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HISPANIC/LATINA STUDENT NURSE PERCEPTIONS OF  
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING RETENTION AND  
GRADUATION FROM A BACCALAUREATE NURSING PROGRAM

Committee:

---

Mary S. Black, Supervisor

---

Oscar Mink

---

Sherry Field

---

Kathleen Edwards

---

Linda Carpenter

---

Delia Esparza

HISPANIC/LATINA STUDENT NURSE PERCEPTIONS OF  
INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING RETENTION AND  
GRADUATION FROM A BACCALAUREATE NURSING PROGRAM

by

Jean Carole Taxis, BSN, MSN, MA.

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## Dedication

This study is dedicated to the participants who generously shared their life stories and in doing so hopefully will help us all take another step in building educational institutions that are respectful, caring, and serve all people.

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HISPANIC/LATINA STUDENT NURSE PERCEPTIONS OF  
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Jean Carole Taxis, Ph.D.

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Supervisor: Mary S. Black

This qualitative study investigated the experiences and perceptions of nine Hispanic/Latina nursing senior students and graduates of a Bachelor of Science nursing (BSN) program regarding the influence of institutional factors upon their retention and graduation. Institutional factors were broadly defined and included programs, policies, curriculum, and the social encounters that occurred while engaging in these factors. The data were collected using individual interviews, a written questionnaire, and a focus group that included an interactive design that allowed the participants to analyze the importance of each factor upon her retention and graduation. The key findings or themes that emerged as influencing factors were: (1) the participants' commitment, intellectual ability, and work-

ethic, (2) adequate financial assistance, (3) ongoing family emotional support, (4) establishing adequate support from other Hispanics to maintain a bicultural orientation, and (5) experiencing authentic caring relationships from institutional agents and peers.

This study is significant in that the shortage of nurses to deliver healthcare in the U.S. is reaching a crisis and is compounded by: the growing ethnic diversity of the U.S. population and the unicultural aging nursing workforce. Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S. and the most underrepresented in the U.S. nursing workforce. In that there are no studies to date that have examined the factors that contribute to the retention and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas from BSN programs, this study adds to the nursing and education fund of knowledge, specifically providing evidence of the importance of the cultural considerations and interpersonal relationships in the development and administration of institutional programs, policies and curriculum in BSN programs.



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## CHAPTER ONE: THE SHORTAGE OF HISPANIC NURSES IN THE U.S.

### Introduction to the Problem

At the same time the U. S. population is growing more ethnically and racially diverse, the nursing workforce and academia are homogenetically stagnant, that is 88% White (non-Hispanic) and 95% female (Health Resources and Service Administration, 2001). The most recent data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2001a) indicates the racial plurality and complexity of America is shifting, with dramatic increases in the Hispanic population. In 1990, about 1 out of 10 Americans was Hispanic/Latino; by 2050 this number is expected to climb to 1 out of 5. The increasing plurality of the U.S. population is challenging educators to provide linguistically and culturally inclusive education. While the Hispanic/Latino population is the fastest growing ethnic/racial group within the U.S., they are the least educated group, and significantly underrepresented in higher education (Meléndez & Petrovich, 1989; U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2001b).

Nursing is not unique among healthcare professions in the underrepresentation of minorities in its workforce. The Institute of Medicine (1994) published a study that highlighted the racial/ethnic homogeneity of

numerous healthcare professions. It outlined the widening gap in health status of minority and majority populations, the paucity of minority faculty and practitioners, and called for research as well as strategic action plans to correct the underrepresentation of minorities in all of the healthcare disciplines. Castiglia (2001), notes, “Nursing can no longer sustain itself without incorporating, to a great extent, diverse minority groups into the profession” (pp. 494-495).

The uniculturalism in nursing is particularly problematic in light of globalization and demographic shifts. Figure A1 (Appendix A) compares the racial and ethnic minority representation of the U. S. and nursing populations over the past 20 years. While the national Hispanic/Latino population has grown to 13% of the national population, the percentage of Hispanic Registered Nurses (RNs) has increased a mere 0.7% over the last 20 years (American Nurses Association, 1982; Health Resources and Service Administration, 2001; U. S. Census Bureau, 2001b). Figure B2 (Appendix B) represents the growing disparity between the number of Hispanics in the total U.S. population and the number of RNs of Hispanic descent (Taxis, 2002).

In a 1996 report, the President’s Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanic Americans cites a “profound and threatening crisis in education, resulting in the loss of productive futures for millions of children and young people of Hispanic origin” (p.3). The National Center for Education

Statistics (2001) reports among 18 to 24 year-olds who had completed high school or earned a GED Asians had the highest rate, (94%), followed by: Anglos (90%), African Americans (81%) and Hispanic/Latinos (63%). The disparity in educational achievement threatens to have significant economic, political and social ramifications in the United States and throughout the global community. Healthcare is one of the many areas that is beginning to experience the results of this lack of educational parity.

The Hispanic population is often referred to as if it were a homogenous group, however the term *Hispanic* includes many cultures and subcultures. While Hispanics of Mexican origin comprise approximately 59% of the U.S. Hispanic population, other groups include persons from Puerto Rico (10%), South America (4%), Central America (5%), and “other Hispanics” (17%) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001a). The U. S. Census Bureau has placed these diverse cultures and subcultures under the rubric *Hispanic*, however some Hispanic/Latina(o)s may refer to themselves as “Cuban American”, “Mexican American”, “Chicana(o)”, “Latina(o)”, or “Hispanic” (Castillo, 1996; Garza, 2001). When surveyed, the participants in this study preferred the terms, *Hispanic* and *Latina*, thus these terms are used interchangeably in referring to the participants in this study.



## Significance of the Problem

Over the last several decades nursing theory and research has developed a body of knowledge regarding the importance of providing culturally competent care, that is, to contextualize care within the racial/ethnic and cultural framework of the patient. To provide the patient with cultural, ethnic and linguistically appropriate care is elemental to competence. Governmental agencies and community groups have joined the nursing profession in advocating for increased diversity within the nursing workforce as a means of providing culturally appropriate healthcare (Broadnax, 1993; Latino Health Consortium, 1995; Pew Health Professions Commission, 1998). As a discipline, nursing has vigorously espoused the virtues of cultural and gender diversity in both education and clinical practice (American Academy of Nursing, 1992; Castiglia, 2001; Eliason, 1993). Yet the fact remains, while the nation is on the brink of an historic nursing shortage that threatens the healthcare system (Buerhaus, 1998; Peterson, 2001), men and women of color continue to be persistently and severely underrepresented in nursing education and in the nursing workforce. The most recent survey of U. S. Registered Nurses reported that 88.2% were White non-Hispanic; and of 11.8% minority nurses, 4.9% were Black (African- American),

3.5% Asian/Pacific Islanders, 2.0% Hispanic/Latino and 0.2% American Indian/Alaskan Natives (Health Resources and Service Administration, 2001).

Tanner (1996) notes that, “Virtually every nursing education policy document of the 1990s has reminded us of the critical need for increasing the diversity and cultural competence of the nursing workforce” (p.291), however, enrollment and graduation from schools of nursing remain persistently White and female. Figure 3C (Appendix C) represents the rate of enrollment and graduation of Hispanics from all schools of nursing between the years of 1978 and 2002 as well as the number of Hispanic nursing faculty members (American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2002; National League of Nursing, 1986, 1991). There has been substantial progress in enrolling minorities in nursing programs with Hispanic/Latina(o)s increasing from 1.4 % in 1978 to 5.2 % in 2002. However despite showing the largest relative increase between 1996 and 2000, Hispanic/Latinos continue to be the most underrepresented ethnic/racial group in nursing, comprising 2% of the total RN population (Health Resources and Service Administration, 2000, 2001). To allow this persistent underrepresentation to remain unexamined is not a feasible option for a profession that seeks to deliver culturally competent care to an increasingly diverse population. If nursing is to sustain itself as a viable profession in the healthcare industry, it must find ways to

implement the goals of increasing the numbers of professional nurses and diversification of the workforce.

Entry-level Registered Nurses are classified according to their highest level of education: diploma (three-year hospital-based program), associate degree (two-year community college) and baccalaureate degree (four-year college program). Associate degree programs are the most prevalent, comprising 58% of the nation's 1,508 basic nursing programs, with baccalaureate programs accounting for 35% and diploma programs, 7% (Castiglia, 2001). According to the *National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses* (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2001), Hispanics are most likely to enter nursing with an Associate Degree in Nursing (ADN) and the least likely of all racial/ethnic groups to enter nursing with baccalaureate preparation.

