from 38 percent to 39 percent. Similarly, the percentage of graduates taking the ACT increased from eight percent to 31 percent in 2011-2012. On the other hand, the California state average increased from 10 percent to 18 percent in the same years. For both tests, AHS students are above state averages.

*Figure 7. Percentage rates of AHS student participation in A-G course completion, 2004-2012*
During her interview, the director of the College and Career Center argued that the number of students taking the SAT exam increased because she had to request fee waivers multiple times. She recalled,

My first year, I kept running out of SAT fee waivers because they only would send us 40 at a time. Then I went over on our allotment, when you go over your allotment that College Board determines you will probably need. You have to answer a series of questions so you can get approved for more. Every time, you need to answer the questions. You would think they save your answers…I found out the year before I took over was the reason we had a small allotment, only 40-45 kids registered with our fee waiver number…So we have doubled that…Now they send us 100 to kick off the school year. We already went through all of them and we requested more.

Ms. Jacobs noted the low request for SAT fee waivers during the 2010-2011. Although 76 students took the SAT that year, it is likely that a large number of those students obtained SAT fee waivers from the UC outreach program that stopped collaborating with AHS. Therefore, Ms. Jacobs had to explain to the College Board why she required more fee waivers as part of her questionnaire every time she requested more fee waivers. She noted that the College Board was beginning to understand that AHS needed more fee waivers and by the 2012-2013 school year, the initial number of fee waivers sent to AHS had more than doubled.

Unfortunately, despite the increasing exam participation over the last three years in particular, the results of the tests reveal the lack of academic preparation of AHS students. On average, the last three years, AHS students scored 816 (out of a possible 1600) on the math and reading section, compared with the state average of 1010. The average ACT scores over the last three years was 16.93 (out of a possible score of 36), compared with a 21.82 score in the state
average. Thus, the results of the ACT and SAT exams reinforce the notion that AHS students are not being academically prepared to enter college.

When asked about their experiences with the SAT, the participants agreed that they did not feel academically prepared to do well on the exam. During the 2012-2013 school year, AHS implemented SAT study sessions. College students from the local UC campus would lead the study sessions. According to the participants, the session entailed practice problems and taking a proctored practice SAT exam but no evaluation of scores to understand how to improve. Although the majority of participants who attended the study sessions complained that the sessions were not helpful, Nydia attributed her experience in the sessions to increasing her SAT scores. She recalled,

The first time it was really difficult and then I started going to the SAT prep, it kind of prepared me but because I didn’t stay long enough in the class, I didn’t do as well as I expected. I remember that my first SAT was 480 for critical reading and went up to 510. The second was math and was 450 at the beginning but then went up to a 500. The writing was from 430 to a 500. I think it’s completely different from my classes.

Nydia explained that she took the SAT twice. The first time, she struggled and found it to be difficult. However, that motivated her to participate in the SAT preparation sessions until her next exam. She attended two SAT preparation sessions and by the second time she took the SAT, her score increased by 30 points in reading, 50 points in math, and 70 in writing. By the end of her SAT preparation sessions, her math and English scores were in-line with the state averages of 1010. Nevertheless, the participants explained that if they were in sports, they could not attend the after school or Saturday sessions due to practice and tournament commitments.
Regardless, the participants who did not attend the sessions or did not find them useful resorted to free resources to prepare for the SAT if they took it a second time.

In the end, the push for students to have the “drive,” as June argued, seemed apparent in the increased college readiness. Moreover, as Ms. Jacobs noted, the emphasis in a college-going climate of preparing students to apply to four-year colleges also contributed to the increase in SAT and SAT participation. Unfortunately, the academic preparation, based solely on the AP, SAT, and ACT scores, continued to lag behind the state averages.

**College-admission rates.** Regardless of the standardized exam scores, the four-year college application and admission rates reached the highest in the history of the school, according to the administrators. During the 2012-2013 school year, 42% of AHS seniors were admitted to four-year colleges (AHS College and Career Center, survey data). Moreover, 49 percent of AHS seniors reported that they would enroll in some type of postsecondary education institution, either a community college or a private for-profit vocational college. Combined, 91 percent of students reported that they planned to enroll in a form of postsecondary education the following school year. Nevertheless, as Chapter Six reveals, the decision making process for the Latina/o participants was rather complex.

**Climate of Low Expectations**

In addition to AHS maintaining a climate of surveillance, interviews with administrators, students, and teachers revealed that the educator practices also nurtured climates of low expectations. In particular, after analyzing teacher and administrator interview data, I find that AHS had spaces of high academic aspirations and low expectations for the AHS students. Although four of the teachers who integrated college exposure to their students did not discuss deficit notions of low expectations, two teachers and two administrators expressed a discourse of
low expectations. This section details how deficit ideologies around academic, non-cognitive, and role models led some teacher and administrator participants to establish a climate of low expectations. I conclude the section by sharing interview data from the principal of AHS and his vision of eliminating low expectations.

**Viewing Students from a Deficit Perspective Contributes to Climate of Low Expectations**

Teachers and administrators with deficit ideologies contributed to climates of low expectations. During the interview, June engaged in a discourse of high aspirations and low expectations. June begins with a disclaimer of high aspirations for all graduates to enroll in four-year colleges and continues by noting their high postsecondary admission rates. When discussing the expectations of students, June explained:

> I would love to say that all our graduates go on to four-year colleges…About 40 percent were accepted to four-year colleges. All together, 91 percent reported that they will be in a postsecondary educational institution.

June begins by expressing the high aspiration of all students enrolling in four-year colleges. June is proud of having high college admission rates. June also boasts of having some of the highest four-year college admission rates in years.

However, June continued by noting that the majority of AHS graduates who enroll in college will not persist and will likely not complete a college degree. June argued,

> We know they wont all stay…I want them to be able to have the skills to finish what they start. Almost none of them have the academic skills but some have the drive to overcome the lack of skills. I think it’s unfortunate that they don’t necessarily have the skill.

Having taught AP and knowing that they weren’t the most academically inclined
kids…The academic part is the hardest part, I think we can push them to be driven and that’s the message that a lot of teachers give.

June emphasized the lack of academic skills present in AHS students will prove to be the greatest obstacle for students. Moreover, June argued that it was difficult to make up for previous limited educational experiences. June explains that teachers attempted to make up for limited academic skills by emphasizing non-cognitive skills, such as building the student’s drive and determination.

Although June argued that the academic skills of AHS students were the greatest downfall, June then explained that students who possess the academic skills, lack the drive to succeed. June’s experiences with AP students influenced the rationale behind the arguments.

Some of our brightest students, it’s always been easy for them and what happens is that they are some of the worst students because they have always gotten As and when they see a D on their paper they shut down because they’ve never had it. So it’s like getting the mental toughness of having to learn and having to try. I found that when I taught AP, the “C” student who would beg me to be in the class, would end up with an “A” or “B” and the “A” student would get a “C” because it was a difference in effort. As a school, we can prepare them for that, warn them, and try to up the rigor in the classrooms.

June argued that during experiences with academically high achieving AHS students, they often lacked the drive or non-cognitive mental determination to succeed when challenged academically. In the explanation, June countered the prior arguments that academic skills were the greatest downfall of AHS students. Instead, June concluded that AHS students need both academic rigor and academic drive. Thus, June predicted that the majority of AHS students
would not succeed in college and maintained low expectations based on deficit notions of individual student qualities.

Ethnographic notes reveal another example of culturally deficit beliefs shaping low expectations. After meeting Mr. Olson, the culturally deficit beliefs and low expectations maintained by some teachers became apparent in my ethnographic memo:

Meeting Mr. Olson was interesting…His “generational poverty” comment made me uncomfortable. He said that students coming from poverty do not have role models or mentors who talk to them about college. As a result, they do not understand why college or high school is important and valuable. Definitely a deficit mindset. Reminds me of Ruby Payne’s culture of poverty theory. He talked about how difficult it is to get through to kids from that background.

Mr. Olson, began teaching at AHS in the Teach For America program. During my first interaction with Mr. Olson, he was enthusiastic to hear that I was studying the college-going culture and college choices at AHS. Upon asking about my preliminary findings and learning that I was still not far enough in the study to have many findings, he proceeded to provide me with his understanding about the “problem” to increasing college enrollments. He explained his theory of “generational poverty” whereupon students from impoverished homes do not have role models who talk about the importance and value of a secondary or postsecondary education. Moreover, he explained that his biggest obstacle as a teacher was the lack of understanding from students in relation to valuing a college education.

During his interview, I asked Mr. Olson to discuss the biggest obstacles he experienced when attempting to create a college-going classroom environment. He explained:
The biggest limitation—the biggest detriment to college is mindset—generational poverty. Kids that have not seen anything but poverty, communicating that to them or communicating “come to school” when there is literally no one who can make them come—including their parents. Changing that mindset getting them to think outside of gangland, and out of the mindset of street culture is the hardest thing to do because you have to have an incredible amount of credibility with the student before they will take you seriously and that credibility is hard to gain.

Mr. Olson framed students as individuals who did not care about school because they lived in impoverished situations and did not understand the value of school. Mr. Olson emphasized that students maintain a gang member mentality and in order to break through that mentality, he needed to gain credibility. Nevertheless, he emphasized that students in his AP courses did not require much support around college-going efforts because they already understand the value of earning a college degree. Therefore, his “star students,” as he framed them, were likely not part of his biggest obstacle.

Mr. Olson’s deficit ideologies of students also translated into low expectations for parents. After asking him if he worked at all with parents, he explained:

It’s very difficult to bring parents into the mix…A lot of times the parents don’t know anything about school, especially from the migrant communities. They don’t know what an “A” is or an “F,” they were just told that the kids have to come here and graduate…A lot of victim mentality, somehow they see school as an oppressor. So parents are my least amount of contact, which is sad. I do try to call and that can be effective but it’s a challenge. It’s definitely different than a well-to do school where the parents won’t get
out of your business, I get very happy when the parents come here angry “Yay, yell at me, be involved somehow!”

Just as Mr. Olson framed students in a deficit lens, he also assumed that parents did not understand or value school. He continued to explain that parents view the school system as an “oppressor” and distrust institutions, which became a problem when he attempted to talk with parents. He concluded by contrasting AHS parents with wealthier parents who oversee every detail of a child’s education. However, Mr. Olson emphasized that his concern for AHS students. He explained that he remained teach at AHS only “for the students” because they were the only benefit to investing time and energy in teaching under such conditions. The following school year, Mr. Olson expected to relocate due to family responsibilities, adding to the AHS culture of continuous change and inconsistency.

Similarly, during her interview Ms. Claire, an AHS teacher, expressed notions of low aspirations and expectations that all AHS students could achieve a college degree. When asked what she aspired for students, she explained:

It would be great if everybody would get their bachelors, master’s, Ph.D.—whatever—but not everybody is cut out to do that. I feel confident that students are choosing a path that is realistic and will fit with what they want. Last year, of about 55 seniors in (our academy) we had 16 that went to the university and the rest of them went to a program, 20 of them went to the (local community college) and they go through (a program) as a cohort so that they can’t get lost and it is structured so their classes are three days a week so they can work…After a year, they get their security guard certificate and they all got hired, but they are continuing to get their associate’s and they can apply to the police
academy or transfer to a four-year university...they can do whatever they want from there. That program is helping bridge the gap between high school and college.

Ms. Claire began by revealing her low expectations that it was not realistic for all AHS students to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher. She explained that for AHS graduates, it was considered a success if they completed a certificate or associate’s degree. Ms. Claire’s comments reveal the continued paternalistic connection that participants recalled when connecting the climate of surveillance and control with preparing for college. When discussing the climate of surveillance and control, the student participants argued that AHS was not preparing them to navigate college due to the high-structured nature of the school. Ms. Claire’s response and solution to students not knowing how to navigate college was to bridge them into a structured course that would allow for “hand-holding.”

During the beginning of her interview, Ms. Claire noted that she had a vision for the academy in which she taught. Upon concluding the interview, I asked her to elaborate on that vision. She explained,

The end result would be that they go out with dedication to their community (tearing up)…that they have a sense of direction and ethics, and civic duty, it doesn’t have to be that they go into (the academy field) but I want them in a skilled job—any post-high school training or college (tearing up and interrupted by bell).

Ms. Claire followed-up on her opening argument that “not everybody is cut out” to pursue college by explaining that she hoped all students would access “any post-high school training or college.” Her goal was for students to have a “skilled job,” which may be interpreted as a vocational job if students did not graduate from college. Moreover, Ms. Claire contributed to the climate of low expectations by not expecting students to attend college. Thus, she did not
represent a teacher who pushed all students to bridge high aspirations with high expectations, especially if she deemed the student as “not cut out” to attend college.

**Student Participant Experiences with Low Expectations**

Generally, the student participants reinforced the notions expressed by administrators and teachers. One of the participants explained that teachers “Want us all to succeed.” The participants differentiated between some teachers “not caring” and other teachers having high aspirations for students to attend college. Most participants argued that teacher aspirations and expectations “depend on the student.” Overall, the participants believed that their English teachers hoped they would succeed in college. As Chapter Six will elaborate, the participants also maintained high aspirations and low expectations for their own academic future. Thus, although they hoped to earn a bachelor degree, they questioned whether it was possible.

When I asked Ms. Muñoz to explain her biggest obstacle in attempting to increase college-going efforts, she emphasized the potential connection between having low expectations resulting in students having low academic confidence. She argued,

> The hardest thing is to have confidence. They feel stupid. Somebody has told them that they are dumb. “We don’t do anything in that class, we don’t learn anything. We’re stupid.” I feel like it’s a mentality that they don’t know anything, they are know-it-alls and they don’t feel confident…So we talk about that in our Socratic seminars.”

While teachers with low expectations explained the need to lower academic rigor, Ms. Muñoz argued that the academic low expectations displayed by not “doing” or “learn(ing) anything” in courses resulted in students having low academic confidence. She explained that when sharing an assignment with students, they immediately question their ability to meet the task because they had been told in prior academic spaces that they could not meet academic standards.
Instead of ignoring or blaming students, Ms. Muñoz addressed the student fears by engaging in discussions to reflect on the idea of students lacking academic confidence.

Moreover, the climate of high aspirations and low expectations was also reflected in the college-going climate. As the college-going climate section will show, participants were presented with the option to apply to four-year colleges or prepare for a vocational pathway. Although the educator interview data reveal that they have high aspirations for students, the resources in the college-going climate were limited. Thus, although participants heard about the importance of a four-year college degree, they did not feel that they received concrete support to prepare for college success—meaning resources were not invested in bridging the college aspirations with a college reality.

**Summary of the AHS Climate of Low Expectations**

This section provided an overview of the climate of low expectations at AHS. Although not every teacher participant maintained low expectations, half did, which established that some spaces within AHS produced such a climate. In this section, I explained how deficit ideologies around academic, non-cognitive, and a lack of role models led some teacher and administrator participants to establish a climate of low expectations. As I demonstrate in the next section, the climate of low expectations with the climate of surveillance and control.

**Climate of Surveillance and Control**

I define the climate of surveillance and control as high levels of security and regulations that aimed to control student behavior and maintain student safety. Administrator and teacher participants argued that incidents of violence on school grounds led to an increasing presence of surveillance and control. Findings revealed that security measures, enacted through funding, disciplinary regulations, and allocation of space, resulted in a climate of surveillance and control.
The climate was primarily a result of five security measures—rooted in paternalistic policies, structures, and practices.

The first measure of surveillance entailed the implementation and use of tall fences within and outside of AHS. The second was the funding and use of police officers from the city of Monte Rico. The third consisted of security guards, who focused on ensuring that students entered class. The fourth element included the surveillance cameras throughout the campus, which were not monitored but recorded 24 hours a day. The fifth element was the limitation of accessing AHS spaces, such as the soccer field. In this section, I describe how the restrictive practices created the climate of surveillance and control. Instead of listing the elements, I explain how students, teachers, and administrators perceived and experienced the climate of surveillance and control.

As one of the administrators, Ms. Smith was responsible for the security of the school, including the police officers, security guards, as well as surveillance and disciplinary actions. Ms. Smith was proud of the reduced incidents of violence occurring in the high school. She argued that a strong security plan contributed to the improvements in overall academic outcomes.

Ms. Smith recalled the environment of the school prior to the high security levels and explained, “I remember years where the beginning of the school very much marked a lot of ‘marking your turf’ and a lot of violence that was gang related. One fight meant that there would be more and more fights.” Mr. Olson reiterated Ms. Smith’s recollection of student fights being common incidents. Ms. Smith continued,

That really does not happen now. The culture has now shifted to be more academic.

There are a lot of factors to that, a lot of it is a push from leadership saying we are going to tell kids to go college, part of is having peacekeepers on campus, part of it is at that
time we didn’t have the security cameras so kids could fight and run and there wasn’t a feeling that they would get caught.

Ms. Smith argued that various elements contributed to reducing the violence in AHS. However, she did not attribute the increase in safety solely to security measures. Instead, Ms. Smith highlighted the importance of teachers discussing college. Moreover, she contributed a decrease in fights due to establishing alternative disciplinary measures, such as the peacekeepers program.

Ms. Smith emphasized an increase in security measures. More specifically, she framed the fence and security cameras as a preventative measure:

In terms of safety, having a fence and security cameras, so kids couldn’t fight and run, so having security and having the cameras has changed the whole attitude in a positive way. I know it can feel “big brother” but the kids want to feel safe, so it changed the focus from trying to find the kids who cause problems—which has always been a minority—to being able to find them, address the issue, and move on…We will never get to a time when we don’t need the cameras. I think their presence is preventative and people do not realize how preventative it is.

Ms. Smith emphasized that the security measures, such as a black iron gate that blocks the entrance/exit to the main school hallway, had positive implications to improve the academic outcomes of students. Furthermore, she attributed the reduction in fights on school grounds to having cameras throughout the campus because students knew they could no longer hide.

During her interview, she countered the “big brother” argument by explaining that the cameras often served to find items left behind on a bench. Ms. Smith justified the need for cameras and other security measures—regardless of a reduction in violence or disciplinary problems. The
ideology enacted in the argument that AHS would always need security measures exposed a deficit notion of students being incapable of self-discipline and self-control.

**Perceptions and Experiences within the Climate of Surveillance and Control**

Although two students and one teacher embraced the levels of security and deemed them necessary to maintain school safety, the majority of participants critiqued the climate of surveillance and control. This section provides an overview of the perceptions and experiences of teachers and students with the climate of surveillance and control at AHS. First, I share the perspective of Martinez, a teacher at AHS, who critiqued the surveillance and control climate directly. Then, I detail the findings of how students perceived the climate. While 55 of the student participants critiqued the climate, for making them feel closed off from society and in jail, the majority of student participants recalled that they encountered negative incidents with campus security guards or police officers. Moreover, I share the experience of one out of five male participants who noted that either they or a close friend experienced altercations with the AHS police officers. Finally, I transition to examine how a climate of surveillance and control limited the college-going efforts.

Martinez, a teacher, spoke critically about the climate of surveillance. Martinez assessed how the climate of surveillance resulted in negative implications on the student experiences:

> It’s so ironic because the gates essentially lock people in. They try to get all the kids in the school and they don’t want them to leave, which only makes people want to leave. Then they shut the lights and lock the gates…Lock-up and lock-down is not an approach that any school should take. I lock you in all day and then I lock you out. Because the kids feel like I’m required to be here and then I’m disposed of…“We used you, we got

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6 I will not provide details about this participant’s gender, academy, or teaching subject to address privacy concerns, given the critiques offered.
what we needed out of you. Okay we can put this on our records, now leave.” They feel that disposal—they feel that culture.

In Martinez’s perspective, the security and surveillance measures, limited her ability to prepare students for college. She depicted how the security measures resulted in a hostile campus climate. Martinez argued that students felt locked-in and then cast out from campus through the use of gates, security guards, and police officers. During the interview, Martinez noted that students did not feel welcome to arrive early or stay after school and participate in college enrichment activities. The teacher explained that the efforts by security guards to push students out of school contradicted an academic community. Thus, the “lock-you-out” security approach, Martinez argued, served as a counter-effort to build a college-going student population.

During interviews, the student participants did not refer to feeling unwelcome in the school. When asked how they perceived AHS, the participants noted an alignment of the school’s practices with a jail. The following sections provide an overview of how the student participants perceived the high school climate of surveillance and control. Miguel’s in-depth reflection on the security measures at AHS, exemplified the feelings shared by the majority of participants. During his follow-up interview, Miguel reflected on his experiences at AHS:

I’m so puzzled as to why the school is still running—fenced off from society, no sunlight, which is bad for the human body, no windows, locked in, hundreds and hundreds of students packed into a tight school…I just look back at it, I remember it, but sometimes I wish I wouldn’t. We felt like animals. Some people would sit on the floor because there weren’t enough places to sit. We would sit in classes for hours and nobody wants to go back during lunch to go sit in the class. We wanted to be human and enjoy the sunlight, be outside but we couldn’t get much of that…Students of this day and age shouldn’t have
to suffer because of the past. I don’t think they should reflect the past upon the incoming students. They shouldn’t have to take all the bullshit the previous classes did. My graduating class was very calm…It was the biggest class to graduate like in the past 10 years. Teachers are connecting better with students but the place, the environment that’s around directly affects all the students, needs to change.

Miguel revealed the internalized effects of the restrictive practices and policies on the student experiences. He explained that the classrooms did not have window and the school was made of concrete, which created a dim and gloomy environment. In order to compensate for the lack of windows, Figure 8 displays the skylights that were present in the school. In addition, the school did not have enough space for students to sit down and eat at a table during lunch but they were not allowed to exit the school building. During my observations, I noted that every lunch period, students would sit in classrooms, on benches, which surrounded the lockers, on the floor against the wall and against the black gate, as seen in Figure 9. Similar to Ms. Smith, Miguel argued that teacher student engagement efforts have improved. However, Miguel revealed that he perceived the surveillance climate impacted his education negatively and argued that he and his
peers unjustifiably attended a restrictive school.

*Figure 8*. Ceiling skylight. Photo cropped and grayscale.

*Figure 9*. Students during lunch sitting against the black gate. Photograph cropped and grayscale.

In addition to the gates being an element in the surveillance climate, the participants explained that having police officers in AHS contributed to a feeling of being in a jail. During
his first interview, Jacob explained that he became accustomed to having police officers in his daily high school experiences,

I’m used to the cops now. At first I was like, “Man, am I in prison or what?!”…I mean, it’s understandable but it’s a school—not a prison. Look at all these cameras! Look at them! I didn’t even like school, so I didn’t care that they added security. I saw school like useless at the time.

Jacob did not recall the administration having a conversation with students about the need to implement the chosen security measures. Given that Jacob was disengaged from schooling, the increase in security measures reinforced the notion that school was not a place for learning. Although at first he felt like he was in prison, he became desensitized to the police presence and security measures. I realized that the cameras existed until Jacob pointed out the security cameras during his interview. As displayed by Figure 10, the cameras were located throughout campus, closer to the ceiling and not easily visible. Overall, every participant, regardless of GPA and/or college plans, expressed the comparison of AHS with a prison or jail, due to one of the five measures of surveillance.
All of the participants looked forward to experiencing more independence and freedom as college students. However, some of the participants noted that given the lack of independence in AHS, they would not know how to navigate the freedom in college. Moreover, findings revealed that the climate of surveillance and control affected students when preparing for college. Once in college, the participants expressed a feeling of gratitude for having a less-restrictive environment. During follow-up interviews, the participants resented the school for not preparing them to be independent college students.

Like the majority of participants, Jose noted that maintaining a climate of surveillance and control created a negative schooling experience for students and he looked forward to attending college. Jose explained,

This could have been a better school if we weren’t so locked in. We wouldn’t feel like we are stuck in a jail, monitored, cameras…We wouldn’t feel like we are stuck in a jail. Freshman year we didn’t even have gates, it was free…In college, you get more freedom, so it’s going to be awesome.
Jose emphasized the increasing security climate throughout his high school years. The result for students, he argued, was feeling “stuck” in a jail. He emphasized a feeling of being in a jail and suggested that the implemented measures should be reconsidered. Moreover, the sense of being in jail impeded the participants from aligning AHS as “awesome.” Instead, they dealt with feeling like AHS was a jail and looked forward to experiencing “freedom” in college.

With AHS, Madeline visited a UC campus. During her time at the UC campus, she reflected on the level of security that AHS had compared to college. She recalled:

We went to a UC. I was like, “I want to be here one day, I want to do this—I want to be a student here.” It was so peaceful. We didn’t see security guards walking by; it was just so peaceful and such a different environment—each place in its own way—It was really different from Monte Rico. It just gets you thinking how people grow up and how they are motivated and don’t need anybody to supervise them.

During her experience on a college campus, Madeline was able to envision herself on the UC campus. However, when she continued to reminisce about her experience on the campus, she focused on the lack of security guards and the peaceful environment. Madeline was struck by how a place can be peaceful, calm, and unmonitored. Madeline connected the idea of not having constant security with not needing security because students were motivated and did not need supervision. As opposed to AHS, where the assumption was that students lacked motivation and needed constant supervision.

Although Juan Pablo also described the experience of being an AHS student as aligning with feelings of being in jail, he also articulated how the climate would hinder him in college:

Here at Academies, it feels like a jail, they have us locked in here…I feel trapped. The first time I saw the gate…I remember that on the right they were having an assembly then
I look to the left and there’s a big black gate there. For a long time I thought this was a jail before it was a high school. There’s always structure here and if there is no structure, they think it’s not going to work. In college they give you more freedom so that’s going to be a tough transition. Here they tell you, “You have to do this, you have to do that,” and they give you all these type of rules. The guards they tell you, “Do this, do that” and you have to do it, there’s not much else you can do ‘cause they have the authority. My friends, we talk about it all the time but just talking shit about it. I think we talked about it once in Ms. Maciel’s (class) but I don’t even remember the conversation. I don’t think it happens in other high schools. I guess it happens here because we have a lot of bad kids, so they have to be strict, and we have to give them more structure, put them all in line. And the ones that aren’t even bad they have to go through the same thing so it’s like, “Why should we do it if we aren’t even bad?” There are some bad kids but once you get to know them they aren’t bad, I guess they are just trying to act tough.

Juan Pablo attributed the need for a climate of surveillance as an attempt to prevent student truancy. However, he continued to express his feelings of entrapment and perceiving the resemblance between AHS and jail. Moreover, Juan Pablo explained how he talked with his friends and that Ms. Maciel allowed students to reflect on the levels of security. Juan Pablo argued that it was not fair for students who were not “bad” to experience the jail climate.

In his concluding thoughts, Juan Pablo engaged in a critical perception of paternalistic surveillance practices by noting that no student is “bad.” He contradicted the arguments that students were “bad” and explained that despite deficit assumptions based on the student’s actions or appearances, no student was “bad.” Although he discussed the climate of surveillance with his peers and in classroom discussions, Juan Pablo did not have a direct avenue to voice his
concerns. Juan Pablo connected his experiences of continuous monitoring and a lack of independence, with his abilities to navigate college in the future. He argued that AHS students would experience difficulties transitioning into college because they did not gain the skills required to become independent students and manage their own academic futures. He questioned how he and others would know to navigate the freedom that college afforded if the AHS climate of surveillance and control prevented students from learning to be independent. Juan Pablo’s interview data revealed that the AHS climate of surveillance and control restricted students from taking ownership of their education. Instead, Juan Pablo explained, the security guards and rules dictated the lack of choices available to students.

Police officers from the city of Monte Rico patrolled AHS on a daily basis. Every day that I entered AHS for data collection, at least one police vehicle was parked on campus and in front of the school entrance. When I took the picture in Figure 11, several police officers were having a meeting, which is why four city police cars were parked on campus grounds. Although the majority of participants noted that the police presence increased the sense of imprisonment, the police presence was not physically harmful. On the other hand, five of the participants recalled that either they or a close friend had an altercation with police officers and/or security guards, which was unaddressed by administration. Javier recalled a negative experience he had with the police officers after school:

I can’t stand the cops…One day I was here for tutoring afterschool. I went across the street to buy snacks. The cop wouldn’t let me go outside. He said I couldn’t come back in if I left. I told him I was just going to buy a snack and be right back. Well, when I came back in, he wouldn’t let me in!...He slammed me into the locker…I had meetings with my mom and the principal, my mom wanted to press charges… the principal
convinced my mom that the cop would apologize to me and that we would not press charges…He’s still here! Walking around the school.

Javier explained how his college-going opportunities were impacted directly by being reprimanded physically by a police officer. As he tried to stay after school and benefit from tutoring, he was unable to walk across the street to buy snacks. After defying the authority of the police officer, he was physically assaulted. Furthermore, Javier was not the only participant who experienced or witnessed the same police officer harassing students. One participant had a similar experience of having to stand up for himself after being bullied by an officer and other participants spoke about witnessing the police officer slamming a student on the ground during school hours. Javier’s experience speaks to the “lock-up and lock-down” approach that Martinez noted earlier. Thus, the climate of surveillance and control countered the college-going efforts put forth by teachers and students.

Figure 11. City of Monte Rico police officer vehicles parked on the AHS campus. Cropped, city name and address blurred, and grayscale.

Reflections on AHS climate of surveillance and control after attending college.

Upon attending college, the participants confirmed their perceived notions of freedom that they
envisioned as high school students. In addition, some of the participants resented their schooling experiences at AHS for not preparing them to succeed in a “free” environment. Gina commented how attending a CSU differed from being in AHS:

It’s different. I was used to seeing the police so much, and right here, it’s more free, so it feels better. It feels more free with more freedom than in high school. As a freshman they didn’t have all that. In a way, I liked it better, but it was easier for people to get out.

Gina recalled the police presence at AHS and compared that to the invisible presence of police throughout the CSU campus. Although colleges and universities have police stations on campus, their presence is not blatant and the climate is not one of constant surveillance and monitoring. Gina could not elaborate why being on the CSU campus felt “better” but she was relieved to note the level of freedom in the CSU, compared to AHS. Gina recalled that as a freshman in AHS, the high levels of security were not as present and connected the increase in security with the need to decrease student truancy. She acknowledged that perhaps students were able to leave the high school but for those who chose to stay, AHS felt “better.”

During her follow-up interview, after completing her first quarter in community college, Anaís clarified how the restrictive climate of surveillance and control limited the possibility of success in college for students:

In Academies High School, it’s like they want us to grow up but we have to ask permission to go to the bathroom. So from them wanting us to grow up but having to ask permission, it’s difficult…The first two years, we didn’t have the gates but then we had no freedom, we didn’t really have a say in anything. They controlled us and they wanted us to do certain things. Then we graduate and have freedom and now it’s hard to do things. Like I said, in high school, you have to ask permission for everything. Then,
when you graduate, you have to do things for yourself. If we had done things differently, I would be more independent and know how to do things by myself. It’s harder now. I don’t know how to explain it.

Much like the other participants who attended AHS since ninth grade, Anaís explained that the school implemented tougher security measures throughout her high school years. Anaís recalled that as an AHS student she had to ask for permission before using the restroom. She contrasted the child-like experience of having to ask permission to use the restroom with the expectation of being an adult in college. Anaís compared the constant control that she and other students experienced while at AHS with the complete freedom that a community college provided. Anaís could not articulate why the restrictive policies and practices of AHS limited her ability to navigate college successfully. However, she blamed the restrictive AHS policies and practices for her lacking the skills necessary to succeed as an independent college student and she argued that the experiences hindered her college transition.

**Redesigning the AHS Climate of Surveillance and Control**

During the interview, Martinez reflected critically on the climate of surveillance. The teacher contended that students were not happy with the high levels of security measures and presented an alternative vision for AHS:

Part of a culture is having programs and breakfast provided in the morning…Create the culture—give them the honey, let them come. I feel like after school programs should be changed. The library should not be closed, the labs should be open, the lights should not be shut off, there should be flyers, “Please come to tutoring,” provide snacks, there should be a culture that they will feel welcome and this is where they want to be.
Martinez argued for AHS educators to build a “culture.” In the vision, Martinez alluded to school administrators taking the lead by establishing school programs before and after school. This would entail AHS being open and welcoming. She envisioned the school providing breakfast and tutoring, the library and computer services open, and the lights on—all of which would send a clear message that students were welcome. By establishing a welcoming space—such as that which Martinez called for—perhaps the participants would not perceive the school as a “jail” but instead refer to their time at AHS as being aligned with a college environment.

**Summary of AHS Climate of Surveillance and Control**

Although AHS administrators created a climate of surveillance and control to increase student safety and reduce truancy, student interview data revealed that the climate also limited the college-going experiences. For the participants, having to attend a school, where they felt restricted and monitored resulted in students feeling as if the climate at AHS was more like that in a jail, instead of a college. Finally, student data disclosed that experiencing a paternalistic environment during high school limited participant abilities to navigate “freedom” in college. The following section details the role of ideologies in designing AHS climates.

**Role of Educator Ideologies in Shaping Climates**

Given the four climates within AHS, it is important to note that the personal ideologies from administrators, teachers, and staff determined the climates. As seen in the low expectations and surveillance climates, culturally deficit perceptions framed how educators viewed AHS students. On the other hand, centering the strengths of students allowed educators to establish climates of high aspirations and college-going in order to support students. Mr. Fernandez, the Principal of AHS, expressed the significance of teachers having low expectations. He argued for the urgent need to replace low expectations with high expectations:
You have to believe it, they (teachers) have to believe that the kids can do it—that’s what we don’t have sometimes. We still have some teachers who don’t believe in our kids, *porque uno es de diferente color,* (because we are a different color) we cannot achieve.

We might have an accent but that doesn’t mean I cannot build a bridge. I think that’s one of the hardest things to do, changing the meaning system of the teachers but when I cannot make it, what I try to do is move them out of here, try to send the message…the new teachers we can mold our way…I want people who come from the community, people who see a Juan or Jose and they believe that that kid can learn…The key issue is people believing…Nobody has looked in their faces to tell them, “You can do it.” Or there was a teacher who told them, “I don’t think you can do it”…it’s the belief system.

Mr. Fernandez, argued that teachers had to believe in students’ abilities to achieve and succeed in college. He acknowledged that some teachers did not have high expectations for AHS students—some teachers did not believe in the students’ abilities to succeed academically.

Mr. Martinez, highlighted the issue of race, racism, and language abilities as possible reasons for teachers having deficit notions of students. He explained that changing a teacher’s ideologies is the most difficult thing for him to address. As a result, he hoped to replace the deficit teachers with new teachers and mold an ideology of high expectations. As principal of AHS, Mr. Martinez hoped to equip his school with teachers who see strengths in students, have high expectations, and believe in students. He hoped that teachers would reach out and support students by bridging high aspirations with expectations. Ultimately, Mr. Martinez supports the finding that personal ideologies shaped how educators perceived students and the actions taken to support or hinder students’ educational journeys.
Discussion and Conclusion

Previous studies establish the need to examine a school’s general culture as opposed to only the college-going culture (Brown & Rodríguez, 2008; Rodríguez, 2013). As explained earlier, various climates resulted from the culture at AHS. Four of the climates included: high aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance. Although the climates often overlapped and were experienced differently based on a participant’s identity, each had implications for college preparation. Without considering the school culture and climates, a portrait of the college-going climate would be inaccurate and incomplete. This dissertation applied the second and third tenet of CRTE using a social justice lens to challenge the notion that Students of Color policing. The permeation of deficit ideologies among administrators and teachers resulted in the climates of low expectations and surveillance.

Moreover, despite administrators framing career academies as a better option for students, the participants felt academically unprepared to enter college. Research finds that students who lack academic confidence are less likely to complete a college education (Bickerstaff, Barragna, Rucks-Ahida, 2012; Cech, Rubineau, Silbey, & Seron, 2011). Therefore, more efforts need to be made in order to address the sentiments of academic readiness. Administrators reinforced the notion of high aspirations and low expectations, which contributed to student participants having low expectations of their postsecondary success. As previous literature indicates, educators maintain low expectations of Latinas/os and referred them to community colleges (McDonough & Calderone, 2006). The combination of low academic preparation and low expectations, contributed to students feeling underprepared for college.
Theorizing Climate of Surveillance and Control as New Jim Crow in Education

Using CRTE, the findings of this dissertation challenge the deficit notion that police and measures of control are needed in urban high schools. While some administrator and teacher participants argued a need existed for high levels of security, the student participants noted that the climate of surveillance and control resulted in feeling like they were in jail. A review of the literature reveals that security guards and police officers became a solution to “high-crime” high schools (Brady, Balmer, & Phenyx, 2007). Although administrators and some teachers argued that the security measures resulted in a reduction in crime, studies find that the approach is ineffective in reducing crime and deterring truancies (Brady, et al., 2007). In addition, schools that serve predominately Students of Color are more likely to have strict security measures and harsher disciplinary policies (Hirschfield, 2008; Irwin, Davidson, & Hall-Sanchez, 2013; Payne & Welch, 2010; Wacquant, 2001; Welch & Payne, 2010, 2012). Finally, similar to the perceptions of student participants, previous studies find that students perceive the policing measures to be unnecessary and restrictive (Bracy, 2011). The participants’ perspectives reinforce the urgent need for administrators to consider how high surveillance measures impact the day-to-day schooling experiences of students.

AHS did not maintain an intrusive form of policing, such as metal detectors, but the physical environment contributed to the sentiment of being in prison and presented an obstacle for navigating college. Michelle Alexander (2010) established the concept of the New Jim Crow (NJC). Given my application of CRTE, the NJC is an essential point to consider. Alexander (2010) establishes that the NJC era uses mass incarceration to maintain a racial caste system, which serves the same purpose as pre-Civil War slavery and the post-Civil War Jim
Crow laws. Alexander defines racial caste as “a racial group locked into an inferior position by law and custom” (Alexander, 2010, p. 12).

Although Alexander centers the NJC on the mass incarceration, she alludes to the education system serving a role in the NJC through the “unequal educational opportunities these children are provided at a very early age coupled with the constant police surveillance they’re likely to encounter” (Sokolower, 2012). Alexander aligned the lack of educational opportunities coupled with the police surveillance in communities as a contribution to the NJC. However, in AHS, the participants not only encountered unequal educational opportunities, such as a lack of access to seats or a qualified teacher in AP courses, but also encountered the policing to which Alexander refers.

Moreover, the findings in Chapter Four elucidate how a climate of surveillance and control in AHS did not support the college aspirations of students. Instead, the climate served to push some participants out of college in the future by not equipping them with the appropriate skills required to navigate such an independent space. In addition, the participants noted how the restrictive climate impacted directly their ability to access schooling and resources. Therefore, I argue that a climate of surveillance and control exemplifies the NJC in the educational system. The argument of always needing surveillance mechanisms mirror’s Foucault’s notion of the panopticon. The panopticon means all seeing and represents a model of power. Foucault established that in modern societies power is represented in the panopticon. Foucault argues, “It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being always able to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection” (Foucault 1977: 187). In AHS, the surveillance cameras represented a panopticon. Other studies have established a connection between surveillance in schools and the panopticon (Azzarito 2009; Blackford 2004; Bushnell 2003; Perryman 2002,
Thus, the AHS methods of surveillance and control served to maintain a panopticon and prepare students for other controlled environments, not the freedom of college.

**Summary of Chapter Four Findings**

Since AHS lacked human and financial resources, the overall school culture of the school was one of change, instability, and marginalization. The strength-based ideologies of individual teachers allowed for other climates to emphasize high aspirations and college-going. The climates of high aspirations and college-going focused on motivating and supporting students to pursue college as a postsecondary option. On the other hand, the deficit ideologies of some administrators and teachers contributed to the climates of low expectations and surveillance. The climate of low-expectations entailed blaming students for not having the academic abilities and/or the drive to succeed in college. The climate of surveillance and control included city police officers, security guards, large gates, and surveillance cameras. However, as revealed by the admission rates to four-year colleges, the overall AHS college-going rates increased. In the following chapter, I focus on the strategies used by educators to build a college-going climate, despite lacking adequate resources.
CHAPTER FIVE
DEVELOPING A COLLEGE-GOING CLIMATE IN AN UNDER-RESOURCED HIGH SCHOOL

Introduction

Chapter Five addresses Research Question Two: How do AHS educators utilize policies, resources, and practices in Academies High School to develop a college-going climate within the larger school culture? In this chapter, I first define the college-going climate and then I provide an in-depth explanation of the college-going climate. I continue with an overview of the educator participants who developed a college-going climate at AHS, which included the director of the College and Career Center, teachers, college advisors, and counselors. I continue by explaining the tools used to build a college-going climate, including: the College and Career Center, workshops, class curriculum, individual college advising, college visits, and career and college preparation internships. The findings continue by presenting the limitations to the college-going climate. I conclude Chapter Five by discussing previous college-going studies.

Defining the College-Going Climate in AHS

The college-going climate at AHS entailed a two-tier track. The first tier aimed to prepare students for the admission process to four-year colleges. The purpose was to ensure that students who had an eligible GPA to meet the application requirements. The second tier entailed preparing students for a vocational pathway in a two-year or private for-profit college.

Ms. Smith, one of the vice-principals, provided an overall explanation of the college-going climate efforts. She argued,

In the ninth grade, the push is for the soft skills of What is college?, What’s the difference between CSU and UC?, reading the transcripts, and the A-G. Beyond that, it’s
taken in the career academies because of the focus and even a lot of it is career
exploration. What are you interested in, in this field? By eleventh grade, that’s when
they can actually get internships and for a lot of students that’s when it can actually come
to life. They do fieldtrips and I know in the Law academy, they do a lot of work with the
police officers and judges, so there were seniors this year saying, “I thought I wanted to
be an electrician and now I want to be a police officer.” And even it’s community
colleges, not a university, some of the kids say, “I want to go to law school, this is the
path I want to take.” They get the information in the classes. When I taught freshmen, we
had a whole binder that we worked off of. We tried to have one day a quarter to check-in
and say, “okay where are your grades? Where is this what are you on track for?” This
year we have academies, before we had houses. So, I think the academies are trying to
figure it out. There will be a bigger focus on that next year also.

For AHS, the lines between college and career readiness were blurred. When asked about
preparing for college, the teachers and administrators often referred to fieldtrips or guest
speakers that emphasized a career option. Educators reinforced the notion of college as a clear
pathway to a career is reinforced. However, Ms. Smith also reveals how the culture of
continuous change permeates the college-going climate. AHS switched into the academies
model but did not take into account the implications for the college-going efforts. Thus, the
culture of continuous change, inconsistency, and marginalization dictated that the college-going
climate efforts would also change but did not provide a curriculum or guidebook for the teachers.

**Four-Year College-Going Sub-Climate**

The four-year college sub-climate aimed to prepare students who were eligible for a four-
year college would meet the application requirements by the college application season. The
four-year college-going sub-climate aimed to establish aspirations to attend a four-year college. The climate focused on supporting students who were eligible to attend a four-year college to take the required college admission exams. The climate also focused on eligible students applying to and enrolling in four-year colleges. The four-year college-going sub-climate was developed by several educators, it was uncoordinated and not a streamlined process. Ms. Jacobs, the director of the college and career center explained, “My job is dictated by the different deadlines throughout the year. The big focus is always to make sure the students that are eligible to apply to four-year schools are prepared to apply to four-year schools.” Ms. Jacobs explained that as the director of the CCC, she focused on working with students who met eligibility requirements for admission to four-year colleges. As opposed to four-year colleges, community colleges did not have application or admission deadlines, which contributed to the four-year college sector being a priority throughout the year.

**Vocational College-Going Sub-Climate**

A sub-climate within the college-going climate entailed college-going efforts that emphasized a vocational pathway. The vocational pathway targeted students who did not meet academic requirements to apply for admission to four-year colleges. The vocational college-going sub-climate prepared students to secure a job after completing a certificate or associate’s degree. However, the vocational sub-climate also targeted students who aspired to transfer into a four-year college by highlighting the ability to transfer after earning an associate’s degree. The outreach counselors visited AHS from the local community college and private for-profit colleges to offer students information about vocational pathways.

Nick, the outreach counselor for the local community college supported students with the enrollment process for the two-year college but focused on vocational programs. Interview data
from Nick revealed the tracking mechanism into vocational programs. Nick explained that the local community college recruited AHS students into vocational college pathways:

There was an organization called Career (Pathways), they wanted to help link, high school academies to related community college programs…When we meet students for the first time, we have them fill out these questionnaires, now we have a database. Probably at about 800 students and we have their majors. We can query all (vocational law) students, we can target those students, send them info about that program, look at students who want to do culinary arts and send them info… As far as transfer goes, we will have a couple of years to go over that. We will reestablish the transfer center…it was eliminated about five years ago so we are going to re-establish it, we are also going to establish a welcome center.

Nick explained the connection between a high school program and a non-profit organization, funded by several national foundations, which established career pathways into vocational programs. For example, the AHS students in the Law Academy could easily transition into the law vocational program, which offered a certificate. Students can earn certificates, such as “Security Specialist” or continue to earn an associate’s degree, which facilitates transfer admission into a CSU campus. Although, Nick acknowledges that, “A lot of students want to transfer,” the institutional mechanisms in place do not prepare incoming community college students for the transfer pathway. I elaborate further on the tracking of students into vocational programs in the limitations of the college-going climate section.

**Summary of AHS College-Going Climate**

As noted above, educators developed a college-going climate, which focused primarily on four-year college and vocational postsecondary pathways. The four-year college sub-climate
aimed to prepare students who were eligible for a four-year college would meet the application requirements by the college application season. On the other hand, the vocational sub-climate was geared towards students who were not academically eligible to apply for admission to four-year colleges. As the following sections will explain, the personal ideologies of educators shaped the strategies when offering college information.

**Who Develops the College-Going Climate?**

Several AHS educators developed college-going climates for students. Educators who aimed to develop a four-year college-going sub-climate, by providing in-depth information, acknowledged the strengths of students. On the other hand, educators who focused on vocational pathways, maintained deficit ideologies of students and/or were restricted by their employment guidelines and resources. This section continues by providing an introduction to the educator participants who contributed to a college-going climate, which included: the director of the College and Career Center, teachers, college advisors, and counselors.

**Director of the College and Career Center**

Ms. Jacobs began working at AHS as a social studies teacher and eight years later, she was placed on special assignment as the counselor for students with learning disabilities and the director of the College and Career Center. Ms. Jacobs oversaw all general college and career information distributed to the school, including college fairs, college workshops, and visits from college representatives. During her transition, Ms. Jacobs aimed to restructure the territorial environment among the college outreach efforts. To meet her goal, she restructured the physical space of the College and Career Center by creating a space for each of the college outreach programs.
In her interview, she explained that the school year began by ensuring that senior students who maintained a CSU and/or UC eligible GPA signed-up to take the admission tests (e.g., SAT and ACT). Then, she focused on applications to four-year colleges by having personal statement and college application workshops. In December and January, she emphasized seniors submitting the FAFSA and Cal Grant forms. After the March 2 deadline for financial aid applications, she focused on community college enrollment and supporting eleventh graders to sign-up to take SAT and ACT exams. However, Ms. Jacobs also provided workshops to students in ninth and tenth grade English and/or social studies courses. In addition, Ms. Jacobs provided academic counseling to all students who were assigned an Individual Education Plan.

**College Advisors**

AHS students had access to five college advisors who worked for non-profit or college outreach programs. Table 2 lists the staff members available to support AHS students. Ms. Jacobs was in the college and career center Monday through Friday. She served all students and organized school-wide college events. However, her primary student caseload consists of those with an Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) because she was also an academic counselor. Two of the programs combined funds, which allowed Andrea, a recent college graduate, to work at AHS as a college advisor Mondays through Thursdays. Andrea did enroll students into a college outreach cohort model but also aimed to serve the entire school through individualized college advising and college information workshops. Hana, the college advisor for the UC TRiO Program, enrolled high-achieving students who committed to participating in weekend and summer college preparation. Ana Lilia was the college advisor for the privately funded program with the capacity of enrolling 100 students, approximately 25 from each grade-level. The program was established with private funds and initially began to support only students in the
soccer team. Due to its small capacity, the students in the soccer team had priority and there was an in-depth application process. The program aimed to prepare students for enrollment in a four-year college. In addition, Catherine, was funded by a local non-profit college outreach program, and worked with students on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the College and Career Center. Finally, Nick, mentioned earlier, an outreach counselor from the local community college assisted students with the college application and assessment process.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>UC Program and Private Grant Program</th>
<th>UC TRiO Program</th>
<th>Private College Prep. Program</th>
<th>Non-Profit Local College Prep. Program</th>
<th>Local Community College Outreach Counselor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Days</td>
<td>Monday – Thursday</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Monday – Friday</td>
<td>Tuesday/Thursday</td>
<td>Depends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Served</td>
<td>All Students</td>
<td>20 Students</td>
<td>100 total – approximately 25 from each grade level</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>12th Grade Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Student</td>
<td>Low-Income First-Generation</td>
<td>Four-year college-going</td>
<td>Four-year college-going</td>
<td>Four-year college-going</td>
<td>12th Graders interested in community college</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Advisor</th>
<th>Andrea</th>
<th>Hana</th>
<th>Ana Lilia</th>
<th>Catherine</th>
<th>Nick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

During the school year, he visited AHS every Tuesday for approximately three hours.

Nick emphasized his role as a bridge between AHS and the local community college:

We have a program that’s about three years old, (High School Bridging). As part of that, we send mostly counselors to the local schools. We bring services to them: online applications, assessments, so they don’t have to come to the college, we get it taken care of here…I’m responsible for (three high schools)...Ms. Jacobs makes it easy, she feeds
me the students. I try to simplify or guide them through it. I take them through the steps. When I’m at the college, I’m in line with them because if I go with the student, I know they are going to get good service, not everyone at the college gives good service. We try to simplify it as much as possible.

Nick explained that his role as an outreach counselor was to assist AHS students with the application, assessment, and enrollment process. He noted that working with AHS has been especially effortless due to the collaboration efforts with the Director of the College and Career Center. Nick noted that his office focused on streamlining the enrollment process to facilitate the process for students. He also understood that students required adequate support and when possible, he would support the student with the financial aid process by walking the student to the appropriate office.

Furthermore, Nick explained that in prior years, the local community college had not emphasized such enrollment outreach. Instead, the decrease in community college enrollment rates along with state-implemented standards, led the local community college to increase the amount of resources placed on student outreach and enrollment. Nick explained,

Most of the community colleges in the area are having problems with enrollment numbers and they need to reach enrollment numbers to get the allocation of funds. Since we need the enrollment to get the funding, now the vice president is putting a lot of resources, staff—It’s the number one priority. It makes a huge difference… Now that the state is holding the community college accountable…we need to be more accountable.

Thus, given the need for adequate funding levels, the community college invested resources in recruiting and enrolling new students. However, as Nick also shared, his office was only
responsible for enrolling students in the college. He was not responsible for ensuring that the student completed the financial aid process or received appropriate transfer preparation guidance.

When elaborating on the strengths of AHS students, Nick argued,

(Students’ greatest strength is) courage, especially when I see their parent’s level of education. Most of them, they parents haven’t finished high school, or they don’t have any family members that have finished college but they understand the value of it. They are very ambitious to be able to want to go to college.

Nick highlighted that although students might not come from college-educated families, he viewed them as courageous. He also understood that the students valued a college education. Thus, Nick acknowledged the high aspiration of students in pursuing college and the drive to earn a degree. As an outreach counselor, he hoped to support students with meeting their goals.

Teachers

Teachers developed a college-going climate within their classroom. Data analysis revealed that teachers often sought intersections between curricular standards and preparing for college. However, there were varying level of attempts to integrate college preparation into the curriculum. While some teachers only discussed college as a side note, others aligned the course curriculum to ensure college was a central theme in the classroom. Teachers who talked about college supported the participants in establishing aspirations to attend college. On the other hand, teachers who integrated college preparation into the curriculum and climate of the classroom supported the college choice process of the participants. English teacher participants connected the writing standards to college preparation and included writing a personal statement, which students could use for college or scholarship applications.
Counselors

The two counselors represented the final set of educators who contributed to the college-going climate at AHS. The counselors had the opportunity to develop a college-going climate during individual meetings with students within their office but also when conducting classroom workshops. Two full-time counselors served approximately 1,600 students, one white female and one Latino male. I attempted to interview both counselors but one denied my request for an interview. She did not allow me to explain the purpose of my dissertation and did not welcome me into her office. Instead, she redirected me to interview Mr. Lara, the Latino counselor. However, several participants referenced the counselor and provided insight into her practices. In addition, some participants accredited the counselors with providing college information.