The Pew Professions Commission (1998) addressed the significance of the underrepresentation of minorities in nursing and the need for a culturally diversified workforce that is educated to provide care consistent with growing technological complexities. This commission recommended aggressive recruitment and retention efforts “to increase the enrollment and graduation of under-represented minorities, especially at higher degree levels” (p. 65). Entering nursing with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree positions the nurse to readily continue graduate education and thus become educationally prepared to

assume leadership roles and academic careers within the profession. Additionally this Commission recommended downsizing diploma and ADN programs while increasing admissions to baccalaureate programs in nursing. If the dual goals of increased diversity in the nursing workforce and increased baccalaureate-prepared nurses are to be achieved, there must be specific research conducted that targets the causes and solutions to the underrepresentation of minorities in general, and Hispanics in particular in the profession of nursing.

#### Problem Statement

The education literature is replete with theories and data, representing nearly 70 years of research, that describe the economic poverty and poor academic achievement of Hispanics (Aguirre, 1979; Lewis, 1965; Sánchez, 1934; Valencia, 2000; Valencia & Alburto, 1991). However, there is significantly less known about the factors that contribute to the educational achievement of Hispanics in higher education and particularly baccalaureate programs in nursing. These topics are by and large missing from the (1960-2002) nursing, education, and medical cumulative indexed literature. It is perplexing that while other minorities and their specific educational needs are frequently cited in the

literature, there is a glaring absence of discussion related to the underrepresentation of Hispanics in BSN programs.

The scarce literature that does exist regarding the educational experiences and needs of racial and ethnic minorities in BSN programs tend to group them together as if they were a homogeneous “other”. In the absence of culturally specific knowledge, theories of retention that apply to the dominant culture have frequently been applied to minority students. Olneck (1990) questions the appropriateness of this application in that it assumes an assimilationist stance. Tierney (1992) argues that attempting to apply knowledge generated in the dominant population regarding participation in college may actually “hold potentially harmful consequences for racial and ethnic minorities” (p. 603). Of the available literature regarding the participation of Hispanic/Latinas in higher education much of it is focused on categories such as dropout rates, performance levels, motivation and socialization. Jaramillo (1988) notes that categories that focus on individual effort and fail to include institutional structures may negatively influence the Latina’s completion of a degree in higher education.

The lack of scholarly attention to the educational experiences of Latinas in higher education (del Castillo, Frederickson, J. McKenna, & Ortiz, 1988; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000) coupled with their underrepresentation on college campuses and within BSN programs creates a

challenge for college administrators, faculty and staff to address the retention and graduation of this growing portion of the population. Furthermore, with the Hispanic/Latino population explosion and the emphasis on delivery of culturally competent care, there is an urgent need for research that specifically addresses the educational needs and experiences of Hispanic/Latina(o) BSN nursing students as a means of increasing the representation of this group within the nursing profession.

#### Research Question

The focus of this study with Hispanic/Latina nursing students was the exploration of their experiences and perceptions regarding the institutional factors that have affected their retention and graduation from a BSN program. The major research question is what are the institutional factors that facilitate or serve as barriers to the persistence and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas from a BSN program? Institutional factors were defined from a broad perspective and included programs, policies, curriculum and the social encounters that occurred while engaging in these factors. The secondary questions are: (a) What were the significant factors that prepared the participants for baccalaureate education (b) what programs, groups, affiliations have been influential or detrimental to them as

student nurses (c) what interpersonal factors among other students, faculty, and professionals in clinical settings have been influential or detrimental (d) what school policies and practices have been influential or detrimental and (e) what factors outside of school had a significant impact on the schooling experience?

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and constructed meaning of institutional factors that were influential in the experiences of Latinas in a BSN program on a large state, predominantly White, university campus. The investigation sought to discover basic information that may prove useful in the design of institutional programs and policies relevant to the retention strategies that are racially, culturally and ethically specific to the needs of the Hispanic/Latina student in a BSN program. Constructing such culturally competent educational systems may enhance the achievement of Latinas in higher education as well as increase the graduation rate from BSN programs of this severely underrepresented population within the nursing profession.

## Theoretical Perspective

Over the last several decades feminist theory has moved beyond the essentialist universalizing of “woman” or “women” to a richly diversified complexity of critical epistemology of women’s experiences, as well as the institutions and policies that frame them (Olesen, 2000). A critical feminist paradigm provides a perspective that centrally locates voice, gender and race in the explication of the experiences and understanding of Latinas in their nursing education (Collins, 1990, 1992; Glazer, 1991; Hurtado, 1989; Hurtado & Stewart, 1997; Lather, 1991). Issues of assimilation, acculturation, cultural, and linguistic experiences with the programs, policies, and curricula, as they relate to larger institutional factors are explored within a critical feminist perspective (Meléndez & Petrovich, 1989; Padilla, 1997; Rodriguez et al., 2000; Tinto, 1993). The critical feminist paradigm moves the study in the direction of recommendations to address systems of asymmetrical power and the construction of mechanisms to assist Latinas in achieving access to the profession of nursing. Furthermore notions of the fluidities and multiple identities of women’s lives provide a useful epistemological paradigm in understanding the participants’ construction of multiple identities as they acquire a BSN degree (Anzaldúa, 1987, 1990; Castiglia, 2001).



## Statement of Methodology

A qualitative case study methodology was utilized because the complex social dimensions of the questions demand a research paradigm that allows voice, positionality and meaning of the participants to emerge from the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Glesne, 1999; Maxwell, 1996). Additionally, this methodology was chosen as it allowed the researcher to represent the fluidity, complexity, and social construction of realities within institutions.

Because of the complexity of exploring the multiple layers of institutional factors effecting Latinas' retention and completion of a BSN program and the lack of prior studies, a single-case study format was selected to provide some boundaries and structure to the inquiry. Given the near absence of literature in this area, it was hoped that the results of this study would allow for some inferences to be made from this particular case concerning institutional factors leading to persistence and graduation of Hispanics to other BSN programs.

While it is true case studies generally are not undertaken to understand other cases and do not provide a strong base for generalization, Stake (2000) describes *instrumental case studies* as inquiries in which the "case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else" (p. 437). Thus, while the identification of facilitating and non-

facilitating factors of obtaining BSN degrees for Hispanic women in this particular setting was the focus of this study, the relationship and strength of these factors may be provide guidance in other settings for future studies.

This study was conducted at The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing. At the time of the study, this university had the largest campus in the nation with 14% of its undergraduates being of Hispanic/Latino origin. In 2002 it was cited as a favorable academic setting for Hispanics, ranking 4th of 25 among “the best colleges and universities for Hispanics” (Hernández, 2002).

The School of Nursing closely resembled the campus in the representation of Hispanic/Latina(o)s in the BSN program, with approximately 15% Hispanics in the program between the years 1999- 2002. Table 1D (Appendix D) presents the percentage full-time BSN student enrollment by ethnicity for the years 1999-20002. The participants in this study were either recent graduates or seniors in the BSN program, most of who attended the university beginning in their freshman year.

## Conclusion

Our national population is growing more ethnically and racially diverse, yet the nursing workforce and faculty have remained predominantly white (non-

Hispanic). Racial/ethnic minorities are seriously underrepresented in nursing and as such are a factor in the nursing workforce shortage. The nursing literature has addressed the need for racial/ethnic diversity for several decades, most often citing diversification as a means of providing culturally competent care; however the nursing population continues to be underrepresented by people of color. The diversification of the nursing profession will require culturally sensitive research and theory development regarding the recruitment and education of ethnic/racial minorities.

The effects of the persistent and pervasive gender and racial hegemony of nursing must be interrogated with the inclusion of the voice and perspectives of nurses and nursing students of color. However, the changes that need to be made within nursing education must be intelligent, informed and inclusive. Nursing education programs must become models for multicultural work environments, honoring diversity, creatively working with difference, and including multiple perspectives within the discourse as the profession moves toward the provision of care for an increasingly diverse population.