Strategies to Develop a College-Going Climate in an Underresourced High School

Educators used various strategies and tools to develop a college-going climate. The tools used to build a college-going climate included: the College and Career Center, workshops, class curriculum, individual college advising, college visits, and career and college preparation internships. The strategies often included collaborative efforts among educators. The following sections provide more information about the strategies used by educators.

College and Career Center

The College and Career Center housed the college outreach programs and served as the space in AHS where students could access college information. However, instead of being located in a central position within the school, the Center was within a classroom tucked away inside the Law Academy hallway. The College and Career Center also housed computers for students to use when they needed to access college information. As depicted by Figure 12, the center displayed college banners as a strategy to promote a college-going culture. Although the
purpose of the Center was to support students with preparing for college, several of the participants argued that the space was not welcoming or accessible. On the other hand, participants enrolled in a college outreach program found the center to be an essential space.

Figure 12. College flags within the College and Career Center. Image cropped and color changed to grayscale.

Several collaborations existed due to the College and Career Center. The outreach department of the local community college, outreach programs from four-year colleges, and non-profit college preparation programs collaborated with AHS by placing college advisors in the school. The college advisors were housed in the College and Career Center, where they held individual meetings with students. In addition, the director of the center and the college advisors conducted outreach and provided college information via small group or classroom workshops throughout AHS. The director of the College and Career Center provided information to teachers who requested resources to support their students. The teachers then distributed the college information in their courses.
College Workshops

Educators led several college workshops to prepare students for deadlines and provide college admission information. College advisors or Ms. Jacobs, often led the workshops. In general, seniors received the most number of workshops, since the educators attempted to ensure that the students applied for colleges and financial aid. The workshops occurred within classrooms, in computer labs, and in the library. Although the workshops allowed for a group of students to receive college information, the participants recalled that the information was not too helpful. However, the participants explained that workshop facilitators were particularly helpful when they referred to individual identity, such as coming from a low-income background and attending college.

When teachers reached out Ms. Jacobs to facilitate a college workshop, she visited classrooms and provided students with a general overview of how to prepare for various postsecondary options. When observing one specific workshop, which was offered to various classes, the director made the process enjoyable by distributing college information via a Jeopardy game. Although students were engaged, it was a drill-and-practice approach. Whereby the students chose a category and then worked in their small groups to come up with a response, and the first to respond would receive points. Students did not have the time or opportunity to reflect on or apply the information. As a result, the participants learned about college later in their high school trajectory and did not engage with the information offered.

Angel’s explanation reflected the comments of the majority of the participants. He noted, I started to hear about college in eleventh grade. We would have people that would come in but I didn’t get persuaded because I didn’t have someone who had the time to take me over there. Ms. Jacobs and Ana Lilia would come and talk about scholarships, FAFSA,
Cal Grant. And they would come and talk about colleges and state colleges and UCs and the A-G, what we needed to do to go to those types of schools.

As explained by Angel, an academically high achieving student, he had access to college workshops until junior year. During the workshops, he was informed about the A-G course requirements for each specific college system, in addition to the financial aid applications. For the participants who were not in a college outreach program, the college workshops during junior year were often the first time they learned about college preparation.

Moreover, it was often Andrea from the UC outreach program who emphasized reaching out to students in ninth and tenth grades—in order to increase her enrollment numbers and serve her enrolled participants. During the presentations, Andrea provided a general overview of the postsecondary system. She invited program participants to the library and create smaller groups. Then, each group was responsible for presenting information on each postsecondary educational system: UC, CSU, community college, and private colleges. Students had to present the information to the group and were able to ask questions. When Andrea recruited students into her program, she scheduled outreach workshops in the English and/or history courses. In the outreach workshops, Andrea also provided information to students, not only about college but also about her UC outreach program. Once enrolled in the outreach program, students received individual college advising. Overall, the number of classroom workshops that were facilitated by the College and Career Center were limited and provided general information about postsecondary pathways.

**Class Curriculum**

Through the curriculum, teacher participants developed a college-going climate within the classroom. Interview data revealed that some AHS teachers did not talk about college, other
teachers informed students about college, and a select few tailored their curriculum and pedagogical practices by integrating a college-going focus. This section discusses findings from student and teacher interview data, which reveals the tools used by teachers to integrate college-going efforts into the curriculum. I focus on Ms. Murillo, who cultivated a college-going climate through an in-depth curriculum and reflective activities.

**Sprinkling college-going talks in the classroom.** AHS teachers did not follow a specific curriculum to integrate college information in the classes. Instead, every teacher decided to what degree s/he would address college preparation or information within the classroom. Regardless of the subject material, the majority of participants recalled that teachers often talked about college during class. Raymundo explained that his art teacher would invite friends to talk about different colleges. Rebeca noted that the economics teacher would say that if students did not do their work and get good grades, they would likely not succeed in college. Finally, all of the participants in the Science Academy noted that the academy lead and social science teacher, Mr. Miramontes, talked about college every day but could not align college preparation with the history academic standards.

**Integrating college-going activities in the classroom.** Teachers who integrated college-going workshops in the classroom did so by assigning students to conduct college search activities. For example, the twelfth grade English teachers integrated the UC personal statement prompts and/or scholarship essays into required assignments. Through this process, students had the choice to write either a scholarship or a personal statement prompt and receive feedback from the teacher.
The students who participated in the college-going activities, regardless of GPA, viewed the activities as opportunities to prepare for college. Anais appreciated having the option to write either a UC personal statement or a personal statement for college. She explained,

In Mr. Malone’s class, everything we do is for college. He helped us do cover letters, resumes, interviews. We had the option to do a personal statement or scholarship application. It was helpful because if I had to do the UC one, I wasn’t going to apply—so why waste time when I’m not even going to need it. He gave us a template.

In Mr. Malone’s class, Anais had the choice between writing a personal statement for admission to UC or a scholarship. Since she did not meet the minimum eligibility required for the UC, Anais was grateful for having the choice and invested time to prepare a scholarship essay. Mr. Malone ensured that the students knew how to approach the statements by providing them with an outline and sample. As a result, Anais felt more capable of writing a strong statement by knowing what to emphasize in her statement.

Although the teachers did not receive formal training in AHS to provide feedback in alignment with the format or qualities desired by UCs or scholarship grantors, they resorted to each other as a resource. For example, one of the English teachers noted that she reached out to Mr. Malone to learn how to structure the personal statement writing assignment. As a new teacher, Ms. Murillo explained, “I went to Mr. Malone about how he does personal statements, Ms. Noguera as to resumes, and Ms. Greedley.” Thus, in order to prepare students for postsecondary options, teachers had to take initiative to find resources. According to Ms. Jacobs, she worked with AHS stakeholders to develop a reference curriculum but it was not complete or available to teachers.
In addition to written assignments, the teachers also secured guest speakers who provided students with information about college admission requirements and college success. During the presentations, speakers would emphasize the importance of college and the enjoyable memories. Finally, teachers also used class time to facilitate workshops where student would conduct online searches for colleges and/or career options and pathways. During a classroom observation, Ms. Noguera had her students take an online quiz to assess career options. In addition, the students searched the postsecondary pathway required to attain the career. Her aim was for the activity to spark interest in bachelor degrees and four-year colleges among her students.

**Aligning classroom curriculum with college-going: Ms. Murillo’s pedagogical practices.** Ms. Murillo created a four-year college-going climate in her classroom. By aligning her pedagogical practices and curriculum with college, her students experienced an in-depth form of college preparation. Ms. Murillo began college portfolios during the 2012-2013 school year. The college portfolio included a pre-survey, college information, exploration, and planning activities, and then concluded with a post-survey. During the year, Ms. Murillo integrated various college exploration written, verbal, and research activities, as well as having invited guest speakers and workshop facilitators.

Since she was new to California and did not have a background in college advising, Ms. Murillo did not know the college requirements. Regardless of her predicament, she felt an urgency to align the curriculum with college preparation projects. Therefore, she explained how she learned the requirements,

I knew that if I didn’t try it out, I probably would have never done it…I had no idea what I was doing with the college kit. Especially because there are certain standards that are different from California and (my state). I had no time to learn everything. I went to Ms.
Jacobs and Ana Lilia and said, “Tell me everything I need to know.” I took notes…We went through the whole college kit portfolio…She would have ideas as to what to cut and what to require. I tried not to go to too many people. I went to Mr. Malone about how he does personal statements, Ms. Noguera as to resumes, and Ms. Greedley.

Ms. Murillo tapped into the information resources available to her. She met with Ms. Jacobs on multiple occasions to find out the deadlines and align her course requirements with the deadlines. In addition, Ms. Murillo went against the standard practices and sought support from other teachers. She expressed that while approaching Ms. Malone for support, he was more than willing to help. However, she had to be the one to reach out in order to build her college-going curriculum, it was not a standard practice. She also requested written information and in-class workshops to make sure that her students received accurate information from various sources.

**Individual College Advising Sessions**

As noted above, five college advisors were housed in the College and Career Center on specific days of the week. Although each college advisor had her/his pedagogical approach, for the most part, all of the advisors were enthusiastic to work with the students enrolled in the respective program. Overall, the participants who were enrolled in the outreach programs noted that they benefitted either from the personal engagement and/or the general college application support that the college advisors would provide.

Juan Pablo joined Ana Lilia’s program during ninth grade. He explained how she supported his preparation for college in several ways:

Ana Lilia helped me a lot picking my classes all my years. She was the one picking my classes. I always planned to go to college—it just became reality this year. I joined (Ana Lilia’s program) my freshman year. Ana Lilia got there towards the end of my tenth
grade year. My ninth grade year, it was this guy named David. He left and a new girl came, Selena. She left and we got Ana Lilia. They were all easy to talk to, they all helped with college. Ninth grade, I went to (a CSU) and (a selective private college). Although he planned to go to college, he lacked guidance prior to enrolling in Ana Lilia’s program. Juan Pablo explained that Ana Lilia provided him with individual guidance to choose his A – G courses. For whatever reasons, the program experienced turnover during Juan Pablo’s freshmen and tenth grade enrollment. However, he recalled that each advisor was approachable and helpful. Juan Pablo recalled that being enrolled in the college preparation program allowed him to visit college campuses early in his high school career. Regardless of maintaining high aspirations, students required consistent and continual support. College advisors often informed the participants for courses required by four-year colleges.

**College advising for potential transfer students.** The participants who aspired to enter community college and transfer to a four-year college, struggled to access the AHS college-going climate. However, Andrea was accessible to these participants. Andrea worked with AHS students at least four days a week from September to May. Analysis of interview and observation data revealed that Andrea supported students establish aspirations to transfer. Anabel, who planned to transfer from the local community college, explained how Andrea supported her college preparation:

Andrea always, if you’re going to a UC, she asks if you have done your personal statement but if you aren’t she doesn’t ask. She was the one who sent me the scholarships and she was like here are some scholarships for you to start applying. Anabel explains that although she was not on track for a UC after high school, Andrea still reached out to her. Unlike the approach used by some teachers, Andrea did not expect Anabel to
write a personal statement. Instead, Andrea provided her with scholarship applications and support to apply. If Anabel had not signed up for Andrea’s program, she likely would not have received the individualized support since Andrea would not be able to keep track of her progress. Due to a limited amount of time, Andrea assisted transfer aspiring students with the financial aid and application process. Observational data revealed that Andrea motivated students to consider the four-year pathway by encouraging entering directly into a four-year college if the student qualified for admission or preparing to transfer if they did not.

**College Visits**

A limited number of college fieldtrips were accessible to AHS students. The participants noted that they had access to visit college campuses by participating in the AHS summer bridge program, outreach programs, and career academy trips. Twenty-one of the participants attended fieldtrips but not all were tailored to visiting colleges. The primary intent of the fieldtrips centered on exposure to possible careers.

When interviewing students, the majority explained that they did not have access to fieldtrips that were specifically for visiting a college campus. “No, we never go to fieldtrips, I think it’s ‘cause we have no money. I know that if you’re in a program they will go on Southern California fieldtrips and visit but the school itself doesn’t offer fieldtrips.” The participant attributed the lack of school-sponsored college fieldtrips due to a lack of funding. He recalled that a college outreach program would offer field trips to southern California colleges. Unfortunately, the primary program that offered the southern California fieldtrip was no longer at AHS.

Rogelio, who maintained a high GPA, was unsure about whether he would pursue college after high school. He explained the impact a college visit had on his plans:
It was so different, people behaved differently. I went to Stanford for a few weeks too. We went to a field trip in (southern California) and that’s when I fell in love with (that UC campus), it was just, the vibe is so cool. Academically, I don’t know. But it was a good place for me. We went to (another UC campus), we went to a few schools. It was mainly seniors, it was some juniors but mostly seniors.

In his interview, Rogelio noted the difference between AHS and college campuses, including how students behaved. Rogelio recalled that he had the opportunity to visit several college campuses. In doing so, Rogelio was able to distinguish between the college campus cultures and hoped to choose a college campus where he could see himself. Thus, the college visits helped to keep him motivated and as he notes later in the interview, allowed him to set a goal for gaining admission to the college.

Jacob also visited several colleges while in high school, partly due to his enrollment in various college programs. He noted,

I’ve been to (two UC campuses and one CSU). (The visit to one UC and the CSU) was a fieldtrip. (The other UC) I visited with a summer program. It’s called (Math and Science Summer Academy). My teacher, English, announced it my sophomore year saying that it’s a program where students get to live the college experience for a month and basically live like a college student at the dorms and studying there and eating there. It was really good, got a lot out of that. They gave UC classes that have to do with math n science.

There’s also extra classes that have to do with English and multi-media.

Although he was able to visit various UC and CSU college campuses, Jacob concentrated on his experience in the summer college program. He explained that the program allowed him to experience being a college student. As a program participant, he took UC courses in math and
science to prepare for college. Thus, Jacob highlighted the need for students to prepare for college not just by taking fieldtrips but also by experiencing college academically.

Ms. Claire explained the trouble with organizing college fieldtrips:

The academies have grants, so the grants could pay for the buses. But there are two problems. One, our principal doesn’t like students to be off campus any more than necessary because we are trying to build our academic skills. For a lot of the trips, paying for the subs becomes an issue. If it’s after school or on a weekend, what would the interest be for students to do? It’s not strictly money, it’s partially money.

Ms. Claire argued that planning a fieldtrip entailed many factors, the trouble occurred when having to gain permission from the principal, secure a substitute, and negotiate academic time. The climate of low-expectations once again emerged in Ms. Claire’s response by noting that students would likely not have interest in attending a college visit if it was not during school.

When interviewing the school principal, he was surprised to hear that fieldtrips might benefit students but open to considering increasing the number of college fieldtrips. He reflected on the matter and asked me whether I found the fieldtrips were important. He did not mention the lack of funding but instead wondered if the fieldtrips were valuable to students. As the exemplars below suggest, visiting a college campus proved to be invaluable for the participants who had the opportunity to see one or more colleges. The inconsistency of college fieldtrips available to students revealed the lack of communication between administrators, teachers, and students.

**Career and College Preparation Internships**

In addition to having access to college fieldtrips, some of the student participants also referenced summer internships when explaining how they learned about college. Overall, the
participants who accessed the internships were satisfied and spoke highly about the experiences. In particular, the participants noted that they benefitted from the internships because the experiences allowed them to understand what career to consider and how to prepare for college.

Pedro, who aspired to enroll in a four-year college, noted that his English teacher connected him with an internship opportunity. He recalled,

I got the internship since I was a freshman it was over the summer. My English teacher, Ms. Noguera, introduced me to it first and then they give you college credit for a week. I did that for two summers freshmen and sophomore. Then Ms. Dani took over it and during Ms. Dani’s time we were able to do four weeks…I got credit and I got paid $1,200. I had to go through a rigorous application process, an online application and letter of recommendation…The internships have helped me a lot, they allowed me to see what an engineer does on a daily basis…The internships would tell me what classes to take. In ninth and tenth grade, the internships would tell me what to do. I first wanted to be an engineer but by junior year I knew what type of engineer I wanted to be after doing all of the internships.

Pedro began his intern experiences since freshmen year and benefited financially and career-wise. Over the years, Pedro learned the various responsibilities for each type of engineer. With the experiences, he was able to learn that he aspired to be a structural engineer. Moreover, during his early years in high school, the internships provided Pedro with the opportunity to know what classes to take during high school in preparation for college. Finally, during his interview, Pedro also discussed the networking and leadership opportunities that he gained as an intern. As such, he helped to establish an AHS chapter for a Hispanic Engineers organization. Without the internship opportunities, Pedro would likely not have concrete ideas as to how to
prepare for college and what career pathway to take. Furthermore, since he was placed in the Engineering Academy, he had opportunities that were specifically in the field of engineering.

Similarly, Nadine, a student in the Science Academy, took advantage of the internship opportunities offered by her teacher. She explained that the internship allowed her to experience a career in medicine, gain college skills, and earn a stipend,

My teacher told us about the internship with doctors…He actually got me the opportunity to go to a college class and interact with other students. He got me the opportunity to go to a hospital and have an idea of what I want to be. In the internship, I was in an ER room, so I saw a lot of opportunities, with doctors, nurses, x-rays…I was also in a cardiology class, and at the end of my internship I had to give a presentation about the heart. I had the opportunity to shadow a doctor and he made us be there when he was stitching people, he made us use the blood pressure machine, he made us use the computers, and he made us watch X-rays, comfort people, clean, organize. It was pretty much like a real job, it was a month and I got paid $800. I have it saved because I feel like I won’t get that much help from FAFSA and the scholarships.

Nadine attributed the opportunity to do an internship to her teacher, who focused on preparing students for college. She explained that as an intern at a hospital, she learned more about what doctors do on a day-to-day basis. She also enrolled in a college course where she learned about the medical field. In the course, she gained academic skills, such as presentation and public speaking. Finally, Nadine explained that the financial incentive allowed her to save money for college expenses. Through the internship, Nadine gained insight into the medical field but also the college academic experiences. Thus she learned about the expectations and how to navigate a college class.
Limitations to the AHS College-Going Climate

Although AHS educators used resources and practices to develop college-going climates, three key limitations existed in the AHS college-going climate. First, the participants who aspired to transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college lacked outreach from the College and Career Center. Second, the information available to students about community college was primarily vocational. In other words, students were tracked into vocational postsecondary pathways. Third, a lack of college advisors did not allow for the 1,600 AHS students to receive individual college guidance.

Lack of Outreach to Participants with Aspirations to Transfer

Data analysis revealed a lack of resources led AHS educators to distribute college information based on immediate deadlines. Thus, twelfth graders who were preparing for admission to four-year colleges received the largest source of college information resources. This preparation entailed ensuring that seniors participated in the SAT program during September, October, and November along with preparing personal statements and applying for admission to four-year colleges. Seniors then received financial aid information and assistance with the FAFSA and Cal Grant program. Then in spring, the local community college outreach counselor offered two-year college goers support with the admission and enrollment process. At the same time, outreach occurred for students in eleventh grade by receiving SAT fee waivers to sign up for the June test dates. The academically low-achieving participants who did not reach out to the College and Career Center noted that they did not receive concrete information about college during their years in high school. Although teachers and other individuals supported the participants by noting the value of college, student participants felt frustrated that they did not receive individualized information about pursuing a college degree. In addition, the
academically low-achieving students noted that there were only a limited number of college preparation workshops available.

As a result of the inaccessibility to college information, the academically low-achieving participants were unclear about how to prepare for or navigate the postsecondary options by the time they were in twelfth grade. Manuel, the academically low-achieving undocumented participant had a negative experience after resorting to the College and Career Center for guidance. He explained his isolating college application process:

I did the application to (the local community college) alone. I just sat there and plugged in my information. I did it a little bit after senior year. I signed up just in time to get the classes I needed before they filled up. At Academies, no one helped me. With FAFSA they had a lot of that but the thing with my situation is that I’m AB540. They had the Dream Act but my overall GPA wasn’t good enough, it was a point off, like 1.9.

Manuel explained that he applied and signed up for courses to the local community college without help from anyone. He also applied and navigated the financial aid process by himself due to a negative experience he had with an AHS college advisor. Given the negative experience and his AB540 status, he did not feel comfortable attending the general workshop that supported students with filling out the FAFSA. Furthermore, he explained that the direct implication to his low GPA was not qualifying for the California Dream Act funding. Overall, several of the participants explained that they filled out the application to the local community college until the summer, alone. During the second interview, the participants also expressed that they had difficulty accessing any financial aid—primarily because they had not filled out the California Board of Governor’s Fee Waiver application and submitted required tax forms to the financial aid office. This speaks to the need for more resources to community college applicants.
The participants who never accessed the College and Career Center were part of the group who did not fill out a college or financial aid applications. Lina was part of the participants who did not complete financial aid applications. During her second interview, she explained what happened the one time she sought help:

I didn’t do the FAFSA, I didn’t know how to do it. I was being stupid, I guess…Ms. Jacobs? I don’t know who she is. I don’t know anyone in the Career center. Ms. Noe did but the day I went—she forced me to go to the career center—I went and they were closed. No one helped me sign up for college. I did it online. It was easy.

By the end of her senior year, Lina had not filled out the FAFSA to qualify for financial aid as a community college student. She blamed herself for not pursuing the information and seeking support in a timely manner when she was a student at AHS. However, when Ms. Noe, her English teacher, inquired about Lina’s college plans and informed her about going to the College and Career Center, Lina attempted to find the much-needed support. Prior to our interview, Lina had no idea who Ms. Jacobs was and did not understand why I would ask if she asked her for help. Since she could not access the required support in time, Lina applied for the local community college by the end of her senior year so that she could attend in the future. Overall, the majority of participants, especially two-year college applicants, lacked college guidance.

**Tracking into Vocational Programs**

Ultimately, academically low-achieving students were not provided with clear information about post-secondary options. The primary source of information for potential transfer students was Nick, an outreach counselor for the local community college. As documented earlier, Nick’s primary role was to increase enrollment rates and assist students from local feeder high schools with the application process. He also assisted with the assessment
process but was not responsible for providing guidance information beyond application, assessment, and course enrollment. Oral history interview data revealed that the participants did not understand the transfer process but instead were provided with information about the vocational cohort programs in the health and law fields.

Nick was the main source of information for potential transfer students and he presented in every economics class to ensure that he outreached to every AHS senior. After the presentations, students filled out information cards so that Nick could contact them in the future. As noted earlier in this chapter, the cards served to gather information about students and provide vocational degree information. Thus, when the participants were only eligible for a community college, the College and Career Center likely referred them to Nick for guidance. Reina explained her experience when seeking information about community college:

I don’t know if I’m going to (the local community college) or one (nearby). I need help to figure out how to do things. I’m going to go one day to the College and Career Center and figure it out there. All last week I didn’t come so they had to call me in to talk to a counselor from (the local community college) but I wasn’t here so I don’t know if I could talk to him later on or if I’m going to have to go to (the college) to talk to him. He just called me out, he had come one time to the class, one of my classes and he was talking about it. My teacher would give him a list of students who would want to go.

During May of her senior year, Reina still did not know what she would do after high school. She maintained a 1.7 GPA and her only source of college information came when Nick presented outreach information from the local community college. Although Reina did not fill out the follow-up card, Nick’s job was to increase enrollment with the community college, which is why he contacted all possible applicants. Reina had to miss over a week of class because she had
back surgery and was not available for her individual appointment with Nick. Therefore, she was unsure of how she would contact him again. After our first interview, I walked Reina to the College and Career Center and helped her sign up to meet with Nick. At the center, he had a clipboard with pages of students who had signed up waiting to receive information about enrolling in the local community college.

However, not only academically low-achieving students were steered into the vocational track upon enrolling in community colleges. Jacob maintained above a 3.0 GPA but enrolled in a community college after an oversight with the enrollment process in a local CSU campus. At the community college, Jacob aimed to transfer and attend Berkeley Law School in the future. However, he heard about the Administrative Justice program once Nick presented to his economics course during senior year. Jacob explained how Nick guided his planning,

I want to transfer and then go to Berkeley Law School...I heard about the Administrative Justice program and Nick said, “You are looking for classes? There’s the medical and the law program.” I was tired of health, I might as well take law. He asked me what I wanted to study. I said an attorney a lawyer. He said well, “There’s this program.” He was telling me I could go to (a CSU). He helps a lot and helps me. It’s cool.

As a high school senior, Jonathan aspired to enroll in a UC campus but was not admitted. Nevertheless, he hoped to earn a four-year college degree and apply to Berkeley Law School. Given his interest in law, it was easy for him to align with the Administrative Justice vocational program. Although Jacob could earn an associate’s degree and gain admission to a CSU campus, the likelihood of him gaining admission to a law school, such as Berkeley Law, were minimal. However, Nick only provided Jacob with two options—both vocational programs. After the second interview, I met with Jonathan and spent two hours explaining the course
requirements to transfer to a UC as compared with a CSU. No one had ever discussed this process with him. Immediately after, I asked what pathway he would prefer to take, the vocational associate degree to a CSU or the general breadth requirement transfer requirements to a UC campus. He exclaimed, “This one! (points to the UC pathway) This is definitely the one I want to do. How do I do that?” Upon receiving thorough information, Jacob selected the UC pathway but felt restricted because he was already enrolled in the vocational law courses. As explained throughout this chapter, every participant with a low GPA was tracked into the community college and none were offered detailed pathway information about how to transfer and meet their high educational aspirations.

As discussed earlier, Nick was not responsible for supporting a transfer process. His responsibility was to recruit students into the local community college and support them with the application process. Moreover, since the AHS college-going climate centered on four-year college-going rates, the participants who aspired to transfer from a two-year college lacked any guidance to prepare for the transfer process. Thus, the existing college-going climate at AHS represented an unsupportive space, where academically low-achieving students did not have access to college guidance resources. The primary information sources available to the participants with a low GPA were a vocational pathway into the local community college.

**Lack of College Advisors**

With only two advisors being at the school at least four days a week, they could not provide individualized services to all students. Mr. Olson explained,

The College and Career Center is like a big mountain of gold in our school. They have definitely fostered a lot of our students going to college. I would say most of our college-going kids have a lot of connections to the College and Career Center. The problem is
that it is underresourced... You have two to three workers, a very small room and like 300 seniors. So getting them all in there and getting them a level of mentorship is a difficulty we have to overcome.