## CHAPTER TWO: RETAINING AND GRADUATING HISPANICS IN BSN PROGRAMS

### Introduction

This review of literature explores the institutional factors relevant to the retention and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas from baccalaureate nursing programs. Unlike other professions that require a minimum of a baccalaureate degree prior to certification or licensure, prospective Hispanic/Latina Registered Nurses (RNs) may choose a shorter and less vigorous academic route than a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) such as an Associate of Science in Nursing degree (ADN) or a three-year hospital based program. Thus Hispanic/Latina nursing students in baccalaureate programs are affected by institutional factors common to all students on the campus as well as those in the nursing program.

There are no studies to date that address the educational, interpersonal, or institutional factors that are pertinent in retaining and graduating Hispanic/Latinas from a baccalaureate-nursing program. This review of the literature concentrates on the institutional issues relevant to retaining and graduating Hispanic/Latinas with BSN degrees and is divided into the following sections: (a) socioeconomic factors, (b) K-12 educational preparation, (c) retention issues, (d) academic issues, (e) cultural issues, (f) institutional marginalization, and concludes with (g)

a description of high achieving Latinas. The significance of the monoculturalism of the profession of nursing, as well as the homogeneity of nursing education is discussed along with the relevant institutional policies and programs that affect ethnic and racial minority nursing students.

### Socioeconomic Factors

Education is often seen in the American culture as a vehicle to social status and financial security. Despite the recent declining trend in overall national poverty, Hispanic/Latino poverty in 1999 was 22.8% while the White non-Hispanic rate was 7.7%. Nearly one in three Hispanic children lives in poverty and Hispanic female-headed families have a poverty rate of 38.8%. In comparison, White non-Hispanic children have a poverty rate of 9.4% and non-Hispanic female-headed homes, 18.6%. (National Council of La Raza, 2000). These figures are significant in that persistent poverty has been demonstrated to be a factor in the failure to complete high school (Romo & Falbo, 1996) and serves as a deterrent to entrance into higher education (St. John & Noell, 1996). Conversely minority students (African-American and Hispanic) who experience more socioeconomic advantage tend to perform better academically than those with less advantage (Schultz, 1993).

The *National Sample Survey of Registered Nurses 2000* confirmed that Latinas who become RNs are most likely to enter the profession through a two-year community college (ADN) program (Health Resources and Services Administration, 2001). This is consistent with the data indicating that regardless of career aspirations, minority students who continue their education beyond high school, will most likely attend a community college (Rendón, Jalomo, & Garcia, 1996). Scholars have found a link between obtaining financial assistance and college retention (Leslie & Brinkman, 1988; Nora, Castaneda, & Cabrera, 1987; Olivas, 1986b; Solberg, 1993). Stampen and Cabrera (1986) found that when low-income students received financial aid they were as likely to persist in college as non-low income students.

Because of the pervasive poverty rate of the Hispanic population, receiving financial assistance is an important factor for many Hispanic youths to persist in college (Vasquez, 1997). In a comparative study of Mexican-American (Chicanas) and Anglo women, Vasquez (1997) found socioeconomic status to be a major variable that distinguished successful and non-successful university students and thus a primary obstacle to participation and graduation from a college or a university. Consequently obtaining the financial support to attend college may be an initial obstacle for Latinas, and once enrolled; financial issues often continue to be a salient factor in their persistence.

In sum, adequate financial resources are influential in the decision to pursue post-secondary education, the selection of a two-year or a four-year program, and the ability to persist and graduate from that program. Additionally experiencing economic poverty during the years prior to college can be an influential factor in the quality of the educational experiences that prepare students for higher education.

#### Educational Experiences: K-12

Educational underachievement is a serious and longstanding problem for Hispanic youth. In 1999 while 90% of White non-Hispanic and 84% of Black young adults, ages 18-24 had completed high school programs, only 63% of Hispanic/Latinos had achieved the same goal (National Center for Education Statistics, 2001). Despite initiatives and reform efforts, the high school completion rate for Hispanics has remained basically stagnant over the last 15 years. Prior to admission to a four-year college and application to a BSN program, many Hispanic/Latinas experience substantial educational barriers. While most of this literature review specifically addresses institutional issues for Hispanic/Latinas in higher education, it is important to give some attention to the educational experiences in K-12.

High school completion rates and academic preparation for college are education factors have a direct relationship to the underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latino students on the college campus. Receiving an inadequate K-12 education disadvantages Hispanic/Latino students who aspire to attend and graduate from a four-year college or university. There is a vast body of literature describing varied and complex factors that contribute to the chronic K-12 under-education of Hispanic children. Pertinent to this review and among the most researched are (a) segregated schools, (b) non-academic tracking, and (c) achievement test bias and standardized curricula.

### *Segregated Schools*

Latino children are the most segregated ethnic/racial minority in U.S. public schools (Chapa & Valencia, 1993; Donato, Menchaca, & Valencia, 1991; Valencia, 2000). The existence of “savage inequalities” in U. S. schools is well documented (Delpit, 1995; Kozol, 1991; McNeil, 2000a; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Valenzuela, 1999). This becomes significant because there is empirical evidence of direct relationships between segregation of minority students and decreased achievement scores, as well as increased dropout rates. (Jaeger, 1987; Valencia, 1984).



Valencia (2000) examined the persistent and severe segregation of Hispanics from the late 1800s to present. Despite the desegregation mandate of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), 54% of all Hispanic students who attended U. S. public schools in 1994, attended schools that were significantly segregated; that is, 70% or more of the students in a school were racial/ethnic minorities. However only 7% of White students attended these densely populated minority schools (Valencia, 2000). In testimony as an expert witness, Valencia (2000) documented that approximately 70% of the schools in Austin, Texas in 1999 were “imbalanced” or segregated in the ethnic/racial representation. Scholars have found that compared to their Anglo peers, minority students are being taught at a higher rate by non-certified teachers, are enrolled more often in schools with less favorable ratings, and are dropping out of schools with greater frequency (McNeil, 2000b; Valencia, 2000). In fact Haney (2000) reports that in 1992, 60% of the Hispanic/Latino youth who began ninth grade did not graduate from high school. Summarizing, children who are segregated into inadequate facilities with insufficient resources for learning, poorly prepared teachers, and over-crowded conditions are less likely to graduate; or if they do, they are more likely to emerge underprepared to compete in post-secondary education (Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres & Talbot 2000).

### *Non-Academic Tracking*

Hispanic children have historically been overrepresented in vocational tracking programs and underrepresented in Gifted and Talented programs. Among the complex causes for this phenomena are lowered expectations of teachers and advisors regarding the ability of Hispanic children and the implementation of controversial ability measures. Achievement and intellectual measurement instruments are used to place students or “track” them into special curriculum groups based on their perceived ability (Chacón, Cohen, & Strover, 1986; Page, 1990; Romo & Falbo, 1996).

The widespread use of controversial standardized intelligence and achievement instruments is not a new phenomenon. For nearly 70 years scholars have questioned the usefulness of these instruments with Hispanics. The education literature is replete with studies that argue many standardized tests are culturally and linguistically biased, especially when used with limited English proficiency (LEP) students (Aguirre, 1979; Flaughner, 1978; Heubert & Hauser, 1999; Margolin, 1994; Mercer, 1988; Page, 1990; Sánchez, 1934; Valencia, 1979; Valencia & Alburto, 1991; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

The continued immigration of Hispanic/Latinos to the U. S. has resulted in increased linguistic and cultural diversity in the public school system and consequently a dramatic rise in the number of these students being placed in

limited English proficiency (LEP) classes. Projected data from *Census 2000* indicates that 74.8% of the students enrolled in LEP programs are of Hispanic decent (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2002). This is true especially in Texas, California, and Florida that have dense Hispanic/Latino populations (U. S. Bureau of the Census, 2001a). Being placed in an LEP program poses an increased risk of these students being misidentified as Learning Disabled and may be account for some of the overrepresentation of Hispanic/Latino children and youth in special education classes (Palmer, Olivarez, Willson, & Fordyce, 1989). Placement into vocational or non-college tracks physically segregates students, even in an integrated school. Furthermore such tracking programs have been linked to inferior education, inadequate resources, and an erosion of perceived academic ability (Romo & Falbo, 1996).

Another subsequent result of the misidentification of the Hispanic/Latino student through intelligence measures is their persistent underrepresentation in Gifted and Talented Programs. Traditionally, “giftedness” refers to a measured, superior IQ score (Winner, 1997). Margolin (1994) asserts historically the gifted child was idealized, viewed as exceptionally intelligent, talented in many areas, morally superior, well behaved, strong, healthy, attractive, and *White*. As the construct of intelligence has become more complex, numerous scholars have suggested multidimensional aspects of giftedness. For example, Sternberg (1997)

has applied his triarchic theory, Renzulli (1986) has included above average intelligence, task commitment, and creativity in his three-ring conception of giftedness. Gardner (1993) expanded the notion of intelligence to include what he termed *multiple intelligences*. However, even with these expanded definitions of giftedness, Hispanic/Latino children continue to be underrepresented in these programs.

The Office for Civil Rights publishes a biennial compliance report that includes the numbers of children enrolled in gifted and talented programs .The projected data from *Census 2000* indicates the persistent underrepresentation of Blacks and Hispanics in the national Gifted and Talented programs, with Hispanics comprising 8.6% of the gifted student population, Blacks 8.4%, and Whites 75.5%. It can be argued that this underrepresentation is due to hegemonic educational practices: discrimination, deficit thinking, and the persistent power differential between the dominant and minority groups. Margolin (1994) posits that the lack of minority representation in Gifted and Talented programs is due to the “very understanding of giftedness – the ways we study, validate, recognize and describe this phenomenon – reflects and supports discrimination” (p.34).

### *Achievement Test Bias and Standardized Curricula*

Recent educational reform as such as *A Nation At Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (2000), and *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, (2001) place a heavy emphasis on standardized curricula and testing that has continued to amplify the national education debate regarding the inherent bias of standardized educational tools when used with minority populations. It is argued that standardized instruments have been normed on the dominant culture and thus contributed not only to the hegemonic reproduction of the dominant cultural capital, but the marginalization and educational disadvantage of the minority populations. Research has shown that implementation of standardized curricula and achievement tests have actually decreased the academic level of teaching and have further widened the discriminatory practices. Standardization in a multicultural educational environment is not only harmful to all children but accentuates educational inequities between socioeconomic and racial/ethnic groups. (McNeil, 2000a; McNeil, 2000b; Serow, 1984; Valencia & Alburto, 1991; Valencia & Suzuki, 2001).

Summarizing findings from a three-year ethnographic study of the educational impact of standardization of achievement tests, McNeil (2000a)

reports, “over the long term, standardization creates inequities, widening the gap between the quality of education for poor and minority youth and that of more privileged students” (p. 3). Valenzuela (1999) conducted a three year ethnographic study in a large high school in Houston, Texas and found Hispanic students were marginalized by what she terms “subtractive schooling” practices that were situated in the dominant culture. Since the introduction of standardized high-stakes testing in Texas, McNeil (2000a) notes in contrast to the stability of the White dropout rate, there is a progressive increase in the dropout rate of African American and Hispanic youths. She attributes this increase to the standardized testing practices throughout the state.

An exhaustive description of the social, political, and cultural factors embedded in the pervasive and persistent Hispanic poverty rates, inadequate education, and failure to complete high school are complex and beyond the scope of this literature review. However this brief overview demonstrates some of the early educational barriers that many Hispanic/Latinos must negotiate to pursue a college education. Furthermore it demonstrates some of the prominent factors that account for the paucity of Hispanic/Latinos who are qualified and financially able to pursue a degree in higher education and complete a BSN program.

## Retention Issues

### *Transition to College*

#### *Institutional Programs*

As the ethnic, racial and culture diversity on college campuses have steadily grown over the last several decades, institutions of higher education have sought to provide services to integrate these students. Programmatic initiatives are most often directed toward academic and co-curricular activities such as orientation, advising, career planning, mentoring programs, and student activities (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1993). Programs that allow for personal or small group interaction with other students and faculty have been utilized, such as freshmen interest groups and fireside chats with faculty. Creative initiatives are emerging nationally to attract and assist qualified minority students in the transition to higher education. The following programs are representative of these efforts.

Southwest Texas State University implemented a mentoring program where Hispanic juniors, seniors, and faculty members served as mentors for Hispanic freshmen and juniors. During the two-year period of 1995 to 1997 the Hispanic student retention rate improved by 10 percent. (Reisberg, 1999, October

8). To increase parental support, The University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) has instituted a Mother-Daughter Program. It is comprised of Hispanic mothers and daughter program offerings to emphasize the value of education, career choices, and life skills (Weiler, 1997).

Iowa State University (ISU) has a recruitment- retention model that adds a cultural component to the traditional approaches that focus on academic and co-curricular programs as a means to foster transition to college. This program has a strong emphasis on mentoring and family involvement. ISU Hispanic students are assigned to high school seniors, working together with the school counselors to help Hispanic high school seniors clarify their academic interest and educational goals. If ISU is an appropriate fit, and the student is accepted to ISU, the trio continues this mentoring support for two or three years. Meetings are held with the families to share information about college including the availability of financial and support services (Walker & Schultz, 2001).

Finally, although not devoted entirely to minority students, The University of Texas at Austin (UT) implements an intense seven-week summer residential program, *Preview*, designed to introduce academic scholarship recipients to college life. Its goals are to “assist students with adjustments to the academic demands of UT and to the developmental stresses that students typically face” (Carreterhers, Beekmann, Coatie, & Nelson, 1996).



## *Persistence in College*

A robust body of literature regarding retention of college students has emerged over the last several decades. Student retention is a significant issue in that almost one-half of the students entering two-year colleges and more than one-fourth (28.5%) of students entering four-year colleges depart at the end of the first year (Tinto, 1993). McNairy (1996) notes that most retention programs are not embedded in the strategic goals of the institution and thus are likely to receive insufficient attention and funding. Furthermore, policies and programs that promote retention efforts for students of color, often neglect to properly address the curriculum and the academic, social, and cultural environment of the institution (McNairy, 1996). The following section reviews major theoretical constructs regarding retention including the socioeconomic and social factors in persistence in college and concludes with the consideration of attrition from an institutional perspective.

### *Theoretical Constructs of Retention*

Theories and models of retention in higher education have mostly been developed from the experiences of dominant traditional students that explain the

notions of persistence and attrition (Astin, 1993; Bean, 1980; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1993). *Commitment, individual intention, and educational or occupational goals* are terms that have been used to describe the individual's investment in completing a college degree. In general, researchers have found a causal relationship between the student's commitment and the likelihood of degree completion (Astin, 1993; Bean, 1982; Tinto, 1993). "Personal commitment to either an academic or occupational goal is the single most important determinant of persistence in college" (Cope & Hannah, 1975, p.19). In professions such as nursing where post-secondary education is a requirement, completing the educational goal is a step toward the occupational goal, thus it is theorized that a student who enters college with a clear commitment to the profession of nursing is more likely to graduate than one who is ambivalent.

Over the last several decades Tinto has developed and revised a widely accepted theoretical model (Tinto, 1987, 1993) that attempts to explicate from an integrationist point of view reasons for college students' decisions to persist or depart prior to graduation. Fundamental to Tinto's model is the concept of integration: social and academic. Academic integration is evidenced primarily by the grades the student earns because it is hypothesized that academic success demonstrates the student's ability to meet the institution's values and goals for students.

According to Tinto (1987, 1993) social integration is essential for persistence in college and refers to the perceived congruency between the individual and the social system of the college or university. Informal peer groups, extracurricular activities and interactions with faculty are mechanisms of social integration. Failure to achieve social integration results in experiences Tinto (1993) labels *incongruence* and *isolation*. Incongruence is the perception that one is “at odds with the prevailing social and intellectual fabric of institutional life” (p. 50) and is most often experienced “in the day-to-day informal, personal interaction among students, faculty and staff” (p.53). On the other hand, isolation is a result of an absence or insufficient contact between the individual and other members of the college or university community.

The size of the campus has an effect on the student’s integration in that larger campuses tend to provide more diversity and thus increase the potential social integration with peers while decreasing the likelihood of extensive contacts with faculty and staff. However the reverse is true of smaller campuses in that they tend to be more socially homogeneous and provide for greater contact with faculty and staff (Tinto, 1993).

Numerous studies have supported Tinto’s theory, in fact Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997) report that by 1994 this model had been cited more than 400 times in the professional literature and by 1995 approximately 170

dissertations have been written that addressed it. In his revised model Tinto (1993) included the experiences of students of color. He noted that finding peers with compatible backgrounds and values is a significant issue for minority students on a majority campus and summarized that minority students are “more likely to experience a sense of isolation and/or of incongruence than are white students” (p. 74).