Mr. Olson argued that the College and Career Center was an essential source of information for students and teachers. However, he explained that much like the rest of AHS, the center lacked resources and therefore limited the amount of support that students could receive. He believed that the majority of the students who were planning to attend college sought guidance from college advisors in the College and Career Center. However, the low number of college advisors, the lack of computers, and the lack of space, hindered the potential support that the center could provide to all students. Mr. Olson’s explanation highlighted the two contradictory themes: college-going students are expected to have connections with the college and career center by twelfth grade by the college-going climate targeted twelfth graders.

Discussion and Conclusion

As indicated in Chapter Two, previous literature argues that students who have limited access to college information at home turn to educators for guidance (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Pathways to College Network, 2006). Since counselors cannot support every student with college information, researchers call for educators to build a college-going culture, which aims to prepare all students to make informed postsecondary options (McClafferty, McDonough, Nunez, 2002). In the case of Academies High School, the administrators depended on college preparation programs from local colleges and non-profit agencies to provide the students with college information. This resulted in a limited access to information, guidance, and resources for students. This finding aligns with the previous studies that argue the level of quality in a college-going culture can be affected by the amount of
resources available to school officials (Corwin & Tierney, 2007). Chapter Five findings indicate that human resources, who included the social and professional networks of teachers and college advisors, shaped the AHS college-going climate.

AHS participated in Linked Learning career academies. Stern and his colleagues (1992) coined the term “career academy” as a school-within-a-school or a small learning community. Increasingly, the career academy model integrated a college-readiness approach (Stern, et al., 2010). Career academies provide coursework to prepare for college and center around a specific career-related theme, such as health or computers (Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2010). Some studies, find that the academies model benefits students, males in particular (Kemple, 2008; Moore & Oppenheim, 2010; Stern, Dayton, & Raby, 2010; Visher, Altuna, & Safran, 2013). However, a large randomized experiment finds that there are no benefits to increasing the high school graduation rates or transitions to postsecondary institutions (Kemple, 2001).

A CRT lens allows for an in-depth understanding of the underlying implications when adopting the career academy model and linking it to postsecondary options. Although the effect of career academies is not conclusive, as noted in Chapter Three, Linked Learning targets districts with low-income students, which aligns with high Student of Color enrollments. Furthermore, career academies began as a strategy to increase high school completion for “at-risk” students (National Career Pathways Network, 2006). The original intent of career academies was to provide a school to workforce pathway (National Career Pathways Network, 2006). The intent of career academies to provide a workforce—not college students—was pervasive at AHS, given the postsecondary options available to participants. In AHS, the college-going climate for students planning to attend community college entailed only a vocational pathway. Of the participants who hoped to transfer, none was aware of concrete
sources of information about course taking. The bridge between the AHS career academies and the local community college served as a guaranteed vocational workforce. Since AHS enrolls a majority of Students of Color and low-income students, it serves as an acceptable space to prepare students for vocational careers as “short-term goals.”

College advisors and teachers, who developed college-going climates in AHS, align with the role of nepantleras who assisted the participants with navigating the pathway to college (Anzaldúa, 2002). Anzaldúa (2002) argues that Chicanas and others who live on the margins of society inhabit borderlands and spaces of nepantla, which represent ambiguous spaces—physical, emotional, and psychological. Anzaldúa explains that nepantleras “are threshold people: they move within and among multiple, often conflicting, worlds and refuse to align themselves exclusively with any single individual, group, or belief system” (pg. 20). Nepantleras identify with multiple identities and live in contradicting cultures. Moreover, Anzaldúa (2002) explains that nepantleras also “serve as agents of awakening, inspire and challenge others to deeper awareness, greater conocimiento, serve as reminders of each other’s search for wholeness of being (p. 20). Nepantleras guide individuals when shifting between worlds.

Within the field of education, scholars describe a role similar to that performed by nepantleras occurring among institutional agents within schools. Stanton-Salazar (2010) defines an institutional agent as “an individual who occupies one or more hierarchical positions of relatively high-status, either within a society or in an institution (or an organization) p. 1075). He argues that within schools, the institutional agents have the potential to support adolescents. The support is evident when an institutional agent utilizes their position of power when s/he transmits or negotiates the transmission of “highly valued resources” (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).
classify the supportive teachers and college advisors as *nepantleras/os colegiales*, which I define as: an institutional agent who assisted participants with pursuing their high educational aspirations and supported the pathway to college. By enacting a college-going climate and supporting students, teachers and college advisors create spaces that aim to build a bridge to a postsecondary education. Regardless of the limitations in the ongoing building of the college-going climate at AHS, as Chapter Six reveals, the college-going climate informed the college choice and enrollment processes of Latina/o participants.
CHAPTER SIX

CONOCIMIENTO COLEGIAL: ESTABLISHING AN INTERDISCIPLINARY LATINA/O COLLEGE CHOICE AND NAVIGATION FRAMEWORK

Introduction

In using critical race theory grounded methodology I aimed to produce a theoretical framework to understand the complexity of Latina/o college choices. The goal was for the theory to clarify the gap between high educational aspirations and low expectations among Latina/o students. As noted in Chapter Three, producing theory requires the use of a previous theoretical framework. In this chapter, I address Research Question Three: How do AHS Latina/o students with high educational aspirations develop college-going and college-navigating identities? I also respond to the Sub-Question: How does the college-going climate inform the college-going identity development of Latina/o participants? While analyzing the first set of oral histories, I saw an alignment with Anzaldúa’s (2002) path to conocimiento. Anzaldúa’s (2002) concept of conocimiento helped me to understand the process of college choice and navigation for the Latina/o participants.

I begin Chapter Six by explaining the use of Anzaldúa’s (2002) seven-stage model of conocimiento as a conceptual framework to bridge college choice and college transition. Next, I establish the concept of conocimiento colegial, which entails seven stages that begin with a student setting aspirations to attend college and conclude with college navigation. The remainder of Chapter Six provides student interview data as evidence for the proposed seven-stage model of conocimiento colegial. Within each stage, I note the role of the college-going climate.
Establishing a Framework of *Conocimiento Colegial*

In this chapter, I establish a Latina/o college choice and navigation theory that bridges college choice and transition, which I entitle *conocimiento colegial*. Unlike the majority of previous models, *conocimiento colegial* arises from qualitative student-level data and allows for an in-depth and contextualized understanding of the experiences Latina/o participants when deciding to pursue college and navigating college. *Conocimiento colegial* is informed by Anzaldúa’s (2002) path to *conocimiento*, a development theory of reflective consciousness. *Conocimiento colegial* examines the intersectionality of the participant’s Latina/o race/ethnicity, first-generation college status, and socioeconomic status as they inform college choice, identity, transition, and navigation. I implement the arguments made in literature, which contends that *conocimiento* serves as a useful tool to examine social change (Keating, 2006) and the experiences of Students of Color in higher education (Cueva, 2013).

**Anzaldúa’s Path to Conocimiento**

Anzaldúa’s (2002) theory of development, a path to *conocimiento* entails oppressive conditions and a deepening of perception and consciousness. Anzaldúa (2002) defines *conocimiento* as:

Skeptical of reason and rationality, *conocimiento* questions conventional knowledge’s current categories, classifications, and contents…*Conocimiento* comes from opening all your senses, consciously inhabiting your body and decoding its symptoms…*Conocimientos* challenge official and conventional ways of the world, ways set up by those benefiting from such constructions” (p. 541-542).
In other words, *conocimiento* entails self-reflection and outward-directed action and results in a social-justice epistemology. The process of *conocimiento* includes seven stages, also referred to as spaces, which are non-linear and can be cyclical (Keating, 2006).

**Stage One: El Arrebato**

The first stage, “*el arrebato*...rupture, fragmentation...an ending, a beginning,” is an event that shatters the individual’s world. As Anzaldúa notes,

This event pulled the linchpin that held your reality/story together…giving you a chance to reconstruct yourself, forcing you to rework your description of self, world, and your place in it (reality)...You honor what has ended, say goodbye to the old way of being, commit yourself to look for the "something new," and picture yourself embracing this new life (p. 546-547).

Anzaldúa (2002) identifies this as an earthquake, which has the potential to initiate a new self and reality. Anzaldúa (2002) explains that *el arrebato* is an event that dislocates an individual’s reality and forces her/him to alter her/his self-description, the world, and her/his position within that world. This first stage awakens *la facultad*, the ability to see deeper than the surface of situations. *La facultad* allows for individuals to see structures below surfaces, it is a sixth sense of awareness (Anzaldúa, 1999). Those who are on the margins of society develop *la facultad*, especially when they are feeling oppressed or experience pain (Anzaldúa, 1999). Finally, fear also helps to develop this sixth sense and Anzaldúa (1999) explains that “confronting anything that tears the fabric of our everyday mode of consciousness” sends an individual into increased awareness (p. 61).
Stage Two: Nepantla

The transitional second space, “nepantla...torn between ways,” occurs once an individual commits to search for something new and entails a whirlwind search process, where the individual is torn between various choices. *Nepantla* is a transitional zone of possibilities where, Anzaldúa (2002) explains the individual becomes “two people.” Anzaldúa (2002) elaborates that in *nepantla*, “You face divisions within your cultures-of class, gender, sexuality, nationality, and ethnicity. You face both entrenched institutions and the oppositional movements of working-class women, People of Color, and queers. Pulled between opposing realities, you feel torn” (p. 548). The pathway to *conocimiento* begins with the understanding that Chicanas/os experience a multitude of intersecting social identities. Anzaldúa (2002) establishes that within certain spaces and points in time, the various cultures of a Chicana will clash and she will have to face institutional processes that go against certain expectations based on her social identity.

Stage Three: Coatlicue

The third stage, “the Coatlicue state...desconocimiento and the cost of knowing,” occurs due to the individual living between multiple worlds or cultures. This space entails dysfunction and self-loathing. Anzaldúa (2002) describes the experience in the Coatlicue state: “When overwhelmed by the chaos caused by living between stories, you break down, descend into the third space, the Coatlicue depths of despair, self-loathing, and hopelessness (p. 545). Since Coatlicue is the “goddess of birth and death,” the Coatlicue stage is one of duality (Anzaldúa, 1999). The individual’s refusal to acknowledge some truths of her identity brings on the paralysis and depression experienced in the Coatlicue stage (Anzaldúa, 1999). In the Coatlicue state, it is difficult for the individual to take a step forward because new knowledge changes the person and does not allow her to stay in the same comfortable place. The stage concludes with a
need to search for a way out of despair. Anzaldúa (1999) notes that this results in developing a new perspective, which serves as a “prelude to crossing.”

**Stage Four: El Compromiso**

The fourth stage, “the call...el compromiso...the crossing and conversion,” an action allows the individual to escape the depressing coping strategies of Coatlicue and experience a conversion to reconnect. Once the individual experiences the event, she reaches a turning point on the path to transformation. Anzaldúa (2002) explains this process as, “loosening your grip on the known and reaching for the future requires that you stretch beyond self- and culturally-imposed limits” (p. 556). The fourth stage entails releasing the old identity, beliefs, and perspectives. *El compromiso* represents a bridge between the old identity and re-entering the world as a new person. This stage is also full of change, which is messy and uncomfortable but is a necessary pathway into beginning to establish a new identity.

**Stage Five: Putting Coyolxauhqui Together**

The fifth space, “putting Coyolxauhqui together...new personal and collective ‘stories,’” includes a desire for order and sorting through lived experiences to arrange a story that speaks to a new reality. In this space, the individual sheds her previous identity and goes beyond challenging the old identity by searching for a new one. As Anzaldúa (2002) notes,

Coyolxauhqui personifies the wish to repair and heal, as well as rewrite the stories that lead out of passivity and into agency, out of devalued into valued lives. Coyolxauhqui represents the search for new metaphors to tell you what you need to know, how to connect and use the information gained, and, with intelligence, imagination, and grace, solve your problems and create intercultural communities (p. 563).
In this quote, Anzaldúa epitomizes the purpose of the fifth stage—to establish a new identity. In the Coyolxuahqui stage, the individual searches for a new identity. With this new identity, the individual will gain new value and agency. The new identity will allow the individual to utilize resources available. Moreover, the new identity includes the person sharing the knowledge gained during the previous stages with their community.

**Stage Six: The Blow-Up**

In the sixth stage, “The blow-up…a clash of realities,” the individual enters the world with a new identity, only to encounter disappointments, which create a war with others and the self. Anzaldúa (2002) elaborates, “Disappointed with self and others, angry and then terrified at the depth of your anger, you swallow your emotions, hold them in. Blocked from your own power, you're unable to activate the inner resources that could mobilize you” (p. 545). However, the individual struggles and remains unable to tap into resources.

**Stage Seven: Shifting Realities**

In the final stage, “shifting realities...acting out the vision or spiritual activism,” the individual develops strategies to negotiate future conflicts in daily life events, and enacts spiritual activism. Anzaldúa (2002) explains, “This is your new vision, a story of how conocimiento manifests, but one with a flaw: it doesn't work with things that are insurmountable, or with all people at all times (we haven't evolved to that stage yet), and it doesn't always bring about immediate change” (p. 571). In other words, although the individual is prepared to manifest the empowered identity, it might take some time for change to be visible and does not remain immune to all obstacles.

Throughout this process, an individual is often found in more than one stage and *nepantla* (stage two) occurs most often as a transition between spaces. Anzaldúa’s work serves as a
valuable framework for social justice and exemplifies that “holistic, spirit-inflected perspectives—when applied to racism, sexism, homophobia, and other contemporary issues—can sustain and assist us as we work to transform social injustice” (Keating, 2008). The following section uses Anzaldúa’s path to conocimiento as a framework to understand the limitations of separating the college choice and college persistence stages.

**Conocimiento Colecial**

In this chapter, I engage with Anzaldúa’s seven stages of conocimiento by using the interview data of 47 Latina/o student participants to establish a theory of college choice and navigation, which I title conocimiento colegial. I define conocimiento colegial as a reflective collegial consciousness where Latinas/os use their ethnic/racial identity and social positionalities in an empowered college identity. This process engages with the seven stages of conocimiento as they pertain to the process of: preparing for college, searching for colleges, choosing a college, transitioning into college, and navigating college. The 47 Latina/o student oral history interviews served as data for Chapter Six.

Anzaldúa (2002) argues that, “A spiritual hunger rumbles deep in your belly, the yearning to live up to your potential” (p. 540). Similarly, Latina/o participants aspired to attend college and earn a degree to live a “better” life. Parents, family members, and educators helped establish a yearning for the participants to graduate with a college degree. As revealed in Chapter Five, systemic processes, such as a lack of adequate college information, pushed Latina/o participants to question whether they would accomplish their educational goals. Findings reveal that participants engaged in the stages of conocimiento colegial, depicted by Figure 13. Every participant was in at least one of the stages during the interviews.
Figure 13. Theory of *conocimiento colegial*: The pathways of Latina/o participants when developing college-going and college-navigating identities

Figure 13 displays the pathways to *conocimiento colegial* and explains the process that the Latina/o participants experienced when developing college-going and college-navigating identities. The solid arrows represent the participants who move from one stage to the next with relative ease. On the other hand, the dashed arrows represent students who re-entered the *nepantla* stage. Within *nepantla*, the participants negotiated original aspirations. For example, the negotiation process often entailed strategically lowering or postponing aspirations, based on information received in the departing stage. Therefore, the black background in Figure 13 represents the space of *nepantla* and the dashed line visualizes the participant entering and emerging from *nepantla* on their quest to reach the next stage.
To initiate the first stage, “Arrebato—Deciding to Attend College,” students experienced an event, which allowed them to realize they should attend college. In this first stage, participants shared various examples of enacting their facultad to understand complex issues. Once the participants decided that they wanted to earn a bachelor’s degree, they entered the second stage, “Nepantla—Searching for a College.” In the second stage the participants learned about the various postsecondary pathways, depending on the college-going information available to them. After nepantla, as depicted by the solid arrow, some participants entered the third stage confident in their abilities to attend a college. Conversely, those that did not receive accurate information regarding college, depicted by the dashed arrow, began the third stage misinformed. Once in the third stage, “Coatlicue—Questioning College Success Abilities,” the participants questioned their academic and non-cognitive abilities. Another event, such as college admission application deadlines, allowed the student to initiate the fourth stage “El Compromiso—Planning College Pathways and Applying to College.” In this stage, the participants took several steps towards college, including applying to college, despite lingering doubts. However, those participants who continued unsure about their abilities, depicted by the dashed line, enter a stage of nepantla, where they continued to be unsure about belonging in college. Participants had various reasons for entering nepantla at that point, including continued perceived inabilities to afford college or doubting whether they could complete a college degree if they entered a four-year college directly after high school.

The fifth stage, “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together—Establishing College-Going Identities” entailed the students composing their collegial identity. Those represented by a solid arrow did not allow external forces to detract them from earning a bachelor’s degree, regardless if they planned to transfer from a two-year college into a four-year college. Often, the participants
recalled helping others or receiving help from others who had undergone the college search process, thus bringing in the sense of community for which Anzaldúa (2002) advocates. However, those who continued to feel uncertain about their ability to earn a four-year degree entered a state of *nepantla* after the fifth stage, which entailed strategically lowered or postponed college aspirations. In the sixth stage, “The Blow-Up—Entering and Clashing with College” the participants entered college with their new collegial identity, only to experience pushback, such as a not qualifying for a college program due to having an undocumented immigrant status. Those who entered with higher levels of confidence, represented by the solid arrow, continued to the final stage. However, those who entered unsure about whether they belonged in a college, stopped-out and returned to *nepantla* to re-establish a postsecondary identity. During the second oral history interview, two Latino participants were attempting to leave the *nepantla* stage and re-enter college.

The final stage, “Shifting Realities—College-Navigating Identity,” entailed the participants realizing that they would continue to experience injustices due to their social positionalities and identities but feeling prepared to utilize resources, overcome obstacles, and graduate from college. The following sections provide a detailed explanation of each stage through exemplar experiences of participants.

**Stage One: El Arrebato: Deciding to Attend College**

An *arrebato*, shattering event, initiated the commitment from participants to attend college. The *arrebato* began a process of searching for a college pathway and identity. In the *arrebato*, the participants established college aspirations, regardless of academic grades. The *arrebato* provided participants with a possibility to establish a college identity. The participants
envisioned the possibilities, without considering likely obstacles, and sought college information in the next stage.

To understand the college choice process, participants were asked to recall when they became certain of wanting to earn a college degree. Although some explained they “just always knew” or could not think of a key event, 40 of the participants recalled how a specific event or interaction with an individual sparked interest in college. Three participants experienced their *arrebato* prior to high school, with the remaining occurring during high school. The following sections establish that social identities within the U.S. context, parents, and elements from the college-going climate caused *arrebatos*. The interview excerpts exemplify the *arrebatos* experienced by participants and discuss in detail the first stage on the pathway.

**Social identities activating el arrebato.** Findings reveal that social identities, informed the development and occurrence of *los arrebatos*. As potential first-generation Latina/o college students, with a low-income socioeconomic status, and with connections to undocumented immigration status, the participants represented social identities around race, college-generation status, class, gender, and immigration status. During events that allowed for the reflection on positionalities, the participants experienced an *arrebato*.

Paulina maintained a 3.38 GPA in the Engineering Academy and then enrolled as an engineering student at a CSU campus. Paulina’s *arrebato* revealed the level of critical awareness, which Latina/o students from low-income backgrounds posses:

When I was in middle school…I actually almost got kidnapped once. It was a 30-minute walk to my old middle school. I was walking alone and I had just seen my mom drive by, she was going to work. Then, a big white van just stopped right in front of me, and I don’t remember what he was saying, I just remember I ran off. I had just seen my mom
before…It’s hard to explain, but at that point, I realized I had to do something to change…I became more outspoken…Wanting to go to college started with seeing my mom work so hard, the one incident, and moving (to Monte Rico).

In Paulina’s *arrebato*, the intersectionality of gender and socioeconomic status led to her experiencing the threat of being kidnapped when walking to middle school. Paulina’s mother had to work multiple jobs. Paulina did not have access to affordable transportation and had to walk alone to and from school. At that young age, Paulina engaged with her *facultad* to see beneath the surface and understand that her mother had to work multiple jobs because she did not have a college degree.

Prior to the *arrebato*, Paulina was shy and bullied by peers. After the *arrebato*—almost being kidnapped, right after seeing her mother drive to her second job—Paulina began to shift her identity, self-advocate, and prepare for a college education. This *arrebato* shook her reality of being raised by a single mother whose work hours resulted in very little time to interact with Paulina. Paulina began to develop her college-going identity after realizing that her mother’s economic situation was due to a lack of a college degree. Shortly after the *arrebato*, Paulina and her mother relocated to Northern California. Then, Paulina participated in school and pursued competitive pre-college summer programs. Her *arrebato* in middle school allowed Paulina to initiate her college-going identity development process in reflection of her low socioeconomic status.

**Parents activating el arrebato.** Although parents played a secondary role in the sociopolitical contexts that initiated the *arrebato* noted above, they also served as a primary source to activate the *arrebato* stage for students. Antonio’s experience at the end of sophomore year exemplified how a student with a high GPA can engage in academic work, without actively
preparing for college and establishing a college-going identity. Antonio graduated from the Engineering Academy with a 3.67 GPA and enrolled in a CSU campus as an engineering major. Antonio explained how his college-going identity began:

My mom, she’s always wanted me to succeed, do better for myself. She’s always told me “go to college”…Sophomore year was my best year. I got the best engineer award and I got a plaque. My mom and my dad came to the event. And my dad. (voice cracking, tearing up) Sorry. (crying) That day when I received that award, he gave me a hug and he said “You know, I’m proud of you son.” That’s one of the best things that’s ever happened to me. (crying) Ever since that day I’ve always wanted to make him proud.

(crying) That motivated me to do more and actually go to college.

In the beginning of his first oral history interview, Antonio argued that his mother supported his college aspirations, while his dad was “not too involved.” About halfway into the first interview, he recalled the point in time when he felt the urgency pursue a college education. This reflection reminded Antonio about the important role his dad played in his pursuit of a college degree. This memory shattered Antonio’s beliefs that his dad did not care about his education. His arrebato opened up Antonio’s ability to use his facultad and see below the surface of his dad not being involved in his education because he works the majority of the day. This arrebato—a hug and verbalized support from his dad—represented a turning point for Antonio, exemplified by actively pursuing future college preparation opportunities in his path to developing a college-going identity.

**College-going climate activating el arrebato.** In addition, elements from the AHS college-going climate also helped participants experience un arrebato. Rogelio recalled how
experiences with the counselor, college advisor, peers in the College and Career Center, and attending a college summer program led to his *arrebato*,

It was definitely Ana Lilia and (her college outreach program). I was a freshman and I only joined (the program) because of my counselor—he forced me. He’s the person that even if you say no, he’s going to do whatever he wants. But I never went to the program my freshman and sophomore years, I never went…When I was trying to change, on that path of changing, I went to the career center a lot and I saw the students happy and they were talking to each other and having fun. They were saying “I’m going to go to this college” and they would come back and tell their stories. I realized, “I want to do something like that—having fun but going forward in my life”…Then, I did a (UC summer program) for a month—it was the greatest experience in my life. That’s the main reason why I wanted to go to college…I saw the whole picture of college.

The Latino high school counselor, saw potential in Rogelio, who maintained a high GPA and thus ensured that Rogelio enrolled in a college advising program. However, Rogelio explained that the application process for the outreach program entailed only filling out basic information. As an academically high-achieving student enrolled in a college advising program, Rogelio represented an “ideal” college-going student. However, he revealed that it was until the summer before senior year when he began to actively establish a college-going identity after experiencing his *arrebato*. Although Rogelio maintained a strong GPA and emphasized that earning good grades was easy because the academic work was not rigorous. Rogelio, an undocumented student, enrolled in a selective UC campus and received numerous scholarships after he graduated from the Art Academy with a 3.93 GPA.
According to the participants, a particularly important strategy in the college-going climate entailed the facilitator of a college workshop leading an honest discussion about navigating possible hardships the students might encounter. Maricela recalled the importance of having a classroom presenter explain that colleges welcome low-income students:

Junior year, someone came to our class and said, “It’s possible to go to a four-year university; it doesn’t matter that you are from a low-income area.”…That was the first time someone talked to me about college…I realized, “Hey this is why I have to prepare!” I started working on my grades junior year. I would’ve settled down quicker instead of being foolish if I would’ve heard about the college workshops earlier!

Maricela elaborated on the importance of the presenter referring to being admitted to college as a low-income student. Having a college advisor acknowledge Maricela’s identity as a low-income student allowed her to envision herself as a student in a four-year college. At the same time, the workshop facilitator acknowledged that colleges welcome low-income students.

**Stage one summary.** Overall, the participants experienced several forms of *arrebatos*, which activated their college aspirations. However, all were related to the participant’s social position, parents, and the college-going climate at AHS. Nevertheless, every type of *arrebato* included a reflection on social identities and future pathways. The participants used the *arrebatos* to tap into their aspirational capital and establish a goal to graduate with a bachelor’s degree (Yosso, 2005). The exemplars presented point to possible individuals who can initiate an *arrebato*, such as teachers, counselors, and college advisors.

**Stage Two: Nepantla—Searching for a College**

After experiencing an *arrebato*, the participants transitioned into the *nepantla* stage, where they searched for college information. Similar to Anzaldúa’s theory of *conocimiento*,
nepantla was the most reoccurring stage for the participants. Often, teachers and other elements in the AHS college-going climate provided information during the nepantla search stage. The AHS college-going climate provided participants with information about vocational pathways, community college, and/or four-year colleges. A GPA above a 3.0 did not guarantee that participants received in-depth information but those with a higher GPA who enrolled in a college guidance program received more support during than participants with a lower GPA.

**Vocational pathways.** During the nepantla search stage, participants received college information about to vocational pathways. The information arose in visits to AHS classrooms by private for-profit vocational college recruiters and by Nick, the outreach counselor for the local community college, who provided students with information about the vocational degrees.