Researchers focusing on minority students have questioned the usefulness of models that have been developed primarily on the experiences and assumptions of the dominant population. Duran (1994) retorts, “our understanding of Hispanic college students is not significantly increased by the available student literature” (p. 4). Tierney (1992) argues the notion of social integration is based on cultural assimilationist view requiring the ethnic/racial minority student to *integrate* or *assimilate* into the white dominant culture of the college community. Tinto’s model uses discrete pieces of information such as income, parental and sibling educational level, and high school academic preparation as predictive factors in persistence in college, while omitting the influences of race, gender and culture. Olneck (1990) furthers the argument of the appropriateness of programs in which the goal is the integration, calling to question the essence of integration, “the language of integration is the voice of white middle-class education professionals

speaking about a ‘problem’ group and about the solutions to the problems posed by diversity” (p. 163).

Numerous studies have been conducted in an attempt to explore the usefulness of mainstream retention literature to minority populations on the college campus. In general, the diversity and friendliness of the university community, the quality of the support of family and friends, financial resources, and the numbers of ethnic/racially diverse professional role models are cited as the most salient features (Gloria, 1997; McNairy, 1996). In a study conducted on a primarily White university campus, Bennett and Okinaka (1990) found that Hispanic students who felt least satisfied and most alienated were more likely to dropout, whereas those who felt most satisfied and adjusted, (less alienated) persisted. These findings seem to substantiate parts of Tinto’s model (1993) in that social integration, along with perceptions of being included and welcomed, were significant factors in persistence. In a study that examined why Hispanic students left higher education before earning a degree, Solberg (1993) found three primary factors: academic stress of being underprepared, social stress of being away from family or friends, and financial stress from inadequate resources. In addition to the literature adapted from majority student research that has been applied to minority student retention, there is a body of minority retention literature that must be explored. The most noteworthy factors in the literature that

are relevant to this study are the influence of finances and social support upon Hispanic/Latinas retention and graduation from college in general and BSN programs in particular.

### *Finances*

Researchers have consistently found economic factors to be paramount for Latina(o) college students (Muñoz, 1986; Vasquez, 1997). Related to low economic status, Hispanic/Latina college students are less likely than their Anglo peers to receive family financial support: thus financial concerns and finances may be paramount in their ability to participate and persist in college (Nora et al., 1987; Olivas, 1986a; Stampen & Cabrera, 1988). Their concerns frequently include debt incurred by loans, lack of money for bills and personal expenses, hours spent on outside employment, and the uncertainty of receiving financial aid (Chacón et al., 1986).

It is not unusual for students from low socioeconomic status to work during their college experience to offset the cost of their education as well as to contribute to the family income (Rendón et al., 1996). In an ambitious study of 679 Latinos in higher education across 5 campuses in California, Chacón (1982) found a significant negative effect on the educational progress of students who

worked more than 20 hours a week. However, the escalating cost of a college degree including tuition, books, and housing, continues to create a serious dilemma in which some students must choose between meeting financial obligations and achieving their educational goals. Mow and Nettles (1993) argue that this pull between finances and grades causes “high anxiety” for Hispanic students with limited financial resources. With a sample of 582 college students Muñoz (1986) found a significant difference between Hispanic and Anglo undergraduate students’ experience of stress related to finances. Statements such as, “not having money for bills, the uncertainty of receiving financial aid”, and “finding employment while going to schools that would not jeopardize academic [success]” (p. 139) were common themes.

In addition to their income from employment, Hispanic/Latino students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds are likely to require financial assistance in the form of scholarships, grants and loans. Accessing information about available financial aid and the application process can be a daunting task contributing to overall financial strain and departure from college prior to earning a degree, especially for the Hispanic student (Solberg, 1993).

In a national survey of 32 major research institutions with BSN programs, Bessent (1997) reported the primary retention issue for minority student nurses was inadequate finances thus creating the need to work full or part-time while

going to school. Cruz-Avalos (1997) substantiated these findings describing inadequate finances as a primary factor that excludes Hispanics from nursing programs.

Once admitted to the college or university and adequate funds are obtained, Hispanic/Latinas must engage in social systems within the institution that will lead to social integration. Some of these social systems may be culturally incongruent with Hispanic values, customs, and language. The next section describes the influence of various mechanisms of social support upon Latinas' retention in college and nursing programs including: (a) support programs and groups, (b) peer support, (c) mentoring, engagement with minority faculty, and (d) engagement with majority faculty.

### *Social Support*

The fact that social support is influential in social integration and ultimately retention of college students is well documented (Brown, 1987; Tinto, 1993). However much of this data was collected on majority students. Literature on the role of social support with Hispanic/Latina students in higher education is more sparse. Marshall (1989) defined support as, "a person's perception of whether and to what extent an interaction or relationship is helpful" (p. 176).



*support programs and groups.*

Support programs or groups are usually formalized structures within the institution designed to facilitate social and/or academic integration and frequently include the direction or supervision of faculty or staff members (Astin, 1993; Gloria, 1999). Research has demonstrated the success of programs or groups specifically designed to provide socialization and support of Latinas on majority campus (Capello, 1994; Gloria, 1999). Participation in a culturally congruent support group assists the participants to negotiate the transition to college, as well as to develop strategies dealing with perceptions of culturally disconnecting experiences such as (a) interactions with authority figures, (b) competitive skills required on academic campuses, (c) distance from family and friends, and (d) experiences of marginalization and racism (Brown, 1987; Capello, 1994; Marshall, 1989; Maville & Huerta, 1997).

In a study conducted from 1987 to 1991 with 485 respondents, Treviño (1996) found that students who participated in Chicano student groups tended to be “aware of and acknowledge the existence of discrimination, are more prone to be activists, and to claim to be members of the group of people called Mexican American or Chicano” (p. 91). In a qualitative study with minority nursing students Kosowski, Grams, Taylor, and Wilson (2001) found students engaged in

ongoing support programs also reported feeling cared for and were able to bond with others in a way that positively influenced persistence. However, some students may shy away from participation in organized group support and find social connections through less formal interactions with peers.

*peer support.*

Peer support can take many forms including social connections in ongoing support groups or through brief informal and spontaneous interactions. The literature is clear that, however peer support is accomplished, finding and connecting with one's ethnic/cultural peers is crucial for minorities in persistence at a predominantly White institutions (Brown, 1987; Jones, 1992; Marshall, 1989; Padilla, Treviño, Gonzalez, & Treviño, 1997; Torres & Castillo, 2001; Valadez, 1996). The initiative to seek out culturally congruent support is described by Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) as *help-seeking behaviors* that lead to resilience for ethnic minority students in the dominant environment. "The greater the ecological risks associated with racial and class segregation, the greater the need for a supportive web of socialization agents across institutional sites that can foster the development of resilient attributes and effective coping strategies" (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 237).

Consistent with his heuristic model Padilla and his associates (1994; 1997) found several factors relevant to minority students connecting to peers, including the initial acknowledgment of the importance of minority support and then taking action to find and connect with similar ethnic/racial peers on the campus. Furthermore Padilla and his associates (1997) found it is important for minority students to be “culturally grounded in their own ethnicity and use this understanding to cope with the lack of a minority presence on campus” (p. 131). Thus this data differs significantly from Tinto’s model in that to be successful on a majority campus, minority students must retain and nurture their cultural identity and reproduce a supportive community on the campus; rather than being separated from it and integrated into the predominately White culture (Espinoza & Garza, 1985; Padilla et al., 1997; Treviño, 1996).

*mentoring.*

Minority student mentoring from both peers and faculty is cited in the literature as a strategy that is extremely helpful in retaining minority students (Bessent, 1997; Blackwell, 1996; Valadez, 1996). Blackwell (1996) defines mentoring as, “using one’s own experiences and expertise to help guide the development of others” (p. 322). In the process of mentoring, the mentor

demonstrates and communicates success-orientated strategies, skills, and knowledge, for the protégé (Valdez, 1994).

An interesting notion of mentoring and social support is found in the work of Stanton-Salazar, Vésquez and Mehan (1996) in which they borrow Vygotsky's notion of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (1986) to describe a social scaffolding process in which a more capable person (peer or faculty) supports the less skilled person in learning new behaviors or gaining knowledge. This learning system is based on the premise of collaboration and cooperation rather than individualism and competition. Additionally Stanton-Salazar and his colleagues relate the concepts of help-seeking behaviors, social networking and social scaffolding to resilience (Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000). Further research is indicated to determine the relationship between resilience and retention of Hispanic/Latinas in higher education.

Romero (1996) conducted a study to investigate the influence of mentoring with 147 Hispanic/Latino undergraduates and found the respondents ranked their most influential mentors were family members, followed by peers, and then faculty. The most important functions that faculty mentors served were: support, counseling, motivation/desire, career assistance, role modeling, and friendship. Possible explanations for this include the fact that most faculty on college campuses are White, creating a cultural disconnect, and seeking help from

one's peer may be less intimidating for the Latina than approaching an older faculty member.

There is no literature to date regarding the effect of mentoring relationships with Hispanic nursing students. Attempting to generalize data across racial/ethnic groups creates data that lacks validity (Levin & Levin, 1991). However if Hispanic/Latina(o) students respond as other minorities, it is important that there be institutional infrastructures that encourage and sustain student experiences of support from varied sources throughout the educational experience.

Faculty support is frequently carried out within the mentoring relationship and is another theme cited in the literature that demonstrates a positive effect on retention (Campbell & Davis, 1996; Dowell, 1996; Kosowski et al., 2001; Romero, 1996). Additional research is needed to distinguish what behaviors are most supportive and if there is a difference in support perceived by students from minority or majority faculty members.

*engagement with minority faculty.*

In a critical essay regarding the persistent lack of Hispanic faculty on U.S. college and university campuses, Olivas (1993) describes racism as the cause of the underrepresentation of Hispanic students in higher education and increasing

Hispanic faculty as part of the solution. “I believe that this need (increasing Hispanic faculty) is the single most important key to any hope for increasing Latino access” (Olivas, 1993, p. 376). As of 1995 the Latino/Latina faculty to student ratio in the U.S. was 1 to 76 (Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, 1995). A lack of successful academic faculty role models has been reported as a significant barrier to educational achievement of Hispanic/Latina(o) college students (Capello, 1994). Conversely, mentoring and modeling from within ones’ culture has been demonstrated to be a powerful asset in facilitating academic achievement (Padilla et al., 1997). The paucity of Hispanic/Latino nursing faculty accentuates the possible problematic identity development for Latinas in BSN programs (Campbell & Davis, 1996; Capello, 1994; Dowell, 1996; Kosowski et al., 2001).

Figure 3C (Appendix C) demonstrates the remarkable lack of growth (0.9% in 1986 and 1.2% in 2002) in the numbers of Hispanic/Latino faculty in U. S. schools of nursing. Castillo (1996) describes a model for recruiting, hiring and retaining minority faculty. This model includes sensitizing the majority faculty to the issues of a multicultural workforce. Nursing is in dire need of Hispanic researchers and faculty to advance the nursing science, and to add an important voice to the cultural discourse within the profession.

*engagement with majority faculty.*

Based on Astin's (1985) research conducted over 20 years and based on 5 million students from more than 1,200 institutions, the single most important factor in determining minority student persistence is the quality of the interaction with the faculty (both minority and majority). This interaction with faculty goes beyond the classroom and includes discussion groups, interaction in office hours and participation in academic retention programs. Feeling *valued* and *respected* are crucial aspects of the majority faculty-minority student relationship that positively effect persistence. (Campbell & Davis, 1996; Capello, 1994; Hurtado, 1994). Summarizing findings of a project to assist minority nursing students in their transition from an ADN program, Griffiths and Tagliareni (1999) argue, "supporting students as they balance work, family, finances and academics is no longer a peripheral role for college faculty; it is now a central faculty responsibility" (p. 295). Majority faculty are most effective in these roles when supported by their administration and there is ongoing participation in education as to cultural influences on teaching and learning on the university campus (Rew, 1996; Ross, 1990). The paucity of minority nursing faculty underscores the need for all faculty, regardless of race or ethnicity to serve as mentors for Latina students.

*attrition.*

Student retention, or conversely prevention of attrition, is a significant issue to all students in higher education. The attrition of students constitutes a loss of money and time for the student, a loss for the institution, and ultimately a loss for society. Walker and Schultz (2001) report that nearly 80% of the Hispanics who enter college leave without a degree. The attrition of a minority BSN student is particularly significant due to the workforce shortage of nurses and the homogeneity of the profession.

Attrition rates for minority nursing students are disproportionately higher than majority rates (Safian-Rush & Belock, 1988). Minority attrition rates reportedly fluctuate between 15% and 85% with higher attrition rates being reflective of retention programs that exclusively focus on academic assistance (O'Neil, 1992). The exclusive reliance of academic support services that include tutorial and remedial services, supports a cultural deficit model (Valencia, 1997a) and places the sole responsibility for retention upon the student, while ignoring a more comprehensive retention program that includes institutional policies, faculty, administrators, curriculum, and the campus environment (McNairy, 1996).



Memmer and Worth (1991) surveyed 21 BSN programs in California with exceptional retention rates between 93% to 100% of English as second language (ESL) students. They found commonalities in institutional infrastructures and strategic policies that were useful in retaining ESL students such as: (a) completion of an assessment test in English proficiency prior to admission, (b) offering remedial courses in English, math, and writing, (c) assistance in completing the application process, (d) extensive orientation, (e) study skills workshops, (f) involvement of students' families at an "Open House", and (g) financial aid coordinated by the nursing department.

The summary, social support for ethnic and racial minority students on a predominately White campus is vital to their social integration, retention, and ultimately graduation. To be useful the social support must be multidimensional, multicultural, and woven into the fabric of the institutional programs and policies. Furthermore the social support must come from peers, faculty, and staff members within the institution. In addition to strategies that facilitate social integration, the exploration of academic issues is another aspect of the literature that is germane to this investigation.

## Academic Issues

The first academic hurdle that Hispanic/Latina college students encounter actually occurs prior to beginning their college career: that is the application and acceptance policies of the college or university. Most major colleges and universities continue to use achievement test scores such as the American College Testing Program (ACT), and/or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), as well as high school graduation standings as a substantial part of the admission process. The validity of SAT test scores with Hispanics' students has undergone extensive analysis. There remains some question as to its ability to predict the academic success of Hispanic college students (Durán, 1983).

The usefulness of predominately academic achievement criteria for college entrance has long been questioned as to validity and reliability of indicators for minority students (Boyle, 1986; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Because of inferior K-12 educational experiences, many Hispanic/Latinas find they are unprepared to be successful on these standardized tests (Chacón et al., 1986; Rodriguez et al., 2000). In a study that focused on the usefulness of standardized entry test in predicting the academic success of BSN minority students, Boyle (1986) found the strongest predictor of success was prior academic success both in high school and college.

Inadequate academic preparation is cited in the literature as a cause for minority student attrition (Crosson, 1988; McNairy, 1996). Being underprepared academically and experiencing inadequate support was one of the primary reasons Solberg (1993) found for Hispanic student attrition. Interestingly, research has demonstrated that the perception of being inadequately prepared to be academically successful can actually undermine the confidence and the performance of the otherwise capable Hispanic/Latina students as they enter four-year institutions (Capello, 1994; Chacón, Cohen, & Strover, 1986; Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres, & Talbot, 2000).

There is scant research regarding culturally effective teaching/learning strategies for minorities in higher education and a near absence regarding Hispanic/Latina educational strategies. However, there seems to be evidence that involving students in diverse teaching-learning strategies may positively influence their academic success and ultimately their rate of retention. Increased involvement in classroom activity, including learning in groups, small discussions and practical (hands-on learning), has been found to be useful to students of color (Garcia, 1992; Park, 1997). Furthermore, Dunn and Dunn (1993) found Mexican-American students have a strong preference for peer-oriented learning and learning in groups rather than learning alone.

## Cultural Issues

In the 1980s Latinas were labeled the “nonexistent minority” (Escobedo, 1980) and the “invisible minority” (Casas & Ponterotto, 1984) on U. S. college campuses. Although still underrepresented, Latinas are increasingly gaining access to college, growing from 2.6% of the population at research universities<sup>1</sup> in 1976-7 to 6.2% in 1995-96 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Although Latinas earn better grades than their male counterparts in college (Vasquez, 1997), their persistence to graduation lags behind their male counterparts (Cardoza, 1991).