For example, Javier graduated from the Law Academy with a 1.9 GPA. In his first interview, Javier discussed the vocational information he received:

> Hopefully I graduate and go to community college for two years and get my associate’s (degree). Hopefully I can transfer to a bigger college but at the moment I don’t know what I’ll study. I have not applied to community college yet. I was going to go see my counselor or a community college counselor. Can you apply during the summer? Or do you have to apply now?…I was going to go during the summer. I guess that’s the easiest way out because my grades in high school were not the best so that the only way I can continue my studies. …No one ever talked with me about college…I never have been talked to one-on-one about college, like we are doing now. But as a class they showed us different opportunities. This year in our sixth period class, there have been a lot of people from community college, the law program, and (a vocational private for-profit college) come talk about college and tell us what we can do.
Although Javier realized he wanted to attend college as a sophomore, it was not until twelfth grade that he began to receive college information. The college information was vocational and focused on the justice administration program, which culminated in a certificate or associate’s degree. Javier recalled that the program would prepare students to earn a license to become security a guard and to enter the police academy or the department of corrections. Javier also received information to attend a private for-profit vocational institution, in which two participants enrolled. Like all of the participants with a low GPA, Javier did not receive information about college, which emphasized transferring to a “bigger” or four-year college—despite having aspirations to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Other participants who were considering community college also received information regarding vocational private colleges. During this nepantla search stage, Angel recalled the options that AHS educators made available to him. He explained, “We had college fairs every year, but it wasn’t state or UC schools, it was like Everest and cosmetic colleges, it was never public schools. It didn’t really help.” During the school year, public four-year college representatives did not agree to attend the AHS college fair, despite Ms. Jacobs inviting several colleges. In the end, Angel, who graduated from the Art Academy at AHS with a 1.9 GPA, chose to continue his pursuit of a four-year college degree by attending a private for-profit college in hopes of transferring to a four-year college. Angel elaborated,

I wanted to attend (a private for-profit college) instead of a community college…My aunty dropped out of community college and told me it would be the same thing as high school—teachers not caring, students do whatever we want…A lady came in my history class and told us about (the private for-profit college)…One of the advisers called me and they showed me around the campus.
During this *nepantla* search stage, Angel only received advice from his aunt, who stopped out of community college. As a student with a low GPA, he experienced teachers who did not care about students, about him—his potential, education, and future. AHS provided vocational information, which led him to a private for-profit college. Given that Angel aimed to transfer to a four-year college and earn a bachelor’s degree, the support he received from the private for-profit college contradicted the lack of attention he received throughout high school and what he expected in community college. It is possible that Angel remained in a state of *nepantla* since he continued to search for information to transfer out of the private for-profit college and into a four-year college during the second interview.

**Community college information shared in the college-going climate.** On the other hand, educators who provided information about community college to participants often portrayed a misleading portrait. Overall, the participants learned about community college as a pathway into postsecondary education that would entail a smoother academic transition. In other words, educators informed the participants that the community college was “easier” academically and more affordable than a four-year college. As a result, educators discredited the academic validity of two-year colleges and the academic potential of the participants. In addition, pursuing a postsecondary education with the idea that community college was an affordable option did not prepare the participants for financial hardships they would inevitably experience. Finally, the participants who were guided to attend a two-year college did not receive information about preparing for the transfer process.

Norma remained in the *nepantla* stage during most of her high school years. It was until junior year when she met with the school counselor that she began to gather vocational information about college. She graduated from the AHS Science Academy with a 2.77 GPA and
enrolled in the local community college. Norma explained that she was unsure about her postsecondary pathway throughout high school due to her low grades freshman year and her deficient grade in biology. She recalled sharing with her counselor that she was unsure about what college to attend but wanted to earn a bachelor’s degree. Norma’s counselor was the primary source of information during her *nepantla* stage. Norma elaborated, “My counselor told me, ‘Are you sure you want to go to a four-year college? You will have to make up your biology class.’ I decided to stick with community college until I get all of my general classes to transfer.” Although, Norma aspired to attend a four-year college, she struggled academically during her first two years of high school. During her third year in high school, she received individualized information from her high school counselor, a Latino male who steered her into community college. Upon exiting the *nepantla* stage, Norma’s experience would be representative of the dashed arrow in Figure 13—a student who was unsure about the future steps. With a 2.77 GPA, Norma’s counselor could have bridged her aspirations to attend a four-year college with high expectations by providing accurate information. However, similarly to Angel, Norma returned to *nepantla* as a community college student, due to her lack of information about how to transfer to a four-year college.

The experiences of Anthony, provide insight into the lack of college information about community college and the tracking into vocational postsecondary options that occurred to academically low-achieving students. He recalled,

No one ever talked with me about college…I never have been talked to one-on-one about college, like we are doing now. But as a class they showed us different opportunities. This year, there have been a lot of people who come talk about college and telling us what we can do. They are from (the local community college) and the law administrator
program or something like that…We’ve never gone to colleges. I went in 6th grade. We went to UC Berkeley. Yeah, (nostalgic), I remember the campus, it was big a lot of students. I haven’t gone back to any colleges…I was here last year during the college fair. I learned about different colleges, I thought about (private for-profit vocational college) or a secondary trade school—whatever it’s called.

Anthony began by arguing that he had not been approached to talk about college, especially on an individualized basis. However, as he continued to explain, Anthony’s experience revealed that he received information about postsecondary options. He received information from the vocational program at the local community college, private for-profit vocational colleges, and the Army. As an academically under-achieving student who did aspire to earn a four-year college degree but maintained self-doubt, Anthony did not have someone reach out and ask about his postsecondary aspirations or offer information about the possibility of transferring to a four-year college from a community college. Thus, the sub-climate of vocational college-going (noted in Chapter Five) reinforced the perception that a four-year college was not a place where participants belonged.

**Four-year college information shared in the college-going climate.** As noted in Chapter Five, the participants who were academically eligible to apply for admission to four-year colleges received more opportunities for college information. The participants received information about four-year colleges during interactions with teachers, on fieldtrips to college, or from siblings who attended college. The following exemplars establish that information that referencing student identities was especially helpful to the participants during the search stage.
Melissa was considering the local community college, despite maintaining a 4.07 GPA in the Media Academy. She explained how a fieldtrip to a selective UC campus during eleventh grade changed her perspective:

I did not have a plan but I knew I was going to college…I would think about community college because people would say it’s cheaper and after two years you can just transfer but I never had a plan…Before applying to colleges I didn’t even think about (the selective UC campus)...until I went on a tour organized by Hispanic students trying to recruit more students to apply. Ever since then, I became interested in it and that’s what made me apply.

Melissa serves as another example of an academically high achieving student lacking adequate college information. Instead of receiving adequate guidance and motivation to establish high aspirations and expectations, Melissa had received information that community college was a better option due to its low cost. However, Melissa recalled that it was a Latina/o student group who emphasized the importance of going to a selective college, such as the selective UC campus. As a result, Melissa applied and was accepted to the selective UC campus due to the information she gathered during an event that was tailored for Latina/o students.

Janet provided another example of a participant who received a strong support system. Janet graduated with a 3.5 GPA from the Law Academy. She explained that her parents, peers, and college advisor provided information about four-year colleges:

I would go to the College and Career Center to get help with applications and check online to see what schools there was. My dad took me to a (CSU campus) before I applied. He took me in September on a Sunday—the whole family went. We didn’t get off the car but we drove around the campus to see how it was. He asked me where I
really wanted to go see and I told him. I’ve seen (a selective UC campus) over the summer, we got a tour because I had an internship and the girl in charge gave us a tour of the whole campus…This year we got presentations and stuff about college…They started talking about college at the end of sophomore year…If I have questions about college I go to (my college advisor). Before (my college advisor) was around, I didn’t really have questions. I only joined (the college guidance program) ‘cause my friend was joining, that’s when I started taking college more seriously. In tenth and eleventh grade I knew to take the classes because my counselor would tell me.

Janet was comfortable entering the college and career center to use the resources and ask for help because she was enrolled in a college guidance program. Janet also conducted on-line searches to find specific information regarding colleges. Janet understood what courses she should sign up for, including taking AP courses, because her counselor noted that she maintained a high GPA and ensured she was on the four-year college pathway. Finally, Janet’s parents supported her quest college by taking her to visit a CSU campus. Although the parents did not attend college, they understood the importance of Janet earning a college degree and wanted to support her. Janet’s college search experience highlighted that in order to receive college information, she resorted to various sources of support.

Moreover, the participants with older siblings, family members, or friends who attended a four-year college not only served to provide in-depth information about college but also provided information regarding what to expect in college. Vanessa explained how her older sisters who attended four-year colleges shared valuable information about college,

Both of my sisters go to college, one to state and the other to UC. They are both pushing me, and making sure I go to college. They tell me to always stay on task and if I ever
need help, to go to them. My sister has work-study and she tells me that when you go to college it will be a lot of time management, do your job, study, sleep, and make sure I have fun as well. When I went to (the UC college), I fell in love with the campus, I researched it and the academics were pretty good but mainly, I have to say the campus. (The UC college) was really nice, I like that they had the bikes and the beach was amazing, I like that underneath the tunnel they had their sororities. My sisters were saying it’s a lot of work but you have to make sure not to be too stressed and make sure to relax sometimes but also get your work done and not slack off.

The knowledge of Vanessa’s older sisters about the community college, CSU, and UC systems enriched her college search stage. Moreover, her college information search went beyond general admission information and entailed learning what to expect in college and learning she must balance school, work, and social life. During her information search, she also learned about work-study as an opportunity, something only participants with a 3.0 or above mentioned. The experiences of Vanessa’s sisters helped her cope with fears of moving far from home. In the end, she chose the campus where she felt most comfortable during the college fieldtrips—a UC campus in southern California.

**Summary of stage two.** During the *nepantla* search stage, through a college-going climate, AHS educators provided the participants information that centered on vocational education, community college, and four-year college information. The participants who planned to attend a community college and transfer into a four-year college did not receive accurate information or had access only to information about vocational pathways. On the other hand, the participants who were eligible to apply for admission to a four-year college and enrolled in a college preparation program were more likely to access in-depth information. However, as seen
with Maricela’s example, a high GPA did not guarantee a well-informed college search process. As the following section shows, the participants who did not receive in-depth and ongoing support were more likely to question whether they could succeed in college.

**Stage Three: The Coatiycue State—Questioning College Success Abilities**

In the third phase of *conocimiento colegial*, participants questioned their abilities to pursue the established goal of earning a bachelor’s degree based on the information acquired during the search stage. During this space, students experience a sense of hopelessness and questioned whether they would: be admitted to the college of their choice, succeed in college, and belong in a specific college system. Participants questioned their potential to succeed in college based on social identities, academic abilities, and financial abilities. Finally, in Stage Three, the participants utilized *la facultad* to consider future obstacles. Anzaldúa defines *la facultad* as “the ability to shift attention and see through the surface of things and situations.

**Using *la facultad* to foresee institutional barriers in higher education based on social identities.** Participants reflected on their social positions and questioned their ability to succeed in college. Three themes encompassed the participants’ social positions: immigration status, low socioeconomic status, and first-generation college status. The participants questioned their ability to afford, attend, and/or navigate college.

**Immigration status.** The participants who were undocumented or had undocumented parents experienced additional obstacles when negotiating college pathways. In particular, undocumented participants understood the risk of deportation by attending college. On the other hand, participants who had undocumented parents understood there was a possibility of not attending college if the family had to return to Mexico with the parent. The following sections provide more information about how being an undocumented student and having an
undocumented parent contributed to the Coatlicue stage by questioning whether they could attend or complete college. The experiences of participants with obstacles centered on immigration highlight the intersectionality of the Latina/o identity and highlight the complexity of the college choice process.

Noe, a student in the Art Academy who graduated with a 2.01 GPA, explained his feelings of hopelessness due to being undocument[ed and lacking guidance. During his second interview, Noe explained,

I filled out my college application bad and because I didn’t know so much about the California Dream Act, I was telling them, “I’m from here, I’m from here, don’t charge me out of state.” I had to go to the school at least ten times before I could change my status…My brother was in constant terror of someone finding out about his status and not being able to finish school, so I knew I had to be very careful…One of the leading people that led the college stuff, actually put me down and made comments saying that I had to put myself as AB 540…I was going by what my family told me. She was very pushy and telling me what to do instead of comforting me. She did not know my feelings. She made some comments that I did not like and I had to tell the principal. Her tone, “You have to put yourself as AB540, if not it will not be my fault, it will be your fault, you are the one that will be in trouble and don’t come back to me asking for help!” Saying that to someone in my delicate situation is really fucked up.

Noe’s older brother attended college when California Assembly Bill 540\(^7\) was in the process of being voted into legislation. However, in order to avoid the possibility of being deported from the country, his brother registered as a California resident, without AB540 status.

\(^7\) “On October 12, 2001, Governor Gray Davis signed into law Assembly Bill 540 (Stats. 2001, ch. 814) adding a new section, 68130.5, to the California Education Code. Section 68130.5 created a new exemption from the payment
Noe questioned how he would navigate the community college application process if he could not get California residency status. At first, he was unwilling to file an AB 540 application due to misinformation and the fear of the application resulting in potential deportation from the country. Ms. Jacobs could not understand the depth of Noe’s Coatlicue state, his despair in feeling like he had no safe options. Eventually, Noe’s parents learned that he could qualify for financial assistance with the new California Dream Act but he would need to file an AB 540 application. Noe’s parents understood the fear behind his hesitation to file the application but assured him that it was a safe option. After fixing his AB 540 status, Noe enrolled in coursework to transfer to a CSU in business administration.

Similarly, Frances, who graduated from AHS with a 1.47 GPA, explained how her dad’s immigration status impeded her ability to tap into her aspirations to attend college. Frances recalled that the threat of moving to Mexico made her question whether she could attend college:

Since freshman year we were supposed to go to Mexico. I was supposed to go and I didn’t want to go over there. Since then I was messing up in school because I didn’t care anymore. I didn’t want to hang out, I didn’t want to do anything because that’s all I would think about…I didn’t want to go because I felt like it was going to be worse for us, my brother and sister, to go to school. My parents stopped everything. Since they knew that we would always get worried they stopped telling us about that. I would ask and they would say, “Nothing is going on.” Then in November I got a letter that said they were sending my dad to Mexico. I got the mail and I opened the letter. I was mad because they didn’t tell me anything. When I found out about that, I messed up again in of non-resident tuition for certain non-resident students who have attended high school in California and received a high school diploma or its equivalent” (AB540 website, nd, “What is AB540” page)
school. I was like “What’s the point of me doing good if I’m going to end up in Mexico?”

Although Frances was not undocumented, her dad was and his legalization process entailed him returning to Mexico. Thus, her parents would have to relocate the family to Mexico during this time. The threat of having to leave the U.S. fueled Frances to question her abilities to enter college. As a result, Frances disengaged with school academically and most of her high school years, did not believe that she could attend a college, despite aspiring to earn a college degree.

**Low-income status.** Moreover, since participants were low-income, they worried about their ability to succeed in college if they could not afford the costs. The participants did not think they could afford college, despite receiving some assurance from educators about access to financial aid. A low-income identity and the lack of in-depth guidance resulted in the participants concluding that they would struggle financially once in college.

Victor, an alumni from the Art Academy, described how experiencing financial hardships during high school impacted what he expected once in college:

It was just the point that our income got really bad that it was just me and my brother in the dark at the house—there was no money to pay the bills…There was times, we didn’t have anything to eat. So it’s another thing, “How are you going to be for sure in school, how am I going to do this in college? I have to take care of my little brother, I have to feed my little brother, How am I going to be able to take care of my little brother?” I don’t care about myself I care about my little brother. My mom and stepdad were working, trying to get some money, I was the one at the house with him. I’m the oldest, I had to do something. I started working and helped a little bit, got us something at least.
During high school, Victor’s family struggled to survive financially. This steered his academic disengagement with school, which contributed to graduating with a 1.8GPA. When considering his financial hardships, Victor could not understand how he and his younger brother would survive financially if he attended college full-time. Victor not only questioned his financial ability to afford college but also understood that if he attended college he would not be able to support his brother financially. Victor’s plans were to postpone college enrollment to help support his family financially. Fortunately, Victor’s financial hardships improved by the time he graduated from AHS and he was able to work towards his college aspirations by enrolling in a postsecondary institution.

Jacob, mentioned earlier in the *arrebato* stage, planned to attend college but stop every-other-semester in order to work and afford college. Jacob explained, “It is tough because my mom cannot support the family by herself…My plans after high school were to go to college for a semester or two and then work and then go back again. I could get the money and pay off college.” Jacob was the oldest and his mom was the head of household. Therefore, he did not expect for his mother to contribute financially to his education. Fortunately, Jacob’s teachers talked with him about financial aid, which helped him decide to enroll in college. Nevertheless, he still planned to stop his community college education during the spring semester and search for full-time employment to save money for the next academic school year.

**First-generation college status.** The participants also questioned whether they could succeed in college due to their status as first-generation college students. As first-generation college students, the participants understood that navigating college would continue to require certain skills and knowledges that they would need to seek out. In the Coatlicue state, they questioned their level of preparedness to navigate college and foresaw possible obstacles.
Alonzo exemplified the first-generation college experience and questioned how he would navigate college. He explained, “My biggest fear is that I’m going to get lost. I’m not going to know what to do next and I’m just going to get stuck there doing nothing because I don’t know what to do.” Since Alonzo graduated from the Engineering Academy with a 2.2GPA, he was part of the group of participants with a low GPA who did not experience a resourceful college search process. During high school, he never stepped foot into the College and Career Center. Besides his English teacher, no other educator reached out to him to talk about college. Once in community college, he placed into college level math and English even after failing several of his courses in high school. Clearly, Alonzo had the academic ability to succeed in college—which he never questioned. However, being the first in his family to attend college made him wonder if he had the ability to navigate college successfully, in terms of selecting a major and establishing a clear pathway to a degree.

**Questioning academic abilities to succeed in college.** In addition, the participants also questioned whether they could succeed in college due to their perceived academic abilities. However, the participants who did not pass the California Standardized High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) had institutionalized reasons for questioning academic abilities to complete college.

Benjamin’s experience with the CAHSEE provided insight into why some participants remained in the Coatlicue state for a long period of time. When I questioned why he began high school wanting to attend a four-year college but as a senior he planned to enroll in a community college but not transfer, after clearing his throat, he responded:

*I thought about (a four-year college) my freshman year, all throughout my freshman year…That’s why I tell everyone always have a backup plan…I had that dream to be an engineer but then I wasn’t able to do it, so I just went to my back-up plan…I really don’t*
do well in tests, I know everything I need to know but once it comes to the test, I just blank out and I hate that…Last year I didn’t pass it because of one point, and I took it this year again and now I’m waiting for my results…I started to reconsider going to a four-year college) my junior year…I really think of the CAHSEE as being a dream-crusher, you plan a dream, but you still have to worry about our qualifications community hours, and now we have to worry about the CAHSEE, if we pass everything and then we don’t pass the CAHSEE, it was all that work for nothing…That happened to me…I changed my dreams…if I had passed the CAHSEE, my dreams would have stayed the same—to be a structural engineer.

Throughout his first interview, Benjamin claimed that he only wanted a “normal life,” meaning that he only wanted to earn a degree at a two-year college. Although he began with high educational aspirations of earning a four-year college degree, once he realized that he would likely not pass the CAHSEE, Benjamin entered the Coatlicue state of hopelessness. Prior to the CAHSEE, Benjamin enjoyed being in the Engineering Academy and aspired to become a civil engineer. This experience led to Benjamin disengaging from schooling because he did not see the purpose to earning strong grades if he could not enter a four-year college.

However, Benjamin’s story revealed a glimmer of hope for being able to rise from the depths of the Coatlicue state when he expressed, “If I would pass it, it would make my journey to college much easier.” Despite verbalizing that he no longer wanted a four-year college degree, he continued to maintain hope for passing the CAHSEE, either during high school or in adult school. This signaled that with adequate support and guidance, even a student deep in the Coatlicue state, such as Benjamin, could continue with his journey in the path towards conocimiento colegial.
Adan explained how not passing the CAHSEE hindered his high aspirations that he established after being inspired by his teacher:

Since that day I was like, “Yeah I’m going to try to go!” But now my senior year, I feel like that’s not my place, that’s not really my place. Because I might get stuck and not be able to move on. Like, on my studies, there might be a lot of homework or work, or projects that I might not accomplish, and I might not take it serious. I don’t know…If the CAHSEE wouldn’t exist, I really would see myself going to college to experience at least the first semester. ‘Cause I really do, I want to be, I had thoughts of being a border patrol, athletic assistant, or helping out in the field. I like that a lot. I find that interesting how you can get hurt, playing football, injuries and stuff like that but for me, to get to my goal of going to college, I don’t know, I think of it twice, like “Should I?”

Adan’s experience reflected that he questioned his academic abilities after not passing the CAHSEE, which tempered his college aspirations. Despite questioning his academic abilities, Adan continued to have college aspirations but did not expect that would attend. Since his teacher left AHS by the time Adan was questioning his academic abilities, he did not have anyone to talk with about his fears.

In addition, college admission tests, such as the SAT and ACT, served as institutionalized causes for questioning academic success in college. Maricela, a participant with a 3.9 GPA in the Engineering Academy, explained,

After I took the test, I started thinking if the tests in college are going to be that stressful or if they are going to be harder. It made me think more about college and wonder if that is what college is like I don’t know how I’m going to be able to handle. I’m going to have to study more. I don’t think anyone has talked to me about that.
Maricela recalled that after struggling with the SAT exam, she questioned her academic preparation and academic ability to succeed in college. She also noted that no one debriefed with her after taking the SAT. Thus, she could not reflect on her fears. Similar to all of the participants, Maricela connected the SAT with college-level academics, which resulted in feeling unprepared to succeed academically in college.

**Summary of stage three.** In the third stage on the path to *conocimiento colegial*, the participant experiences reflected how social and academic identities informed whether and how they questioned their abilities to succeed in college. The social identities of immigration status, socioeconomic status, and college generation status pushed participants to question whether they could attend, afford, and/or navigate college—especially those who did not have a systemic source of support, such as a college advisor in high school. Those who experienced institutional obstacles—such as not passing the standardized high school exit exam—questioned their academic abilities to complete a college education. As the following stages reveal, to cope with the fears, the participants strategically negotiated college aspirations from a four-year college to a community college, which was perceived as more affordable and academically less challenging than a four-year college.

**Stage Four: The call…*El Compromiso*…Planning College Pathways and Applying to College**

As a transition out of the Coatlicue space, the fourth stage, a “call to action” pulled participants away from feeling hopeless. Instead, the participants asked more questions about college, listened more closely, and used *la facultad* to alter thoughts and behaviors related to college. Students reinterpreted previous experiences and allowed new interpretations to shape their future by applying to specific colleges. Participants released fears of failure—the fear of
not meeting college aspirations—to envision a college pathway. This stage entailed establishing a postsecondary education plan and applying for colleges. However, during this stage, institutional agents, such as college advisors, often guided the participants.

In her first interview, Gina explained why she chose to apply to CSU campuses:

I knew I wanted to go to a (four-year) state college, I didn’t even apply to a community college. I heard they take longer…Since you have to take a test before. If you score low in a community college, it takes more years than if you score low and go to a (four-year) state college. I don’t know if it’s true but that’s why I didn’t want to go. I never thought about transferring. I figured it out in high school, like during sophomore and junior year when the workshops would happen. I knew I would go to a CSU. I remember them teaching us the difference between UCs and CSUs and that’s when I learned the requirements, how to get to a UC and to a CSU.

Gina noted that if students placed in developmental education at a community college, they would have more difficulties completing the required coursework and take longer at a four-year college. In her first interview, Gina did not mention wanting to attend a UC or applying to a UC campus. During her second interview, Gina was enrolled in the local CSU campus and she revealed that during high school she aspired to enter a UC campus. Due to her 3.0 GPA, college advisors steered her into a CSU because they did not think that a UC campus would admit her. During the second interview, Gina proudly announced that she was admitted to a nearby UC campus after applying against everyone’s advice.

Gina’s experience confirmed that school officials guided the Compromiso stage for students. If she had listened to the advice from school officials, Gina would have entered the local CSU campus questioning her college abilities. After turning down the UC campus solely
because it was a wiser financial decision to attend the CSU campus, she began college with a higher academic self-perception knowing that she was academically capable to enter a UC campus. For Gina, her *Compromiso* stage was one where she had to dig deep and advocate for herself to apply to a UC campus, despite the opposition from school officials. Moreover, Gina’s experience of establishing a college pathway revealed how participants had to distinguish between the available two-year and four-year college options.

Natalie, a Media Academy alumna, recalled that her English teacher was key in helping her transition into the college pathway stage. She stated,

> Throughout my whole high school career I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I knew I wanted to be a nurse and then become a doctor but I didn’t know if I wanted to go to a two-year college or a (private for-profit college). Ms. Muñoz made a big difference, she made us do a college portfolio and we had to present on where we were going to college. She would put tables and have different colleges on the tables; she opened up my mind a little bit more about college and where to apply.

Originally, Natalie was only considering a two-year college or a private for-profit college. However, with the support of her twelfth grade English teacher, Natalie applied and was admitted to UC and CSU campuses. She received guidance from Ms. Muñoz when applying to colleges and writing her UC personal statement. When Natalie set her college pathway, she moved away from her initial open-access college choices and enrolled in a UC campus. With the support from Ms. Muñoz, she chose a four-year college, as opposed to the majority of the participants, who entered the community college system.

**Summary of stage four.** In the fourth stage of Coatlicue, the participants reflected on their postsecondary options, planned a college pathway, and applied to colleges. Unlike the
majority of the stages before, the fourth stage was time-sensitive and occurred prior to November 30 for UC and CSU applicants or after November for community college applicants. This stage was especially significant for those who, throughout high school, were unsure about what college system to pursue and for those who planned to attend a four-year college but had to reconsider and enroll in a two-year college due to admission decisions. As will be seen in stage five, stage four has direct implications for the participants when establishing a college identity.

**Stage Five: Putting Coyolxauhqui Together...Choosing a College and Establishing a College Identity**

In the fifth stage, students redefined college realities, after begin admitted to colleges, and chose a postsecondary institution to establish a college identity. Participants sorted through various parts of their lives in order to organize and arrange a story that spoke to their new reality. However, upon reorganizing college identities, participants were critical of dominant ideologies.

**Choosing a four-year college.** When the participants were choosing between four-year college campuses, they often made the decision based on distance from home but often sought outside advice if they were enrolled in a college advising program. For example, Rogelio was enrolled in Ana Lilia’s program and received advise from his mentor:

(A highly selective UC campus) was not my first choice. (Another UC campus) was my first choice but I got denied and into (the highly selective UC campus). Out of the schools that I got into, it was definitely the best. It’s going well but it wasn’t my first choice because it’s too close to home…My mentor from (Ana Lilia’s Program) helped me a lot…He gave me motivation and he helped me decide what school I wanted to go to because I was considering (another UC campus) and (the highly selective UC campus) so I had to decide between those. I went there to study and the environment is so cool. I
think it’s way better than (the highly selective UC campus) but academically, it’s not, and that’s what I leaned on.

During his second interview, Rogelio explained that he did not intend to enroll in the highly selective UC campus. Instead, he dreamed of attending a UC campus in southern California but was not admitted. Therefore, he had to choose between two campuses in northern California, one that was highly selective and the other, which was not. Rogelio was prepared to choose the less selective campus because he liked the campus environment. However, his mentor advised Rogelio to attend the highly selective UC campus because he would benefit more from the academically competitive environment. Ultimately, Rogelio, who maintained a 3.93 GPA, had access to his mentor and Ana Lilia for support in choosing the adequate college.

**Choosing community college.** Miguel, an undocumented student, described that he felt he did not have postsecondary options when choosing a college and establishing a college identity. Miguel noted,

I wanted a two-year college as a freshman. I don’t like to overshoot things so I try something out before I do it fully. I feel like my whole life I thought, “Two years is good enough. At the end, if I like it, then I’ll go to a four-year. If everything paves its way then I’ll go to a Ph.D. if it’s possible”…I think it was already made up that I had to go to a community college, it was already decided being AB540 and where I lived—it was already decided I would be at a community college.

Miguel’s experience as an undocumented student with a low GPA resulted in only being able to consider a community college. Furthermore, his undocumented status did not allow him to fully engage in establishing a college identity as a future transfer student who pursues a PhD. His hesitation and need to add, “If it’s possible,” noted that he was not sure how far he would be able
to continue in his educational pathway. Miguel established his identity as a two-year college student to “test-out” his higher education pathway, prior to establishing a transfer identity. Miguel argued that his AB540 status designated him into the community college system and he used his *facultad* to critique the systemic role preventing him from establishing transfer identity.

**Nepantla: Strategically negotiating aspirations.** Oral history interview data revealed that the participants with a low GPA often strategically negotiated college aspirations when establishing their college identities in the fifth stage. However, not experiencing a strong college-going climate at AHS influenced the participants to lower or postpone college identities.

Alexis explained how she chose to identify as a community college student in a vocational program. During her senior year in high school, Nick presented Alexis’ class with information about the cohort vocational program offered at the local community college. Alexis explained the benefits of the program and her decision:

They are taking 30 students—sounds good, only 30 students. They guarantee you a job after. You get to be in an ambulance. I heard about it from the community college counselor. They came from (a private for profit college) but I don’t know. I was really interested in social work like so bad! That is my dream career to be a social worker but it takes so long. You have to get a good degree and takes so long. A dental hygienist, it’s a good paying job and doesn’t take that long. That was my thought—to be a dental hygienist, work for a while, then go back to social work.

Since Alexis maintained a 2.2 GPA, the AHS college-going climate steered her into a vocational pathway. Instead of establishing her transfer identity, Andrea accepted the offered option to earn a vocational degree as a dental hygienist prior to pursuing her social worker degree. Originally, Alexis signed up for the emergency medical technician cohort. However, after experiencing the
high-stress environment the career would entail, she decided to switch to the dental hygienist option. Given a “good” option to earn a vocational degree and address her financial fears, Alexis strategically postponed her aspirations from earning a social work degree. She hoped to return to community college after working as a dental hygienist and pursue her transfer coursework.

Similarly, Jasmine graduated from the Art Academy with a 2.75 GPA and chose to enroll in the local community college to save money and prepare academically. She explained:

I wanted to go to a four-year university last year, I was planning to apply to a four-year university but now that I see it, I think it’s better that I go to community college first to save money. My last counselor, Mr. Olivera, told me that it was a better option for me because I was going to save money and it was going to prepare me first. I do wish I would have applied to a university; I might have had a chance to actually be accepted to a university. I didn’t apply because I didn’t really think that my GPA or experience was going to make it. Five or six years from now, I see myself in an elementary school, as a teacher…I learned from my counselor that I’ll take two years at community college and then transfer for another two years.

Although Jasmine qualified to apply for admission to a four-year college, her counselor steered her into a community college. He framed a community college as a more affordable and academically easier option for Jasmine. Therefore, Jasmine negotiated her aspirations to include a four-year college after transferring from a community college. Given the information she received, it would take the same amount of time to transfer from a community college than to enter directly into a four-year college. However, the counselor did not provide her with any resources or tools to know how to navigate the transfer process.
Re-Entering the pathway of *conocimiento colegial*. Elia experienced a *nepantla* stage after establishing her college identity. Her experience served to understand how a participant remained in *nepantla* until something or someone “pulled” her/him back into the *conocimiento colegial* pathway. Although the following example of Elia choosing a college and establishing her college-going identity might seem like an *arrebato*, by middle school, Elia had already established college aspirations. She disengaged from school after encountering personal problems. Upon graduating high school, she entered a *nepantla* stage, where she did not actively pursue a college degree. She explained,

> It must have been early November when it clicked. It was a special day because we went to a dinner with my friend’s parents. I remember they were asking me “What are you going to do? What are your goals? What are your aspirations?” I was like, “I don’t know, there’s certain things I’m good at. I want to be a nurse. I’m working.” They were like, “Quit your job. What are you doing?” They drilled me, they drilled me in telling them what I want to do, what I want to become. I was like, “You are right, I need to save my money, go to school, get a car, go to school. I don’t want to be working at the store for the rest of my life. For what, little pay? I want to do something better in my life.”

During her second interview, Elia shared that after graduating from high school her friend’s parents confronted and “pulled her out” of *nepantla*. Elia explained that being confronted about her postsecondary plans allowed her to reflect on the reality that she was not pursuing her goal of earning a four-year degree from a UC campus. After the confrontation, Elia signed up for courses in two community colleges and began attending the classes during the spring semester. During her second interview, Elia remained unsure of whether to pursue a nursing degree or
follow her passion for design with a degree in art. Elia revealed that pursuing college plans was not an individualized decision making process but required the support from external forces.

**Summary of stage five.** In the fifth stage, the participants chose a college campus after receiving admission notifications. The participants who chose a four-year college benefited from the college-going climate at AHS to navigate the choice process. However, those who did not have the GPA to apply for admission to four-year colleges felt like the only option was to choose a community college. Prior to choosing a college, some of the participants experienced a *nepantla* stage, where they required further information and support in their choice process.

**Stage Six: The Blow-up…A Clash with College Realities**

In the sixth phase, students entered college and tested their college identities. They implemented the identity, only to clash with navigating issues of: race and racism, academics in developmental education, and financial obstacles in college. The participants anticipated many of the clashes during the third stage of Coatlicue when questioning their abilities to succeed in college. The participants provided several instances when they felt as if they did not belong in college and often struggled for weeks in the sixth phase.

**Clashing with campus racial climate.** Nicole, an alumna from the AHS Art Academy, with a 2.7 GPA, chose to attend a private for-profit vocational college. She enrolled in college the summer after graduating high school and her interview occurred during the end of her second quarter. Her first quarter in college, Nicole earned a 3.0 GPA but struggled academically due to some professors not understanding or supporting her:

> College is really different (from AHS) they (white students and instructors) have their own way of expressing themselves, they think they can do whatever they want…I’m half white too because my mom is Mexican and my dad is white but I don’t consider myself
white…They are really proper and at AHS you can talk slang and the teachers understood us, you didn’t have to use big vocabulary…At (the college) they are all white—the students and teachers—they have a good vocabulary. But my friends are all Latinas, and we have two Asians in our group…It happens to me all the time that teachers don’t understand me…I asked a teacher “Can you explain what has to be in the project?” and he didn’t understand me. He was like, “What are you saying? I don’t understand you.”…It was embarrassing…My friends said, “Good thing you said something because we didn’t understand.”

Nicole planned to attend the private for-profit college due to her interest in the fashion industry. Once she entered the college, Nicole experienced academic invalidation when asking some instructors for clarification. She noted there was a clear distinction in vocabulary and interactions among the white instructors and white students. Nicole worked forty hours a week and her parents set aside money from her dad’s social security check. Nicole paid thousands of dollars but some instructors did not respect her. Instead, Nicole felt unwelcome and less intelligent, compared to the white students. During the second oral history, she explained that she continued to struggle but looked forward to having “nicer teachers” in the future.

In another example, Vanessa, who graduated from Law Academy with a 3.83 GPA, shared her clash with college realities due to issues of race in a UC campus. She struggled for weeks with her dorm roommates and explained,

It was horrible. We were in a triple, so two of the girls clicked automatically. It became a feud and they wouldn’t listen to me…I felt really disrespected…I felt attacked because I was talking with my mom on the phone in Spanish and one of my roommates asked me what my first language asked what my first language was. I told her my first language
was English and she said, “Really, I would have expected it to be Spanish because you have a thick Spanish accent… I was like, “What does it matter?” I felt so attacked. I did not like the way that she said it. It was a constant: “She’s Mexican, she’s Mexican.” I felt like they would judge me because they sounded like they had pity for me because I’m Mexican…I did not realize there were ignorant people like that… My sister went to a CSU and there was a lot of white people there. She had a tough time with people accepting who she was and would get a lot of judgment put on her. She told me to be prepared. Once I experienced it, I was like, “Wow, I see what she meant.”

In her sixth stage, Vanessa entered a UC and quickly encountered racial microaggressions\(^8\) when her roommates “attack(ed)” her based on her ethnic background. Vanessa’s roommates were demeaning towards her for speaking Spanish and for being Mexican. Vanessa’s clash in college due to her ethnic background exemplified a hostile campus racial climate, which she had to overcome and succeed academically. Since her older sister experienced similar events while being a student in a CSU campus, Vanessa was aware about the possibility of such experiences. Vanessa struggled for weeks to understand how to respond. She requested to change roommates, was approved at her own expense.

**Clashing with academic expectations and developmental education.** Overall, the participants expressed a sentiment of not being prepared to meet the academic expectations in college. Participants experienced a clash with academic rigors in college-level and developmental education courses. Given their hesitation during stage three, where the participants questioned their academic ability to succeed in college, many were not surprised with the clash.

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\(^8\) See: Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009
During her second interview, Nydia, a UC student explained that she experienced a financial clash, which she overcame prior to enrolling in college, but she also encountered an academic clash. Nydia recalled,

My first quarter was so difficult. The work, compared to high school, it was so difficult I was so stressed. I didn’t know how to manage it. AHS didn’t teach me how to manage my time, and the other students knew how to manage their time, I guess their schools taught them…I got into a dancing program, that helped me deal with my stress—that was my stress-reliever. We did some time management workshops at the beginning of school but I feel like I didn’t benefit as much.

Nydia explained her struggles with adjusting to the academic rigors of a UC campus. She argued that compared to AHS, the college courses were difficult and she felt unprepared academically. In order to deal with the stress of adjusting to the academics, Nydia turned to dancing. However, her clash also entailed non-cognitive factors, such as managing time commitments. Nydia recalled that she had to learn to adjust and manage her time. Similar to other participants who attended four-year colleges and private for-profit colleges, Nydia received a workshop during the beginning of the term but needed more support to learn how to manage her time.

Daniel elaborated on the lack of academic preparation at AHS. He explained what it was like to feel academically unprepared for college,

It’s overwhelming because I’m here but I don’t have the same skills as others. I don’t have the same knowledge as them because their schools had a different level of teaching and learning…That’s probably why I’m taking remedial college and math because my school didn’t teach me to be at the college level.
While redefining his college identity, Daniel had to reorganize his reality to include his experiences with unchallenging coursework in AHS. As a student in a prestigious UC campus, he felt overwhelmed having to compete with other students who were better prepared academically. Daniel used his facultad to see below the surface. This resulted in critiquing AHS for not preparing him academically, as opposed to blaming himself.

Similarly, Juan, alumni from the Engineering Academy, enrolled in a community college after high school and when defining his college identity, he critiqued the teaching methods used in high school. It was clear to Juan that after placing in below college level mathematics, he felt academically unprepared for college. He explained, “My AP math teacher did not make our class as difficult as he could have, it was like ‘Why aren’t teachers pushing us to a certain limit?’…I was not ready for college, I read a lot and was still not prepared.” Juan was frustrated with the AP teacher having low academic standards, which display the climate of low expectations at AHS. All of the participants expressed frustration with the lack of academic preparation provided by AHS. The lack of academic preparation contributed to experiencing academic obstacles in college, regardless of high school GPA or postsecondary institution.

**Clashing with financial limitations.** Upon entering higher education, the participants also clashed with college due to financial reasons—just as they had feared during stage three. Participants in four-year colleges oftentimes had to work long hours in order to afford college costs. Moreover, the participants in community colleges had troubles completing the financial aid application process and accessing financial aid reimbursements in a timely manner.

Linda explained how she realized the negative effects of not qualifying for financial aid once in college:
I didn’t get any financial aid, paying for college has been really hard…I didn’t qualify (for the Cal Grant B) and my GPA was too low for Cal Grant A…It was really hard (for me) and really hard on my parents too. Once I started school, I realized, “Crap, you have to pay for all of this!” First, all of the tuition was due on one day but to give myself time, I enrolled in the payment plan and I separated the payments into $3,000 each. I took out $9,000 in loans already but the rest, my parents had to put it on a credit card. That was just fall semester and this next semester, they don’t know what they are going to do.

Upon receiving her financial aid letter, Linda realized that she would not receive the financial support that she had been promised during the general college workshops. She was surprised to see that she would not receive financial aid but decided that she would maintain her educational aspirations and enroll in the CSU. However, it was until she began the semester that she understood the implications of not receiving financial aid. Since her parents supported her educational pursuits, both Linda and her parents went in debt the first semester to pay her tuition and housing. During her second interview, Linda wanted to remain in the CSU campus but was not sure how she would afford the following semesters.

The participants who entered college unsatisfied with their choice of institution, as represented by the dashed line in Figure 13, were more likely to stop attending college and not complete the first term. Juan Carlos entered the local community college as a last resort. Juan Carlos had originally planned his college-going identity as a soccer playing, four-year college student. However, after not being admitted to any four-year colleges, he enrolled the local community college. Juan Carlos explained how his identities of being male, low-income, and a first-generation college student pushed him out of community college in the middle of his first semester. He recalled,
My friends started working. Wherever we would go out to eat, they would take out money like nothing and all I had was $20 from my parents. They would always talk about money, “I took this girl here, I took her there.” Money can take you places and you can do things, so I figured I might as well get some money—that’s what drew me away from school. I don’t even think I applied for financial aid… I didn’t want to be there (in the local community college), I could be doing a whole lot of other things than sitting in the class. I felt like I was just sitting there waiting for time to pass…Now, I want to go back to school. But in order for me to get my classes I have to pay my classes from last semester. It’s okay if I wait until fall semester. But I don’t like working. I paint houses. The people that work there talk to me, they helped me realize that this is not fun I shouldn’t be breaking my back painting someone else’s house, I should paint my own big house—after getting a college degree.

Like the majority of participants who enrolled in community college, Juan Carlos did not apply to the California Board of Governor’s (BOG) Fee Waiver program in order to waive his course fees. In addition, all community college participants waited for months before they could receive a financial aid award check. Instead, they had to struggle financially, work, or decide to stop pursuing school. Juan Carlos’ parents offered to pay for his courses and gave him spending money because they supported him earning a college degree. However, his gendered expectations among his peers influenced him to stop attending college and earn a full-time income. His college advisor knew that Juan Carlos stopped attending college but she could not help him reconsider his decision to stop-out. Instead, his co-workers, middle-aged Latino immigrants who lacked a college degree, understood his frustrations and reminded Juan Carlos about the delayed gratification he would receive after earning a college degree. Upon clashing
with college, due to financial limitations, Juan Carlos entered a *nepantla* stage, where he lowered his aspirations from earning a college degree to working full-time. His co-workers helped Juan Carlos depart *nepantla* in order to plan for and prepare to enter community college once again.

**Stage six summary.** Upon enrolling in a college, Latina/o participants continued to experience problems. During the third stage, the majority of participants, especially those with a GPA below a 3.0, questioned whether academic and financial limitations would hinder their success in college. Since the participants experienced academic and financial limitations, the use of *la facultad* was evident. Participants tapped into *la facultad* and used the ability to foresee possible obstacles. Those who had access to resources or entered college with a solid pathway were more likely to reflect and resist the obstacles encountered and continue to stage seven. On the other hand, those with a dashed pathway, after strategically lowering aspirations in *nepantla*, were more likely to stop-out prior to completing their first term in college.

**Stage Seven: Shifting Realities...Acting out the College Vision**

In the seventh and final stage to reach a *conocimiento colegial*, the participants engaged in a critical transformation by realizing that obstacles would continue but they would persist in college due to the ability to navigate college successfully. In the second oral history interview, collected during the first term of college, the shifting reality was evident.

Gabriel, a graduate from the Media Academy, who planned to transfer to a four-year college from the local community college, explained:

Everything that I’ve been through, the decisions I’ve had to make…for some reason I’m here…and…I’m here for a reason and I know where I’m going, I’m going to pursue what I want to do, no matter what the circumstances are, I’m going to keep fighting to do what I want to do…I will keep going.
Gabriel believed that he would continue to encounter obstacles in community college, from financial limitations to struggling in mathematics. However, by stage seven, he was confident that by asking for help, he would prepare to transfer into a four-year college. Gabriel believed in his own ability to succeed in college and that he would continue overcoming obstacles in college to meet his goal.

In another exemplar, Karen explained that she viewed her background as a source of strength. While originally she was intimidated by placing in developmental math, she viewed her background—a low-income Latina who graduated from an under-resourced high school, and with parents who did not attend college—as empowering. Karen stated,

I surround myself with people like me…At school, I feel so sheltered…I feel so separated from the world. It’s so easy to live here (on campus) and there’s people making sure that there’s no harm put on us, we are being babied. We don’t realize the reality of the world anymore…coming from a world of violence…a lot of people do not realize the reality of the world that we are in, I always have to remind myself that this is not real, the college environment feels fake to me because it’s so perfect.

Karen explained that college students did not know about struggling in a low-income community and lived in a false reality. Therefore, they struggled in sociology, when presented with readings that discussed places like her home community. Meanwhile, Karen was able to use her background as an advantage to understand the material and did not need to spend time conceptualizing the topic—she lived the experiences.

**Stage seven: A transformation for future generations.** Although the participants had not been in college for long, in stage seven, some participants began to network. Anzaldúa (2002) elaborates a similar vision, “You form an intimate connection that fosters the
empowerment of both (nos/otras) to transform conflict into an opportunity to resolve an issue, to change negativities into strengths, and to heal the traumas of racism and other systemic desconocimientos” (p. 573). In their experiences, the participants who became involved in college organizations discussed how other students offered a source of support.

Nydia, who enrolled in a nearby UC campus, explained that she and her peers were ready to withdraw from the UC campus. However, they created a community of academic and personal support among the Latina/o college peers. Nydia explained,

Only my roommates and me are Latinas. There’s about five of us in the whole building. It’s hard…My college though, has 40 percent Latino/Hispanic and our sister college is 60 percent Latino. When I go to other places or class, I don’t see them…it’s important because they understand the struggles that I’m going through and I can talk with them about not being as prepared as other students. We come from a background that’s not great as other people, so I can connect with them…We give each other hope, like, “You gotta do this, don’t give up,” because a lot of us wanted to give up the first three weeks. Nydia noted that within her dormitory, she was one of five Latinas/os, which was a big adjustment after attending a high school that was majority Latina/o. Her UC campus was separated in colleges and she was aware that her college and sister college had large percentages of Latinas/os. She explained the significance of having individuals from similar backgrounds when adjusting and with academic difficulties. Nydia used her facultad to see beneath the surface and understand that AHS was an underresourced high school, which likely underprepared her academically for college. Having individuals like herself allowed her to be comfortable and reach out for support. She recalled that students from similar backgrounds were
able to provide each other hope and support to persist and stay in college, during the first term, despite encountering obstacles.

Nydia continued by providing a specific example of how she and her friends reached out to a peer who was ready to withdraw from the UC campus during the first term. She recalled,

One of my friends that’s in my sister college, she was going to withdraw and go home. I was like, “No, you have to keep trying.” If some of us have classes together, we help each other because we know we are at the same level…We managed to go to her. Her main problem was that she was alone. She never talked with her roommate because she was never there and she wasn’t from the same background. We would take her out to eat and study in our dorm. We would tell her, “You got here, now you have to keep going, don’t be the type of person, that they say Latinos just start and don’t graduate.”

Nydia explained that when a friend was ready to withdraw from the UC campus, Nydia and her Latina/o peers supported the friend and helped her transition into college academically and socially. Nydia and her friends used la facultad to acknowledge the systemic underrepresentation of Latinas/os in higher education and the push-out function of colleges. Similar to Anzaldúa’s vision, mentioned earlier, they resolved the issue of withdrawing from college and healed from the trauma of the previous experiences with systemic educational inequities.

Moreover, Nydia continued to elaborate why it was important for her to have a community of Latina/o peers in her college. She discussed how she also benefitted from the support:

Someone helped me. There’s this girl that’s in my dorm, who is also Latina. We have chemistry together, and I did not understand chemistry at all. She kind of got the hang of
it. She would help me and I would help her… It was more comfortable because I could talk Spanish and we came from the same background, one of us didn’t know more. It was more comfortable and we weren’t ashamed of it, we could say, “I’m really confused.” In class we couldn’t ask. Some people would say, “Why didn’t you take the lower chemistry class?” and say “Are you serious?” and we would feel bad. I never asked. If I had a question I would ask the teacher or TA or my friend, I wouldn’t ask in front of everybody…it was really difficult but I got a “B.”

During the second interview, Nydia expressed that she had troubles adjusting to the UC campus but in particular, to the academic expectations. However, as the interview continued, she attributed her retention during the first term to her Latina/o peer network at the campus. She detailed how she and her friend would help each other with chemistry. Nydia argued that they felt comfortable enough with each other, due to their similar backgrounds. Thus, they could let their guard down and admit to each other when they needed help, without the fear of academic invalidation. Moreover, Nydia explained that her classmates would question the academic preparation of students if they asked questions, which prevented Nydia from asking any questions during class. Instead, Nydia would resort to her friend or asking the teaching assistant and teacher for help individually. Due to the support her friend provided, Nydia was able to pass the introductory chemistry class with a “B” grade.

Anzaldúa (2002) concludes her conocimiento theory by stating, “We are ready for change. Let us link hands and hearts together find a path through the dark woods step through the doorways between worlds leaving huellas (footprints) for others to follow, build bridges, cross them with grace, and claim these puentes (bridges) our ‘home’ si se puede (yes we can), que asi sea, so be it, estamos listas, vamonos (we are read, let’s go)” (p. 576). The importance of
family within the Latina/o community resonates in the responses of participants who explained that they hoped to earn a college degree and set an example for their siblings. Regardless of the participants’ postsecondary pathways, when asked what they hoped for their younger siblings and/or cousins, all of the participants explained that they want the younger generations in their family to attend a four-year college. Eduardo explained, “I’m starting my brother off by bringing him to the robotics program. The mentors, they tell us we are doing college work at the high school level. I want him to experience what I’m doing so that when he comes here he can do things that I’m doing.” In the process of Eduardo including his younger brother in the robotics team, he was also preparing him for the conocimiento colegial journey. Eduardo’s aim was that his brother would benefit and experience a shorter and smoother process than he did to identify as a future college student. Yesenia, an alumna from the Media Academy, expressed a similar opinion, “I want to be an example for students from Monte Rico and let them know that good can come from a dark place into college.” By graduating from college, Yesenia hoped to become a role model for future generations in her community.

Similarly, with a college education, the participants aspired to collaborate and transform various communities that experienced forms of subjugation. Patricia, an alumna from the Health Academy and current undergraduate student in a UC campus, discussed how she hoped to transform her community:

I realized that I can’t leave this community because it needs people to help it be better. I knew I was going away to college to get knowledge so that when I graduate and come back, I could serve the community better.

Patricia’s commitment to return home upon earning a college degree and work towards improving her community, exemplified the college vision of a student who understood the
collective force behind her college identity. She carried her community as a source of inspiration. Patricia looked forward to returning home to benefit her community. Anzaldúa (2002) explains that, “By redeeming your most painful experiences you transform them into something valuable, algo para compartir or share with others so they too may be empowered” (p. 540). Thus, by sharing the experiences and process of reaching a conocimiento colegial with the younger generations and others, educators, peers, and mentors can support the transformation and college education of the Latina/o community.

**Stage seven summary.** In the final stage, participants reached a state of conocimiento colegial and were able to bridge aspirations for a college education with expectations of a college degree. Regardless of what institution they were in, (four-year, two-year, or private for-profit), the participants who reached the stage of conocimiento colegial knew that they would persist in college and expected to succeed, despite foreseeable obstacles. In stage seven, the participants reached a level of confidence to seek out individuals and resources in order to survive and thrive in college. Furthermore, in reaching conocimiento colegial, the participants engaged their facultad and critiqued systemic inequities related to race, gender, class, and immigration status. They used la facultad—the ability to see beneath the surface—as another source of motivation to navigate and complete college. Finally, just as the conocimiento work of Anzaldúa (2002) notes the potential communal value in conocimiento, so did the participants who reached the stage of conocimiento colegial.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Unlike previous studies that examine the college choices of Latinas/os, this dissertation included a detailed analysis from the reasons for aspiring to earn a four-year bachelor’s degree to the transition, during the first term, and persistence in postsecondary education. Thus, this study
bridges literature that examines the college choice process with college integration and persistence literature. This resulted in a detailed understanding of college choice, enrollment, and navigation of the 47 Latina/o participants. Unlike previous scholars who conceptualized a college persistence model, which takes into account pre-collegial factors (Nora, 2004), this study establishes a seven-stage college choice and navigation model that is reinforced by in-depth qualitative data. The seven-stage model, entitled conocimiento colegial, entailed the Latina/o participants: aspiring to earn a four-year bachelor’s degree, searching for college information, questioning abilities to succeed in a four-year college, establishing college plans, establishing a college identity by applying to colleges, entering college, and navigating college successfully. Within the stages, there were several instances where the participants strategically tempered or postponed aspirations to earn a bachelor’s degree. Strategic negotiations of aspirations occurred after having a search stage that entailed primarily vocational information, lacking support when questioning college abilities, and after not being admitted to four-year colleges.