Latinas attending college may experience stress resulting from family obligations, educational aspirations that conflict with parental expectations, and distance of the college from home (Rodriguez et al., 2000). Some of the distinct characteristics of the Hispanic/Latino culture(s) are ongoing connections and responsibilities toward the family and community. The family network of Hispanic/Latinas frequently extends beyond the nuclear family to include the young, the elderly, and the community as a whole (García, Coll, Erkut, Alarcón, & Tropp, 2000; Montero-Siburth, 2001).

The personal relationships and ongoing connection to family embedded in the Hispanic/Latino culture carries with it obligations and responsibilities that

continue even when Latinas enrolled in higher education. Negotiating between family and school may create behaviors that can be easily misunderstood by faculty or administrators who may interpret the Latinas' ongoing response to the family as a lack of commitment to her education or her personal individuation (Vásquez, 1997). Research has shown that Latinas experience significantly more stress while enrolled in college than Hispanic men, Anglo women and Anglo men; furthermore family responsibilities and gender-role stereotyping are two sources of this stress (Chacón et al., 1986; Muñoz, 1986).

Although Hispanic/Latinas are a heterogeneous group differing in color, comfort with the dominant culture, socioeconomic status, and proficiency in English, the literature reports some common cultural traits within the group that are at variance with White college students. Some of these cultural variations include ways of dealing with authority figures, unwillingness to express disagreement or engage in debate, and preference for cooperation rather than competition (Meléndez & Petrovich, 1989). In the Hispanic culture leadership is viewed as a competitive male attribute, thus the role of the well-educated, independent woman has not been readily accepted in the traditional Hispanic/Latino culture (Torres & Castillo, 2001).

A distinguishing characteristic of minority socialization in the dominant

culture, is the simultaneous social participation in incongruently constructed worlds. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) emphasize that this incongruence “translates into partial integration in a number of social worlds divided by class, ethnic and gender-based borders that have historically evolved in ways that make these worlds inherently conflictive, incompatible and contradictory” (p. 42). A brief review of some of the potential cultural pitfalls Hispanic/Latinas may encounter on the college campus and in BSN programs is worth consideration in that cultural incongruence may be an important factor in retention and graduation of Latinas from BSN programs.

Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres and Talbot (2000) posit that one of the reasons the educational needs of the Hispanic/Latinos have been poorly served is due to stereotypic notions that they are undisciplined and irrational. From this perspective the dominant culture describes, explains, and at times predicts failure of minority students due to these ascribed deficiencies, and then blames the victim for the hegemonic stereotypes produced by the dominant culture failure (Gutierrez, Baquedano-Lopez, & Alvarez, 2000; Valencia, 1997a). Latinas have been further stigmatized as docile, passive, and primarily interested in mothering activities. Numerous scholars have argued the inherent racial bias in these genderized, culturally-biased stereotypes (Castiglia, 2001; Castillo, 1996; García, Jorgensen, & Ormsby, 1999; Trueba, 1999). Low expectations and discriminatory

actions on the part of educators can create an additional barrier for Latinas and frequently serve to escalate insecurity regarding academic ability.

Given the between and within group differences within the Hispanic/Latina cultures, not all Latinas hold to the same values or share them to the same degree. Traditional values emphasize family and community across the constructs of age, gender roles, respect, spirituality, and time orientation (Mendoza & Martinez, 1981). Acculturation is a “bi-directional process...and reflects changes in the individual’s behavior and thinking as a result of contact with the host culture and retention of one’s native values, beliefs, customs, and traditions” (Gloria, 1999, p. 248). Therefore the retention of traditional values and the degree of acculturation will obviously vary from person to person. Gloria (1999) describes cultural values common to Hispanic/Latinos that are not intended to perpetuate stereotypes, but rather to contextualize some of the cultural disparities Latinas face on the college campus.

- *Personalismo* – a communication style that emphasizes personal interactions and emphasizes the importance of interpersonal behaviors as compared to task completion.
- *Respecto* (respect toward others) is manifested by valuing the dignity of self and others and deference to perceived authority figures.

- *Simpatía* – is a pattern of social interaction that emphasizes ease and the promotion of harmony in interpersonal relationships. *Simpatía* is a quality “where an individual is perceived as likeable, attractive, fun to be with and easy going” (Triandis, Marín, Lisansky, & Betancourt, 1984, p. 1363).
- *Confianza* – “expresses pure friendship, based on mutual understanding and appreciation, without obligations of kinship” (Delgado, 1983, p. 89).
- *Familismo*- is essential in Hispanic cultures; it includes “providing material and emotional support for family, relying on family members for help and support...and placing family needs higher than individual needs” (Gloria, 1999, p. 250).

It is essential that institutional programs and policies allow for the expression of a great variety of cultural diversity. It is incumbent on faculty and staff who work with Latinas to provide academic and social support networks that do not marginalize students with these cultural expressions.



## Institutional Marginalization

Rodriguez, Guido-DiBrito, Torres and Talbot (2000) report Latinas frequently experience a devaluation of culture both in the classroom and in social settings that tend to marginalize their integration into the larger college community. Some of the most poignant experiences center around language and class discrimination. In their longitudinal study of 487 Latino students, Hurtado, Carter, and Spuler (1996) found experiences of discrimination and marginalization have a significant negative impact on the ability of Latinos to connect with the college community. Smedley, Myers and Harrell (1993) found interracial conflicts and experiences of perceived discrimination were not as “debilitating minority status stressors as those that undermined student’ academic confidence and ability to bond with the university” (p. 448). In a study of exploring the educational mobility of nursing students, Villarruel, Canales, and Torres (2001) report substantial and recurrent themes of discrimination that were “horrific, painful and frequent” and thus a barrier to the educational mobility of Hispanic/Latina(o) nursing students (p. 248). Particularly painful were the experiences of perceived discrimination on the part of nursing faculty.

Barbee (1993) argues that while cultural and institutional racism as a taboo is unaddressed in the nursing literature, it is endemic in the nursing

profession, and results in the marginalization of minority nurses. Jackson (1993) further posits that the hegemonic permeation of white middle-class and female ideological perspectives has serious implications for biasing nursing education and research. Nieto (1996) describes institutional racism as a silent process that is so interwoven into the fabric of an institution that it is difficult to see because it is an accepted part of the culture. Such racism may intentionally or unintentionally create or perpetuate policies that restrict opportunities for a particular group (Essed, 1991). Because discrimination and racism are incongruent with the image nurses have of themselves (Jackson, 1993), it is difficult, but necessary that the nursing profession engage in critical reflexive inquiry regarding its recruitment, pedagogy and retention strategies for Hispanic/Latina(o) students.

### High Achieving Latinas

Much of the foregoing review is representative of the large body of literature that often fails to address within group variance of the Hispanic culture, or worse constructs “minority” group from a variety of cultures and/or races. Volumes have been written that record the research findings regarding the cultural, educational and economic “deficits” of the Hispanic population as reasons for the persistent underachievement and underrepresentation in higher

education. Most of the literature has focused on what is wrong with the Hispanic culture, in the “deficit” model (Valencia, 1997b). There is much less literature available that explains why some Latinas, who have been labeled as experiencing “triple oppression”, that is economic, gender and ethnic/racial, (Chacón et al., 1986; Muñoz, 1986) have succeed in negotiating their way through a baccalaureate degree. Bempetchat (1998) stated, “we know far more about the factors that foster underachievement and school failure than those that contribute to academic success in poor and minority children (p. 4). Persons who live on the margins of society are often regarded as being “at-risk” for failure of some sort, however Hall, Stevens and Meleis (1994) argue these persons often exhibit an uncommon resilience and strength.

### *Bicultural Orientation*

Biculturalism is a recurrent theme that has emerged in the literature as an attribute that contributes to the success of Hispanic/Latinos. Biculturalism allows Latinas to retain their Latino values while also utilizing Anglo values as needed. Trueba (1999) argues this adaptability or cultural flexibility allows the bicultural Latino to “pass for members of many groups, reproduce interactional styles, and function comfortably across social strata of different ethnic groups” (p. xl ).

Recent research has demonstrated that immigrant students who retain their language, culture, and networks are better able to adapt in the U. S. public schools because they are bicultural. Furthermore the maintenance of bicultural identity seems to have a positive influence on the academic success of Latina/os. In a study of 244 undergraduate Latinas attending a four-year public university, Gomez and Fassinger (1994) found that the Latinas who retained bi-cultural identities tended to have greater diversity in their achieving styles. Turner, Laria, Shapiro and del Carmen Perez, (1993) found a number of variables that were influential in Latina(o) academic achievement including (a) early exposure to school experiences, (b) psychological factors such as self-esteem and aspirations, (c) familial support, and (d) positive high school experience and enrichment programs.