The findings of this study resonate with previous literature, which establishes that Latinas/os maintain high educational aspirations and value a college education (NWLD & MALDEF, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010; Venezia, et al., 2003). Furthermore, similar to previous research, this study finds that Latina/o parents help to establish high educational aspirations for their children (Ceja, 2004; Perez, 2008; Yosso, 2005). As shown in the arrebato stage of the conocimiento colegial model, parents and other family members often helped to awaken the participants’ desire to attend college. Similar to previous research, when searching for college information, the participants often resorted to school officials (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Pathways to College Network, 2006).
Unfortunately, this dissertation finds that the majority of participants did not have a strong source of support to access accurate information. This finding aligns with previous literature, which finds that oftentimes counselors maintain lower expectations for Latinas/os (Immerwahr, 2003; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Moreover, the participants often received information focused on vocational options and private for-profit colleges but not to prepare for transfer. Unfortunately, Students of Color are overrepresented in private for-profit institutions, which maintain high student withdrawal rates and are expensive (Deming, Goldin, Katz, 2012). This dissertation provides new information about the college choice process by examining how the Latina/o participants questioned their academic and financial abilities to succeed. Previous studies use survey methods to establish that Latinas/os maintain high educational aspirations but lower their expectations and do not believe that they will achieve college goals (NWLD & MALDEF, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010). Roderick and her colleagues argue that the aspirations-expectations gap represents the “most vexing problem in education today” (Roderick, et al., 2006). Stage three provided insight into the aspiration-expectation gap by elucidating how Latinas/os question their academic and financial abilities to succeed in a four-year college. Research establishes that discussing issues of being low-income benefits the academic outcomes of students (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Although the college-going climate did not centralize the social identities of students, the participants benefited when educators addressed critically the implications of social identities as they related to college.

Upon questioning their abilities to succeed in a four-year college, the participants entered stage four, which entailed establishing a college pathway and applying to colleges. In this stage, the participants decided to pursue a four-year college directly out of high school or to consider a community college as a transfer pathway into a four-year college. Given the previous stage of
questioning their abilities to succeed in a four-year college, many of the participants decided that their entry into a four-year college should begin with a two-year college. Thus, the two-year college represented a space that was less challenging, both academically and financially, due to the information often received from teachers and other educators during the search and questioning stages. This information aligns with previous studies, which find that counselors often refer Latina/o students and parents to community colleges in order to address preconceived notions of financial fears (McDonough & Calderone, 2006).

During the fifth stage of applying to colleges and prior to entering college, some of the participants experienced academic undermatching, which is pervasive among low-income, first-generation, and Students of Color (Bowen, et al. 2009; Roderick et al. 2008). In this stage, given the guidance from the community college outreach counselor, the participants who aspired to transfer to a four-year college often strategically negotiated aspirations to first earn a vocational certificate or associate’s degree and prior to preparing for transfer to a four-year college. In addition, the participants who met the minimum GPA requirements to apply for a CSU campus often did not apply due to a lack of individual guidance during the application phases. Finally, some participants who qualified for a UC campus, decided to apply or attend a CSU or community college campus as a strategic temperament of aspirations. This study reinforces previous literature, which argues for an increase in college guidance and information available to students (Liou, Antrop-Gonzalez, Cooper, 2009; McDonough, 2004).

Upon entering a college, in the sixth stage, the participants encountered several academic, financial, and social clashes with college. With a traditional college choice framework, such as the three-phase college choice model (Hossler & Gallagher, 1987), these experiences are not relevant because a student has already chosen a college. Although previous models argue that a
student’s academic and financial background will influence the adjustment and transition into college (Nora, 2004; Tinto, 1993), this study elucidated how the participants tackled such issues to persist in college. In particular, this dissertation provides a case for improving academic readiness and addressing shortfalls with the developmental education system. In addition, the participants who attended the community college system often were not provided with adequate information to apply for financial aid in a timely manner. Furthermore, as explained by previous studies, the campus racial climate affected how Students of Color adjusted to the college (Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo-Wann, 2011). The participants in this study provided qualitative examples of how they had to adjust and respond to unwelcoming racial campus climates in both the four-year colleges and the private for-profit colleges.

In the seventh stage of conocimiento colegial, the participants reached a point where they were confident and expect to meet their goal to graduate from college. Similar to the arguments made by literature that examines validation as a method to increase persistence, the participants explained how access to networks of support assisted with transitioning into college (Rendon, Garcia, & Person, 2004). Moreover, this study aligns with previous research, which argues for improving the student perceptions of a campus climate in order to increase persistence (Castillo, Conoley, Choi-Pearson, Archuleta, Phoummarath, & Van Ladingham, 2006). Finally, the participants who reached a stage of conocimiento colegial alluded to several forms of community cultural wealth, including: aspirational, navigational, social, and familial capital (Yosso, 2005). Thus, once a participant reached the seventh stage—conocimiento colegial—they used their college navigating identity not only to inform their college pathways but also to benefit the current and future pathways of peers and family members.
Applying Critical Race Theory

Finally, this study engaged with the five tenets of critical race theory in education framework (Solórzano, 1998) when answering the research question: How do Latina/o participants with high aspirations establish a college-going and college-navigating identity? The first tenet centralizes race and racism as they intersect with other forms of subordination, such as gender and class. Thus, the research question revealed the intersectionality of race, racism, class, gender, and immigration status present during the college choice and transition processes of the Latina/o participants. By highlighting the participants’ hardships when attempting to access information about college and the academic, financial, and racist clashes experienced in college, the findings engaged with the second tenet by challenging the dominant ideologies of “objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122). The alignment with the third tenet will be discussed further in the practical recommendations in Chapter Seven by proposing a social justice oriented college-going culture that can inform the process of conocimiento colegial. The question and findings engaged with the fourth tenet by centralizing on the experiences of Latina/o student participants and conducting multiple oral history interviews. This allowed the findings to understand how Latinas/os experience the college choices and transitions. Finally, by integrating Anzaldúa’s (2002) theory of conocimiento, the findings aligned with the fifth tenet. Integrating Anzaldúa’s interdisciplinary theory of conocimiento allowed me to include in the historical and current state of coloniality in which Latinas/os find themselves within the U.S.

In addition, utilizing a critical race theory in education framework made it possible for me to conceptualize the framework of conocimiento colegial in Chapter Six. I defined conocimiento colegial as: a pathway, which results in a reflective collegial consciousness where
Latinas/os use their ethnic/racial identity and social identities in an empowered college identity. Latina/o students shift into the *conocimiento colegial* pathway where they actively pursue a college education, establish a collegial identity, and navigate college. This process engages with the seven stages of *conocimiento* as they pertain to the process of: preparing for college, searching for colleges, choosing a college, transitioning into college, and navigating college. In Chapter Seven, I conclude with an overview of the dissertation study and findings, as well as implications for research, policy, and practice.
CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

In Chapter Seven, I revisit the study and review the research questions. Then, I summarize the findings shared in Chapter Four, Chapter Five, and Chapter Six. In each of the summaries, I include the role of critical race theory in education as the primary theoretical framework in this dissertation. Chapter Seven continues by discussing the implications for methodology and theory. I then share practical and policy recommendations, given the findings of the study. I conclude by considering how this study can inform future research.

Revisiting the Study

Three research questions guided this study. The first research question was: What is the structure and culture of Academies High School? The second question was: How do policies and practices in Academies High School situate the college-going climate within the larger school culture? The third research question was: How does the college-going climate inform the pathways of Latina/o participants when developing a college-going identity? To account for the role of institutional forces, sub-question three was: How do Latinas/os with college aspirations develop a college-going and college-navigating identity? To review, this study aimed to understand how educators in an underresourced high school utilized various approaches to build a college-going culture and increase college-going rates. Moreover, this study addressed the gap between high aspirations to attend college and the low educational outcomes of Latinas/os. To understand the gap between educational aspirations and outcomes among Latinas/os, I examined the college choice and transition process for 47 Latina/o participants. However, I bridged the two research questions by considering how the college-going climate, among other factors, informed the college choices of the participants.
In Chapter Three, I established the theoretical framework, methodology, methods, and data analysis of the study. I detailed how I integrated critical race theory in education, school culture, and the college choice organizational *habitus* as theoretical frameworks to guide this study. Chapter Three detailed the use of grounded theory and critical race grounded theory as the methodology for this study. I also described the high school site for this qualitative case study, as well as, the multiple methods of oral histories with 57 student participants, interviews with 17 practitioners and administrators, and observations during one school year. Finally, Chapter Three provided a description of how I used open, axial, selective coding to analyze and triangulate data.

**Critical Race Theory in Education: Tenet Four**

The fourth tenet in CRTE explains that examining the experiential knowledge of People of Color is fundamental when discussing issues of race and racism in education. In this dissertation, I aimed to understand how Latina/o students experienced college-going efforts and the college choice process in an underresourced high school. Thus, the fourth tenet is represented through the use of multiple Latina/o student oral histories. Moreover, the interview data of Educators of Color, such as Ms. Murillo, Mr. Rivas, and Mr. Fernandez, revealed the racist deficit ideologies that Students of Color overcame at AHS.

**Summary of Chapter Four Findings: AHS Culture and Climates**

In Chapter Four, I conceptualized that structures, climates, and individual agencies shaped school culture. Structures encompass the history and policies of the school and surrounding community. Individual agencies refer not only to the decisions made by students but the decisions of administrators, teachers, and staff. The overall culture of AHS was of change, instability, and marginalization, which resulted from funding policies and district
management. On the other hand, climate referred to the micro-cultures found within different school spaces, which were experienced differently based on the student. Climate described the individual ideologies and perceptions of the school.

Data analysis revealed that the AHS culture entailed at least four climates. As indicated by Figure 14, the climates included: high aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance and control. Teacher participants created climates of high aspirations. In these climates of high aspirations, the teachers aspired for students to succeed in college and integrated college-going activities resulting in college-going climates. Teachers and administrator participants also created climates of low expectations, which rooted from deficit ideologies around academic, non-cognitive, and a lack of role models led some teacher and administrator participants to establish a climate of low expectations. Interview data revealed that the principal knew some teachers maintained low expectations and he emphasized the urgency to view all students from a strength-based approach. The high levels of security and regulations aimed to control student behavior and maintain student safety encompass the climate of surveillance and control. Ultimately, the student participants argued that the climate of surveillance and control restricted their abilities to navigate college as independent students.
Figure 14. Four climates of AHS: High aspirations, college-going, low expectations, and surveillance and control

Critical Race Theory in Education: Tenet Three

In the third tenet, CRTE is committed to social justice and aims to eliminate racism and other forms of subordination. Thus, the third tenet served to connect the climate of surveillance and low expectations with Alexander’s (2010) New Jim Crow concept in the school setting. I argued that the climate of low expectations and the climate of surveillance and control represent the New Jim Crow in schools, which steered students away from college and prepared them to live in a controlled setting. In addition Foucault’s concept of the panopticon serves as the bridge between surveillance strategies in schools as preparation for the New Jim Crow outside of schools. Given the commitment to social justice, in this chapter, I provide an approach that does support the college-going efforts of students instead of focusing on controlling their actions.
Summary of Chapter Five Findings: College-Going Sub-Climates

As shown in Figure 14, the college going climate was composed of two sub-climates: four-year college-going and vocational college-going efforts. Chapter Five provided an in-depth explanation of the college-going climate, which included several elements, such as: the College and Career Center, collaborative efforts with college outreach programs, community college outreach, college-going teachers, college visits, engaging with students’ identities, and internships. Student participants were more likely to access an in-depth college-going climate, which focused on preparing for admission to a four-year postsecondary institution, if the student participant maintained a high GPA. On the other hand, the student participants who planned to attend a two-year college were more likely to receive information and support for entering a vocational pathway—regardless of the aspirations to transfer from a two-year college to a four-year college.

Critical Race Theory in Education: Tenet Two

The second tenet in CRTE aims to challenge dominant ideologies in the educational system such as “objectivity, meritocracy, color and gender blindness, race and gender neutrality, and equal opportunity” (Solórzano, 1998, p. 122). CRTE serves to understand how these concepts perpetuate white privilege. This tenet informed the methods to include observations of the curriculum, implemented workshops, and the purpose of a college-going culture at AHS to reveal if dominant ideologies limited the college-going climate. These observations and the student oral history interview data revealed that a color-blind and regurgitating dominant understandings of higher education did not work for the Student Participants of Color. A color-blind perspective during college preparation workshops did not address the concerns student participants maintained about succeeding in higher education. Instead, when educators
acknowledged how race and other social identities impacted the higher education journeys, student participants engaged more in-depth in the college preparation process. Furthermore, the interview data of Educators of Color revealed that teachers and administrators used dominant ideologies such as academic meritocracy to justify the focus on control and surveillance instead of college-going. In addition, this study challenges the color-blind ideologies used to focus on vocational pathways and not provide transfer preparation. Finally, interview and observation data from Educators of Color also served to challenge equal opportunity in education by finding that teachers used community cultural wealth to provide students with college-going resources.

**Summary of Chapter Six Findings: Conocimiento Colegial**

In Chapter Six, I defined the framework of *conocimiento colegial*, which explained the process that Latina/o participants experienced when deciding to attend college, establishing a college-going identity, and developing a college navigation identity. The framework argued that educational researchers and practitioners building a college-going culture must move beyond the individualization of the Latina/o college choice process and engage in a collective process that addresses the heterogeneity in Latina/o identity and social position in the U.S. Within the framework, I provided examples of how the college-going climate, among other factors, influenced each of the seven stages. The findings provided evidence for college-going culture to also include a focus on college-readiness, which included cognitive and non-cognitive factors.

As indicated by Figure 15, *conocimiento colegial* identifies seven different stages that the participants experienced establishing college going and college navigating identities. I define *conocimiento colegial* as a reflective collegial consciousness where Latinas/os use their ethnic/racial identity and social positionalities in an empowered college identity. Latina/o students shift into the *conocimiento colegial* pathway where they actively pursued a college
education, established a collegial identity, and navigated college successfully. The college-going climates supported and hindered the process of participants on their pathways to *conocimiento colegial*.

Figure 15: *Conocimiento Colegial*: The pathways of Latina/o participants when developing college-going and college-navigating identities

To initiate the first stage, “Arrebato—Deciding to Attend College,” students experienced an event that awoke them to realize they must choose a postsecondary pathway. In this first stage, participants shared various examples of enacting their *facultad* to understand complex issues. The participants eventually experienced the second stage, “Nepantla—Searching for a College.” In the second stage the participants were oftentimes torn between choosing a vocational, two-year, and four-year college or entering the workforce as the first step to pursue a bachelor’s degree. However, the postsecondary information was limited for students who aimed
to enroll in a two-year college. Thus, those that did not receive accurate information regarding college, depicted by the dashed arrow, began the third stage misinformed and with self-doubt. Once in the third stage, “Coatlicue—Questioning College Success Abilities,” the participants questioned their academic and non-cognitive abilities. Students then initiated the fourth stage “El Compromiso—Planning College Pathways” and take a step into college, despite the doubts. However, student participants who continued unsure about their abilities, entered into a nepantla stage, depicted by the dashed line, where they continued to be unsure in which type of college they “belong.” Participants had various reasons for entering nepantla at that point, including perceived inabilities to afford college or doubting whether they could complete a college degree if they entered a four-year college directly after high school.

In the fifth stage, “Putting Coyolxauhqui Together—Establishing College-Going Identities,” students established their college-going identity by choosing a college to attend. Those with a solid arrow did not allow external forces to detract them from pursuing college, regardless if they planned to transfer from a two-year college into a four-year college. However, those who continued to feel uncertain about their ability to earn a four-year degree re-entered nepantla after the fifth stage and they modified or postponed their college aspirations. In the sixth stage, “The Blow-Up—Entering and Clashing with College” the participants entered college with a collegial identity, only to experience pushbacks, such as being placed into developmental education. Those who entered with more confidence in their abilities, represented by the solid arrow, continued to the final stage. However, those who entered unsure about whether they belonged in a college, stopped-out and returned to nepantla to reassess college aspirations. In the final stage, “Shifting Realities—College-Navigating Identity,” the participants understood they would continue to experience injustices due to their social
positionailities and identities but they felt prepared to utilize resources, overcome obstacles, and graduate from college. Regardless of their postsecondary pathways, the participants remained hopeful that they would one day meet their goal to earn a college degree and make a difference for other Latinas/os.

**Critical Race Theory in Education: Tenet Five**

The fifth tenet calls for CRTE scholars to utilize an interdisciplinary research perspective. This tenet challenges the ahistoricism found in the analysis of research (Solórzano, 1998). Given my previous knowledge of ethnic studies and Chicana/o studies, I was able to integrate traditional education theories with Anzaldúa’s theories. However, critical race grounded theory facilitated my use of previous knowledge during the research process. Thus, during the data analysis process, I understood the alignment in the college choice processes of Latina/o participants with Anzaldúa’s (2002) theories of borderlands, *conocimiento*, and *nepantleras*. Therefore, the fifth tenet is evident in my integration of interdisciplinary theories when developing the framework of *conocimiento colegial*.

**Methodological Implications**

Previous Researchers of Color discuss the importance of reciprocity between Researchers of Color and participants within Communities of Color (Figueroa & Sanchez, 2008). As a Chicana researcher, I identified with the student participants and entered the research site with “buena voluntad” (good will), which as Figueroa and Sanchez (2008) explain:

*buena voluntad* embodies the enactment of being mindfully courteous at all times to those around you to demonstrate your persona and intentions. This demonstration of good will allows the surrounding community to decide the value of your presence and to the
degree to which they would like to include and involve an individual like you in their everyday lives (p. 23).

I argue that researchers who conduct future studies with Students of Color should embody *buena voluntad* and understand that regardless of aiming to be an unbiased researcher, by entering the lives of students and educators, a researcher has an impact. If a researcher truly cares about the well-being of the communities she studies, she should enact *buena voluntad* to potentially have a positive impact on the communities before, during, and after conducting research.

I designed this dissertation as a qualitative case study, utilized critical race theory in education, and applied a critical race grounded theory methodology. Tenet four in CRTE centralizes the lived experiences of Students of Color, which is why the majority of the data derived from oral history interviews with students. Moreover, I integrated the CRTE tenet three, which emphasizes social justice within research. Finally, guided by critical race grounded theory methodology, I utilized my cultural intuition of professional experiences as a college advisor. My research design can inform future methodological approaches to go beyond traditional approaches to research, particularly for Researchers of Color.

Given my research design, I provided the student participants with college advising sessions to redirect any possible misadvising that occurred in their previous interactions with college guidance. Thus, I moved away from being a researcher who only reaches out to potential participants to document and analyze educational experiences. Instead, I focused my time to attempt and support the educational pathways of participants. In doing so, I hoped to provide some guidance, resources, and/or bridge the high educational aspirations with expectations. In the college advising session, I provided concrete information about possible pathways and outcomes, as well as resources to support students in their educational quests. For example, I
often took the time to walk participants who attended community college through the ASSIST website.9 My goal was to support participants in learning how to navigate the website and have the knowledge to search in the future on their own. I went beyond entering a research site to gather information and leave. Instead, I reached out to the student participants with the goal of providing college guidance, as needed or requested.

**Theoretical Implications**

With this dissertation study, I provided theoretical contributions to the areas of Latina/o college-going, college choice, and college integration. By designing a study that examined both organizational and student-level issues, I was able to understand the topics better. As Chapter One and Two indicated, previous literature examines college-going culture and the college choices of Latinas/os but there was a void in literature that addressed the connection between both subjects. In addition, a dearth of literature exists in examining the college transitions of Latinas/os. In this section, discuss how I contribute to the theoretical understanding of college-going culture, college choice, and college integration.

**Reconsidering College-Going Culture**

Previous literature argues that a college-going culture entails preparing all students to make informed post-secondary decisions and frames the topic as a coordinated school-wide attempt (Corwin & Tierney, 2007; McClafferty et al., 2002; Pathways to College Network, 2006). Although researchers have produced various toolkits to build a college-going culture, the toolkits do not account for the financial limitations of under-resourced, inner-city schools, which increasingly enroll a majority of Latina/o students (Tierney, Corwin, Colyar, 2004). This dissertation addressed the need for studies to examine a college-going culture more in detail and

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9 ASSIST is an online student-transfer information system that provides information about the courses students should take at a California community college in order to meet the course transfer requirements at a public four-year college.
through a qualitative case study methodology (Jarsky, et al., 2009; Tierney, et al., 2004). By conducting a qualitative case study at an urban under-resourced high school, I was able to understand how educators in the high school struggled with three major obstacles in the attempts.

First, without a college-going culture addressing issues of race, racism, and other forms of subordination, the culture took a color-blind approach to college-going. However, student participant data revealed that by taking a color-blind approach, the college-going efforts did not address student concerns. Moreover, upon entering college, some of the participants felt unprepared to encounter obstacles attributed to issues of race or being a first-generation college student. Second, the literature assumes that a school only has one culture but as this study finds, several climates existed within the school to prevent the development of college-going climates into a school-wide culture. This study highlights the need to examine college-going efforts not as occurring in a vacuum but in an organizational culture with various, oftentimes, competing climates. Third, without appropriate human and financial resources, AHS educators could not offer college-going guidance to every student. Therefore, regardless of attempts to provide guidance, given the lack of resources, the college-going climate did not reach all students.

Revising College Choice and College Integration Models

My choice of theoretical frameworks and methodologies facilitated the development of the conocimiento colegial framework. Given my use of the critical race theory in education, I designed the study to ensure that student participants could share their experiential knowledge. In addition, I used previous theoretical frameworks to build new theory. With the student participant data and Anzaldúa’s (2002) theory of conocimiento, I was able to develop the conocimiento colegial framework and account for the process participants experienced when establishing college aspirations, a college-going identity, and college-navigating identity. By
understanding the entire process, this study provided insight to close the college aspiration, expectations, and integration gap. Ultimately, those participants who reached the college navigation identity, I argue, are more likely to persist and meet their academic goals of earning a bachelor’s degree. Thus, by establishing the framework of *conocimiento colegial*, I bridged the college choice and college integration models to address the gap between student aspirations and college persistence.

**Recommendations for Policy**

In addition to offering theoretical contributions, I also consider the findings and recommend the following policies.

**Consistent College Advising**

The first recommendation for policy is for districts and schools to allocate appropriate amounts of funds to employ college advisors/counselors within high schools that have a high percentage of students who are first-generation. As noted in Chapter One, the high caseloads of counselors and the non-existence of counselors, in high schools that serve Students of Color, prevent students from accessing information about higher education (California Department of Education, 2011; Corwin, et al., 2004; McDonough, 2004; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Similarly, the majority of student participants noted that they lacked individual advising, which affected the postsecondary transitions. Therefore, California K – 12 funding structures need to ensure that districts and schools that serve a majority of Students of Color have adequate amounts of funding for college guidance/counseling staff. By failing to ensure that all students can access adequate and timely college guidance, Californians ignore the need to address the gap in college-educated workforce.
Coordinated Collaborations Between K – 12 and Postsecondary Institutions

Second, I recommend increasing the coordinated and collaborative efforts between secondary and postsecondary institutions to increase college preparation. Without the collaborative efforts with local postsecondary institutions and programs, AHS would only have one college advisor to serve the 1,600 students. Therefore, UC, CSU, and community college campuses should allocate adequate level of funds and resources to support local high school students through college guidance and advising. Though some argue that outreach is beyond the scope of the UC mission (Timar, Ogawa, & Orillion, 2003), this dissertation study aligns with previous studies that indicate the urgent need for college outreach programs (Gándara & Bial, 1999; Perna and Swail, 2002). I recommend for high schools that enroll high numbers of Latina/os and first-generation students, to solidify coordinated collaborative efforts with local four-year and two-year college sectors.

Systemic Transfer Pathways

Third, more policies are needed at the local and state level to institutionalize adequate transfer pathways. Findings reveal that participants emphasized the advice from the community college outreach counselor of transferring into a four-year college with an associate’s degree. In California, Senate Bill 1440 established the guaranteed transfer pathway into a CSU upon completion of an associate’s degree at a California community college. However, that does not guarantee transfer into a UC campus. Therefore, to address the underrepresentation of Latinas/os in the UC system, policies like SB 1440 need to also include all UC campuses.

Recommendations for Practice

This section recommends guidelines for educators that work in Latina/o-majority high schools by operationalizing a culture of conocimiento colegial. I recommend that administrators
and educators in underresourced high schools with large populations of Latina/o students implement the proposed framework of a culture of conocimiento colegial. First, I define a culture of conocimiento colegial. Then, I continue by referencing previous literature, my dissertation findings, and the critical race theory in education tenets when establishing the five recommendations to build a culture of conocimiento colegial.

As shown in Figure 16, a culture of conocimiento colegial centralizes the racialized, gendered, classed, and racist nativist experiences that the Latina/o participants encountered when attempting to access, transition, and navigate systems of higher education. Findings in Chapter Six established how the Latina/o participants experienced college choice and college integration by conceptualizing the framework of conocimiento colegial. However, limitations in the college-going climate forced some participants to experience several stages of nepantla, in which they strategically lowered college aspirations due to a lack of information. Therefore, the goal in building a culture of conocimiento colegial is to avoid misguidance and multiple stages of nepantla. The culture of conocimiento colegial entails five conditions and a five-stage process to build a college-navigation identity.
Figure 16. Culture of conocimiento colegial: Bridging high aspirations with college navigation

The five conditions include:

1. Centralizing Student’s Race as they Intersect with other Social Identities in Higher Education
2. High Aspirations, High Expectations
3. Social Justice and College Information Training for all Staff
4. Critical Parental Engagement
5. Timely and Engaging Information about All College Pathways

A. Community College Transfer Planning

The first condition calls for educators to provide college information in a reflective and engaging manner that centralizes the student’s race as it intersects with social identities in relation to likely experiences in higher education. The second condition entails educators challenging dominant ideology by establishing high expectations and embracing the idea that the majority of Latina/o
students have high educational aspirations, regardless of previous academic achievement. The third condition centralizes social justice. This begins with administrators ensuring that every staff member of the school receives up-to-date information about postsecondary options available to students and from a critical perspective.

The fourth condition entails acknowledging and engaging the postsecondary awareness of parents and using parents as a resource with which to support students in their pathway towards developing a college-going and a college-navigating identity. Fifth, I recommend that educators provide college information and guidance in a timely manner, which allows students to plan accordingly. The final condition also includes providing students with accurate transfer information to students who aspire to transfer from community college to a four-year college. Combined, the five conditions establish the context to build a culture of *conocimiento colegial* and prepare students to make empowering postsecondary decisions and persist in higher education. The following sections define each recommendation, provide more details, and share examples of how educators in underresourced high schools can implement each element.

**Critical Engagement around Issues of Social Identities in Higher Education**

Both Chapter Four and Five find that when educators provided an engaging avenue for the student participants to discuss their social identities, it supported college aspirations and addressed student concerns about pursuing a higher education. A recent study finds that first-generation college students benefited from discussing class differences as opposed to ignoring them (Stephens, et al., 2014). Similarly, I recommend that educators should acknowledge other forms of student identities, such as race, gender, class, and immigration status—using a strength-based ideology. The first recommendation encompasses tenet one of CRTE, which centralizes race and racism as it intersects with other forms of subordination. By addressing the expected
inequities due to race, class, and immigration status, the first condition acknowledges the forms of subordination present when accessing and navigating higher education.

The goal is to equip students with the tools to navigate higher education successfully by preparing students to overcome potential obstacles. This entails teachers incorporating reading and writing assignments that allow students to reflect on their identities. Although AHS teachers with high expectations, like Ms. Maciel, utilized readings that advocated for a critical analysis of race, class, gender, and social status, there was not an immediate connection to higher education. In a culture of *conocimiento colegial*, readings would build a critical understanding of what it means to be a college student who comes from a low-income background, is the first in their family to attend college, and is racially/ethnically underrepresented.

I recommend, English and U.S history teachers to incorporate readings and documentaries that examine—critically and not from a deficit perspective—the autobiographical experiences of underrepresented students accessing, transitioning, and graduating from college. Readings could include various books, such as: *The Maid’s Daughter* (Maynard, 2012), *Narratives of Mexican American Women* (Garcia, 2004), *Migrant Daughter* (Tywniak, García, & Garcia, 2000), *Bootstraps* (Villanueva, 1993), and *Critical Race Counterstories along the Chicana/Chicano Educational Pipeline* (Yosso, 2006). Films such as *Stolen Education*, *Walkout* (Esparza & Olmos, 2006) and the *Lemon Grove Incident* (Espinoza & Christopher, 1985) can also be incorporated in the curricula. By reading such literature and viewing the films, students will have the opportunity to learn about the fears, obstacles encountered, and resources used to navigate higher education. Moreover, the readings and films allow students the opportunity to engage with their own fears and establish a space to discuss skills to foster college success. Writing and classroom discussion assignments should provide the opportunity for students to
reflect on their fears and doubts, as well as establish resources that will allow them to meet college expectations.

Upon sharing the recommendation with AHS teachers, the biggest concern was obtaining funding to purchase the books and films. Ms. Maciel held an external fundraiser and used her own funds to purchase sets of new books, such as, What Night Brings, by Carla Trujillo. When Ms. Maciel share this information during my year of observations, I emailed Dr. Trujillo to connect her with Ms. Maciel so that Trujillo could visit AHS and engage in a discussion with the students. However, when I shared my recommendation of having teachers incorporate readings and films that share personal stories of college-going individuals who the students might relate with, Ms. Maciel noted her financial concern. Thus, to implement such a guideline, the school would need to set funds aside or secure external funds to purchase such books and films.

High Aspirations, High Expectations

This study finds that Latina/o students maintain high educational aspirations, which aligns with previous research (NWLD & MALDEF, 2009; Pew Hispanic Center, 2010; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2003). Moreover, similar to previous studies, data revealed that some teachers and administrators maintain low expectations of students, which can limit educational outcomes (Davison Aviles, et al., 1999; Vela Gude, et al., 2009; Martinez, 2003). In AHS, part of the low expectations entailed the use of surveillance and control mechanisms. I argue against the use of surveillance and that educators should focus instead on bridging high educational aspirations with high expectations and informing students about the range of postsecondary options available. As the principal indicated in Chapter Four, teachers must have high expectations for students and not operate from deficit ideologies. By educators maintaining high educational aspirations and expectations, students can benefit and learn to believe in the likelihood of
accomplishing the educational aspirations. Overall, the second condition aligns with tenet two of CRTE, which challenges dominant ideologies. The second condition acknowledges that deficit ideologies drive the formation of climates of low expectations. Therefore, the condition challenges deficit ideologies and instead advocates for educators to engage in caring practices by acknowledging the community cultural wealth that Students of Color posses (Yosso, 2005).

This recommendation aims to eliminate the deficit perspectives that may drive the ideologies of educators. Findings revealed that deficit ideologies contributed to educators demonstrating low expectations towards students, such as lowering academic standards. Therefore, if educators engage in community cultural wealth they acknowledge that Students of Color have various forms of capital and avoid deficit discourses. For example, instead of community college outreach staff focusing on promoting and enrolling students into vocational pathways, they should acknowledge the transfer aspirations and provide accurate information about transferring into a four-year college. Without deficit ideologies, educators would not develop climates of low expectations.

**Social Justice Focus and College Information Training**

Chapter Four and Five reveal that some AHS educators maintained low expectations due to deficit ideologies, which resulted in Latina/o participants encountering negative experiences with accessing college information and climates of low expectations. Moreover, previous studies indicate that educators maintain low expectations of Latina/o students, which limits postsecondary pathways (Davison Aviles, et al., 1999; Vela Gude, et al., 2009; Martinez, 2003; McDonough & Calderone, 2006). Therefore, I recommend that all high school and four-year college outreach staff receive social justice and college information training. Both the required cultural awareness and college information trainings must be critical and rooted in a social
justice perspective with the purpose of improving support systems available to students. This would address teachers enacting climates of low expectations, such as the climate of surveillance and control that was implemented at AHS. The third tenet in CRTE, which focuses on social justice, aligns with the third condition by tapping into educators as advocates for social justice.

Not all educators maintain or perpetuate deficit perspectives or a lack of college information. In many instances, educators can collaborate to lead such trainings. In this study, teachers often advised participants around college, without having accurate college information, which resulted in the student receiving misguidance. This process ensures that educators who provide college information receive culturally relevant and college information training. This element avoids perpetuating deficit perspectives about the educational potential of Latinas/os and understanding the sources of community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005).

**Parental Engagement**

Oftentimes, a primary goal of providing college information is to establish high educational aspirations for students (Gándara & Bial, 1999; McClafferty, et al, 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna, 2000; Perna and Swail, 2002). Despite the role of parents supporting Latina/o students to establish college as a goal and the value of the family unit in the Latina/o college choice process, educators rarely engage parents with college choice processes (Ceja, 2001, 2004; Delgado Gaitan, 2013; NWLC & MALDEF, 2009; Perez & McDonough, 2008; Venezia et al., 2006; Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). Thus, a culture of *conocimiento colegial* begins with the premise that Latina/o parents want their children to succeed. Therefore, this condition engages with tenet two, which challenges the dominant notion that Latina/o parents do not care about education. In addition, tenet four informs this condition by turning to Parents of
Color as sources of experiential knowledge and experts who can support each other and the students on several levels.

In addition, educators should engage parents in the college choice process. This approach entails going beyond providing informative workshops to parents around college admission or financial aid and engaging with parents around how students can prepare for and navigate college. For example, educators can ask parents to participate in a panel and share what they hope for their children, while teachers, administrators, other parents, and students are in the audience. Parents are often an untapped source of motivation and support; educators must create innovative approaches to privilege and engage the community cultural wealth of Latina/o parents (Yosso, 2005).

**Timely and Engaging Information about College Pathways**

A primary purpose of college preparation programs and a college-going culture is to provide students with information about college and other postsecondary options (Gándara & Bial, 1999; McClafferty, et al, 2002; McDonough, 2004; Perna and Swail, 2002). However, a culture of *conocimiento colegial* argues for educators to move beyond providing students with college information towards engaging with students in discussions about postsecondary options, both in individual and group settings. Talks about college should move beyond a “banking” method and entail a guided problem-posing process, by engaging with students in critical discussions. This approach acknowledges students as holders of knowledge and centers on the college information that students know. This process dispels myths and addresses student fears. For example, after receiving information about the various postsecondary options, instead of having a general question and answer session, the facilitator or instructor can ask students to write down their perceptions, fears, and questions about college on note cards. As a group, the
students and facilitator can address the anonymous responses. Since the educator facilitating the workshop received appropriate training, s/he can avoid perpetuating deficit stereotypes about Latina/o students and provide accurate college information. The fifth condition aligns with the tenet five of CRTE, which advocates for an interdisciplinary perspective that is not ahistorical. Educators utilize a historical and sociological lens to inform students and critique how all systems of higher education and postsecondary pathways have served to challenge and/or perpetuate social stratification.

Finally, in order for students to be completely informed about college pathways, high schools must to take all students to college campus visits. However, the campus visits must include meeting underrepresented college students on campus. Moreover, the college visits would entail the high school students engaging in conversations with current college students, alumni, faculty, and staff from the college. Understandably, some high schools cannot afford to send students on a college campus visit. However, four-year colleges have outreach budgets that allow for providing transportation and other means of supporting high schools to bring students. If four-year colleges administrators hope to increase Latina/o representation, they will allocate funding to high schools in need. In addition, the aforementioned college representatives, can also visit the local high schools to provide outreach.

**Community college transfer planning.** The study participants chose a community college pathway as a final alternative. I recommend that in a culture of *conocimiento colegial* the community college planning occur alongside four-year college preparation. Since the majority of Latinas/os enter a community college after high school, it is important that secondary and postsecondary institutions invest an adequate amount of time and resources preparing students to enter the various pathways (Nuñez & Elizondo, 2013). The first sub-element is the
community college application process. Instead of signing-up for community college in May, before high school graduation, educators should support students in applying for community colleges by January. The second sub-element is to ensure that students understand the process of enrolling in, attending, and completing community college. This includes the math and English placement exam process, the course enrollment process, and the possible pathways of certification, associate’s degree, and transferring to a four-year college. As such, students would learn about the purpose, resources, and pathways within a community college. Instead of concentrating on community college as a more affordable or easier transition into college, students should receive assistance with planning for and navigating the community college sector. Moreover, community colleges must receive appropriate financial and human resources to support local high schools in yearlong college counseling positions.

**Five Stages Towards a Culture of Conocimiento Colegial**

As indicated by Figure 17, the goal when implementing the following recommendations in a culture of *conocimiento colegial* is to eliminate tempered aspirations and provide a smoother pathway towards a college-navigating identity. Thus, as students depart a stage, they continue to build stronger college-going and college-navigating identities, as indicated in Figure 17 by the increasing thickness in the line.
Figure 17. Ensuring timely college-going stages in a culture of conocimiento colegial

**El arrebato – Establish decision to attend college.** The first stage to a culture of conocimiento colegial, “El Arrebato – Establishing the Decision to Attend College,” occurs during the first semester of ninth grade. In this stage, the goal is for educators to support students who have not experienced the arrebato moment, to awaken their desire to attend college. As noted in Chapter Six, the participants experienced an arrebato sparked by social identities, interactions with parents, and elements in the college-going climate. Therefore, educators can focus the college-going climate to entail moments of reflection, which allow students to engage actively in the decision to pursue college. However, as noted in the exemplars, the experiences had deep significance for the participants and did not include the traditional superficial lecturing of college resulting in long-term financial benefits. For the arrebato to occur, the college-going curriculum entails several levels and engages with students
on multiple occasions throughout the semester. Students ideally experience the first stage during the first semester of ninth grade.

**Nepantla – Search for college information.** After the arrebato stage, the culture of conocimiento colegial entails providing students with the space, time, and resources to learn about the various postsecondary options. This stage would occur during the second semester of ninth grade. This stage reinforces the purpose of the arrebato and strengthens a student’s desire to attend college. However, as the participants in Chapter Six revealed, the nepantla search stage did not always provide concrete and accurate information about postsecondary options from a critical perspective. Similar to the arrebato stage, the nepantla stage entails several sessions and overlaps with the remaining stages.

The search stage not only includes lectures where students receive college admission requirements but also individual and group activities where students engage and critique the various postsecondary pathways. For example, Andrea allowed small groups of program participants to search the admission requirements and system characteristics for the UC, CSU, and CCC systems. The students then presented the information to the larger group. In a culture of conocimiento colegial, the activity would go one step further to critique the traditional discourse of requiring only two years to transfer from a community college to a four-year college. The following level includes learning about the transfer process and the requirements to transfer into four-year colleges. However, without accurate information and a social justice lens, the educator who facilitates the search stage can provide students with misguidance, which hinders the conocimiento colegial pathway of students. Thus, it is important that educators participate in the third condition and receive appropriate training.
**Coatlicue – Address questions about succeeding in college.** As Chapter Six findings reveal, student participants questioned their academic and financial ability to succeed in college. However, the concerns and fears went unaddressed by the college-going climate. Therefore, I propose that in a culture of conocimiento colegial, the college-going curriculum engages students to address possible concerns about postsecondary pathways. The Coatlicue stage represents one of the most delicate phases in the process of conocimiento colegial. In this stage, the educator must maintain a trusting and safe space for students, which would allow students to be honest and express any fears.

Taking into consideration that students engage differently, it is important to include written self-reflection activities, small and large group discussions, and individual meetings with a college advisor. This stage establishes the foundation for a student making postsecondary plans. For example, as mentioned in the first condition, the concerns for success in college root from the student identities—academic, social, and economic. Therefore, by having various resources, such as reading a novel that elaborates on the college navigation process or college student guest-lecturers, the students learn not only that the fears are legitimate but also begin to consider possible institutional and personal support systems.

**El compromiso – Plan college pathway & apply to college.** Findings in Chapter Five and Six reveal that a major focus of the college-going climate entailed ensuring that students who met the qualifications to apply to a four-year college were prepared for the application process. Although the participants enrolled in college preparation programs often had a strong support system during the college application process, the school held several application support workshops. Similarly, in the fourth stage of El Compromiso, educators focus on
ensuring that eleventh graders who qualify for admission to four-year colleges establish a college plan and prepare for the admission exams.

In twelfth grade, the students complete the applications to four-year colleges. If a student is close to meeting minimum admission requirements, then educators need to meet with the student individually and in small groups to provide college guidance. The goal is to ensure that the student receives adequate support if he/she wants to validate deficient courses. If a student is not eligible academically for admission to a four-year college but aspires to transfer from a community college to a four-year college, their plan would entail understanding the transfer process, such as the college breadth requirements for the UC system. On the same note, students who apply to community colleges should receive adequate support with the college application and financial aid process.

**Putting Coyolxauhqui together – Choosing college strategically & bridging with college.** The fifth stage in the pathway to *conocimiento colegial* occurs during twelfth grade. As findings in Chapter Six indicate, the participants who selected admission offers from various four-year colleges were satisfied with their college choice. However, students who had to strategically negotiate aspirations by attending a community college first, either lacked guidance during the college choice process, stopped-out, and/or were not satisfied with their postsecondary choice. Therefore, in the fifth stage, it is essential that students have well-informed college-guidance sessions that discuss the implications of choosing a higher education system.

Moreover, educators need to build networks with higher education student support programs at individual campuses, such as TRiO Programs or freshman summer experience programs. Thus, students connect with adequate resources to navigate the postsecondary institution and establish a community of support. In doing so, students will avoid the blow-up
stage and thus enter college and connect with college *familia*. As noted in Chapter Six, the
participants who established friendships with peers also benefited from a network of support, and
in turn, supported others. Therefore, high school educators can support the completion of the
pathway to *conocimiento colegial*, by building institutional bridges that can connect with a
potential network of peers from backgrounds similar to the student.

**Culture of Conocimiento Colegial Summary**

Combined, the five conditions and the five stages support students and build a culture of
*conocimiento colegial*. A culture of *conocimiento colegial* centralizes the racialized, gendered,
classed, and racist nativist experiences that the Latina/o participants encountered when pursuing
college preparation and navigating systems of higher education. First, the five conditions
establish the context to build a culture of *conocimiento colegial* by eliminating deficit ideologies
of the educators. Second, the culture through five stages prepares students to make empowering
postsecondary decisions and navigate higher education.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research should continue to examine the implications of underresourced schools
attempting to build college-going cultures. More qualitative studies are needed to understand
how underresourced high schools can address the postsecondary fears and concerns of low-
income students, first-generation students, and Students of Color. Research is needed to know
how not just to provide the students with accurate and critical information but also to know how
to equip the students with the tools they will need to navigate college successfully and
accomplish their educational aspirations.

Future studies should examine the implications of policies and practices within
underresourced high schools that serve Students of Color as a mechanism for institutionalization
of tracking Students of Color into workforce development programs. Although not fully explored in this study, data analysis revealed a connection between postsecondary workforce development programs and veering students into vocational programs and away from their aspirations to transfer from community college to a four-year college. Although Linked Learning has been deemed a successful option, more research is needed to examine the implications on student aspirations and postsecondary pathways. Future studies should also explore the connection between feeder schools of local community colleges and the enrollment in vocational programs.

In the future, researchers should examine New Jim Crow in schools. As discussed briefly in Chapter Four, the New Jim Crow includes a criminalizing climate and restrictive policies. More research is needed to understand how elements in climates of surveillance and control, such as constant surveillance, hinder the college preparation of Students of Color. In addition, studies should also use qualitative methods to understand the role of administrator ideologies in restructuring policies and practices used in climates of surveillance and control. It is important to consider the role of Educational Leaders of Color and how they might implement a strength-based approach to combat previous climates of surveillance and control.

Finally, future studies should continue exploring how high school policies, practices, and discourses hinder and support the high educational aspirations of Students of Color. More specifically, research is needed to understand the use of tempered or postponed aspirations as strategic decisions made by Students of Color and low-income students. Similarly, qualitative research is needed to understand the use of strategic academic undermatching for Latinas/os. Given the previous research, which finds that Latinas/os choose less selective colleges in order to stay closer to home. Although research frames academic undermatching as a negative outcome,
more studies are needed to understand if the families provide a greater source of support to help students with college transition and persistence.

**Conclusion**

When conceptualizing and conducting this dissertation, I merged my professional, personal, and academic knowledge of college access and college choice, with my passion for educational equity. As a result, this study clarified the understanding of how educators in a high school that lacked human and financial resources, faced systemic obstacles, and collaborated with various networks to improve the likelihood of postsecondary success for Academies High School students. As a result, the number of AHS graduating seniors that received admission offers from four-year colleges reached a record high. However, this dissertation also revealed that students pursuing a two-year college experienced a lack of college guidance resources that facilitated the accomplishment of plans for transfer to a four-year college. Nevertheless, after developing the findings and recommendations, I offered AHS teachers and administrators ideas for improving the postsecondary educational success of students.

None of this would have been possible without the support from the principal and the director of the College and Career Center—I am grateful for their trust. Moreover, I was able to understand another perspective of the college-going climate and AHS due to the willingness of several teachers, counselors, administrators, and staff members to participate in an interview—despite their lack of available time. Their concern and care for all AHS students was apparent in their commitment to continue improving the educational opportunities. However, the voices of the 57 student participants, and the many more who I observed, allowed me to understand the day-to-day experiences when being a student at AHS. I am honored to have had the opportunity of spending a year among Academies High School students and educators.

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Appendix A: First Student Interview Protocol

9th and 10th grade memories
When you entered high school, what did you think about college?
Who informed the way you thought about high school and college?

11th grade memories
When you entered 11th grade, what did you think about college?
Was there someone in AHS or from a college outreach program that helped you think that way?
What were you planning to do after you graduated high school?
How were you preparing for that?

12th grade memories
When you entered high school this year, what did you think you would do after high school?
What did you think about college?
During your 12th grade, who spoke about life after high school to you?
How did they help you think about what you would do after high school?
What was your goal?
Who has helped you prepare for that goal?
Have you applied to colleges? Which ones? Why did you choose to apply to those?
Who has helped you during that process? How?

College-Going Culture
(College Talk) In Academies High School, who has talked to you about college? What did they say? How did that make you think in regards to your goals?

(Clear Expectations) What do you think teachers, and people who work at Richmond High School expect every student to do during high school and after graduating high school?

(Information and Resources) If you have questions about college, like what classes to take, what colleges to apply to, and how to apply, who do you turn to for information and resources?

(Comprehensive Counseling Model) Is there a counselor who is really good about talking to you about college? Is there more than one? Who?

(Faculty Involvement) What do teachers in general say to you about college?

(Testing and Curriculum) How do you think the materials that your classes cover compare to the tests you have to take to get into college? (Like the SAT)

(Family Involvement) Does your school ever have events for parents? Does your school talk to your parents about college or your options after high school?

(College Partnerships) Does your high school ever visit colleges or do college representatives visit your high school? If yes, what was that like? If no, why do you think?
Appendix B: Second Student Interview Protocol

1. Where are you enrolled now?

2. How did you prepare for college this summer?

3. Who helped you enroll in classes?

4. How was your first semester/quarter?

5. What has been your biggest struggle in college?

6. How is it different from AHS?

7. What have you enjoyed the most about college?

8. Who has supported you while in college? Who do you ask for help?

9. When did you know you realize you wanted to attend college?

10. Who supported your college dreams at AHS?

11. Who supported your college dreams outside of AHS?

12. Where do you hope to be in five years?
Appendix C: Teacher Interview Protocol

How many years have you taught at AHS?

How would you describe the school culture at AHS?

Based on your experience, what do you expect most graduates to do after graduating high school?
Why do you think that is?
What would you like for most of the graduates to do after AHS?

Can you tell me a little about how you incorporate college in your daily work?
   How do you talk about college in your classroom?
   Why do you talk about college in your classroom?
   What information do you think is essential for students that you share?
   Was the CCC a resource? Can you tell me a little more about that?
   Is this something that all teachers do?
   Do you feel like you have the up-to-date information to prepare students for college?
   Do you feel that you are preparing all students for college in your classes?

A lot of students that I interviewed expressed feelings that you care about them and their future, how did you make that message clear to them this past year?

What improvements do you think are needed in order to help meet that goal?
Appendix D: Counselor Interview Protocol

1. What is your role at AHS?

2. Please describe the school culture at Academies High School?

3. What are the biggest barriers to college access and success?

4. How are these barriers removed?

5. What role do you play in facilitating students’ college access and success?

6. As a counselor, what are your biggest challenges in addressing student college access and success?

7. How do you address those challenges?

8. Can you define what a college going culture means to you?

9. What are your top priorities as a counselor in shaping AHS college-going culture?

10. What resources do you utilize to create a college-going culture?

11. How do students respond to the college-going culture?

12. Does this response differ between certain groups of students? Can you elaborate?

13. How can the college-going culture be improved?

14. Is there anything you would like to add?
Appendix E: College-Advisor Interview Protocol

1. How long have you worked at Academies High School?
2. Please describe your role at AHS?
3. Please describe the school culture at Academies High School?
4. What are the biggest barriers to college access and success?
5. How are these barriers removed?
6. What role do you play in facilitating students’ college access and success?
7. As a college advisor, what are your biggest challenges in addressing student college access and success?
8. How do you address those challenges?
9. Can you define what a college going culture means to you?
10. What are your top priorities as college advisor?
11. What role does your program play in the college-going culture?
12. What resources do you utilize to create a college-going culture?
13. How do students respond to the college-going culture?
14. How can the college-going culture be improved?
15. Is there anything you would like to add?
Appendix F: High School Administrator Interview Protocol

1. How long have you worked at AHS?
2. Please describe the school culture in AHS?
3. What are the biggest barriers to college access and success?
4. How are these barriers removed?
5. What role do you play in facilitating students’ college access and success?
6. As an administrator, what are your biggest challenges in addressing student college access and success?
7. How do you address those challenges?
8. How do you define a college-going culture mean to you?
9. What do you expect the majority of AHS students to do after high school?
10. What do you hope they will do?
11. Is there anything you would like to add?
Appendix G: School-Wide Observations & Information Gathering Protocol


**Articulation** - What are the school's college-going rates? What types of colleges do they attend after high school? Do students hear a consistent message about going to college from all educators?

**Testing and Curriculum** - What is the school's rate of passage on the CAHSEE? How many students take the SAT? How many students take the ACT? SAT Subject Tests? How many take APs?

**Faculty Involvement** - Do faculty interact with counselors? Do faculty members have up-to-date college knowledge? Do teachers talk about college in class?

**Family Involvement** - How many events are held for parents? Do parents attend college fairs? Workshops?

**College Partnerships** - How many college representative visits do they have each semester? From what institutions? What information is presented?

**College talk** - Are students talking about college around campus? Do teachers talk about college and their college experiences in class?

**Clear expectations** - Do teachers expect students to go to college? Are there four year plans for each student? Are there opportunities to discuss college?

**Information and resources** - Are there college visuals around campus? Do students use the college and career center? Is there an SAT support, financial aid information, and college counseling available to all students?

**Comprehensive Counseling Model** - Do all counselors address college-going topics? Is college information distributed to all students by counselors?
Appendix H: Workshop Observation Protocol

**College Information**
What **topics** are addressed in the workshops?
What **information** is shared during the workshop?

**Pedagogy**
Is there a set curriculum?
How is the information **communicated** to the student?
How does the facilitator address **student questions**?
Is there room for **discussion**?
Is the presentation **one-way or interactive**?
- List **students’** activities.
- Does facilitator encourage students to summarize and add to other’ summaries?
- Does facilitator help quieter students interact with others?
What type of **discourse** does the facilitator engage in? (e.g., empowering, deficit, pure information)
Does the facilitator “track” students into a postsecondary pathway? How?

**Instructional Methods**
Did the opening gain the class’s attention? Did it establish rapport?
Did the opening outline the topic and purpose of the lecture?
Is the delivery paced to students’ needs?
Does the facilitator introduce topic, state goals, present material or activity effectively, summarize, and give assignment or suggest an idea to consider before the next class?
Could the facilitator be seen and heard?
Were key points emphasized?
Were explanations clear to students?
Were examples, metaphors, and analogies appropriate?
Was the lecture stimulating and thought provoking?

**Individualization**
Are the emotional and intellectual needs of students met?
Does the facilitator prompt awareness of students’ prior learning and experiences?
Does the facilitator offer “real world” application?
Is the facilitator available before or after the event to meet with students?
Does the facilitator relate event to students’ personal goals or societal concerns?

**Teaching Tools**
What teaching aids/materials were used to convey the message? (e.g., visual aids, handouts, alumni)
What are the intended outcomes/objectives of the event?
How is effectiveness of the event measured?


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