Throughout the last two decades critical qualitative research has gained increased acceptance in educational research and has provided a methodology to explore the complexities of cultural research. An example is Gándara's work (1995; 1996) that focused on understanding the path of high achieving Hispanic women who "defy expectations, and transcend the powerful race, class, and gender scripts that have been written for them" (p. 169). Arellano and Padilla's study (1996) challenges the "at-risk" label describing the influence of family

support, personal resilience, and the utilization of school resources to overcome institutional barriers found in higher education.

Gándara studied the factors that contributed to the educational success Latinas who earned J.D., M.D., or Ph.D. degrees. They were divided into two cohorts: those who graduated during the 1970s to early 1980s and those who completed their degree in the late 1980s to early 1990s. The following themes emerged:

- Nearly all had been very good students prior to college and enrolled in college preparatory classes where they were exposed to mostly Anglo students. They were comfortable and self-confident in their bicultural worlds. However 20% in each group had to “fight” their way off the vocational track and into the college preparatory track (p. 179). In this college-preparatory track, they were encouraged and guided into the college application process.
- They received support from their families, primarily their mothers, to continue their education and did not marry or have children during their education.
- Most of the group decided before high school that they would go to college.

- Nearly all of them reported that financial assistance was mandatory for them to continue their education.
- Nearly all the women participated in student groups that were geared toward supporting Latina undergraduate and graduate students.

In a study of 30 academically successful undergraduate Latino students, Arellano and Padilla (1996) focused on factors that precipitated and sustained their academic success, they found:

- Strong parental support
- A firm belief in their ability to succeed. A majority of the respondents attributed their self-confidence to participation in Gifted and Talented Programs
- Coping skills that act as protective resources that allowed students ability negative experiences into goal directed actions for success
- “A stubborn” persistence and drive to succeed (p. 493)
- High degree of socialization with other Hispanic/Latino students
- Most could identify mentors

Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that when minority students receive the same help and educational privilege that is often reserved for the majority group, they also “flourish despite what might appear as disadvantages and deficits in their background” (p. 499). They found the positive reinforcement and special

attention inherent in the Gifted and Talented programs promoted a high level of self-efficacy, self-confidence and academic achievement in higher education.

There have been no studies of high achieving Latinas in nursing, nor the institutional factors that specifically address their success in BSN programs.

There is a need for more Hispanic/Latina nurses with baccalaureate degrees, who are prepared to assume leadership roles within the profession of nursing. However prior to increasing the Hispanic/Latina student population, research is needed to explore the factors within BSN programs that promote the academic persistence of Latinas.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

### Introduction

The focus of this study with Hispanic/Latina nursing students was the exploration of their experiences and perceptions regarding the institutional factors that effected their retention and completion of a baccalaureate nursing program. The fundamental research question was: What institutional factors facilitate or serve as barriers to the persistence and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas from a baccalaureate program of nursing? The secondary questions are: (a) What were the significant factors that prepared the participants for baccalaureate education (b) what programs, groups, affiliations have been influential or detrimental to them as student nurses (c) what interpersonal factors among other students, faculty, and professionals in clinical settings have been influential or detrimental (d) what school polices and practices have been influential or detrimental and (e) what factors outside of school had a significant impact on the schooling experience?

Due to the complex social dimensions of the research questions, this study utilized a qualitative method of investigation. Creswell (1998) suggests that qualitative methodology is an appropriate research design when variables are not



easily identified and there is an absence of theories to explain the behavior or perspective of the participant. Furthermore because of the absence of knowledge about the institutional factors that effect Hispanic/Latina retention and completion of a BSN program, it was important to obtain the intricate details of the participants' experience and to explicate how they make meaning or understand their experiences in a BSN program (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

One of the strengths of a qualitative or naturalistic study is its openness to generating new knowledge without having a predetermined hypothesis or theory; rather, understanding or meaning emerges from the data as it is co-constructed with the participant and the researcher (Patton, 2002). However, because this study was undertaken with a feminist perspective and the participants and the researcher in this study were all women, every attempt was made to: (a) establish connection and equality, (b) value "women's ways of knowing", including reason, emotion and intuition, and (c) generate knowledge for the sake of change to contribute to women's empowerment (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Mertens, 1998; Taylor, Gilligan, & Sullivan, 1995).

An instrumental or interpretive case study was selected to exert boundaries and structure to the inquiry while allowing exploration of rich descriptive data. The descriptive data of this research came from multiple sources including

individual interviews, written questionnaires, and a focus group. In general this study used the structure suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) for case studies: (a) explication of the problem, (b) description of the context, (c) exploration of the issues, and (d) descriptions of the “lessons learned” or “working hypothesis”.

### Site Selection

The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing was chosen as the research site. This school has a large, well-established BSN program. During the years 1999-2002, when the participants were students in the BSN program, the average full-time undergraduate enrollment, including students in the pre-professional and professional sequences was approximately 450 (The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing, 1999-2002). Students in the pre-professional sequence were generally freshman or sophomores, who declared nursing as their major, but had not yet been admitted to the upper division, professional sequence.

Additionally this school has a diverse student population, including a substantial Hispanic/Latina student enrollment of approximately 15% of the total full-time students (The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing, 1999-2002). It is noteworthy that this number is substantially higher than the national average of 5.2% Hispanics in BSN programs (American Association of Colleges

of Nursing, 2002). During the time that the participants were students in this BSN program, the pre-professional student population remained steady at around 17%; while the professional sequence population of Hispanics hovered near 15% (The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing, 1999-2002). Table D1 in Appendix D contains the complete ethnic distribution of the full-time BSN students during this time frame.

Due to the size of the university and the nursing program there are multiple student support services and programs available to racial/ethnic minority students, as well as programs directed specifically toward the retention of minority students. A multifaceted support program for students, *Pathways*, was implemented in the research site in the early 1990s. The goal of this program was to, “affirm diversity of backgrounds, learning styles and career aspirations for students” (Rew, 1996, p.310) by emphasizing the usefulness of programs that enhance empowerment and maximize the potentials of both faculty and students in the teaching/learning process. The Pathways program resulted in formalized peer mentoring and tutoring for students, classes to enhance study and test-taking skills, and funded the establishment of a Learning Center with a computer laboratory.

A chapter of the National Association of Hispanics Nursing Students was begun at the selected site in 2000 that provided opportunities for support and

leadership among Hispanic students. Thus the institutional programs and presence of Hispanic/Latina students, made this site ideal for the exploration of the influence of institutional factors upon the success of Hispanic/Latina BSN students.

The remainder of this chapter describes the process and criteria for selecting the participants, methods of data collection during each phase of the study and the methods used for the analysis of the data. The chapter concludes with methods used to insure trustworthiness or creditability of the data and relevant ethical considerations.

## Data Collection

### *Selection of Study Participants*

Nine participants, six graduates and three second-semester senior students, volunteered to take part in this study. Because the data collection occurred over a time span of six months, some of the participants that are classified as *graduates* began the study as second-semester seniors: graduated, and continued in the study as graduates. The criteria for participation in the study included the participant: (a) be of Hispanic/Latino origin, (b) female, and (c) had

completed at least one semester of her senior year, or be a graduate within the last five years of the BSN program at the research site. Recruitment of students enrolled in the school at the time of the study occurred by their response to an email announcement sent on a School of Nursing listserv (the script of this email is provided in Appendix E). Graduates of the program, who did not receive the listserv announcement, were recruited through their informal social network and they initiated the contact with the researcher requesting to participate in the study. Though it was possible participants knew the researcher previously in the role of a faculty member, the students were not approached directly by the researcher to participate in the study. This strategy of indirect recruitment was a deliberate attempt to limit any undue persuasiveness or sense of obligation that could transpire in the recruitment phase of the study.

### *Methods of Data Collection*

The data in this study was obtained in two phases: the initial phase consisted of completion of a demographic information sheet (Appendix F) and an individual audiotaped interview; while the concluding phase included a follow-up written questionnaire (Appendix G) and participation in a focus group. These methods provided a wealth of data, from different perspectives that when

analyzed converged into central themes. Thus as the study progressed data were triangulated, that is validated from multiple sources and perspectives (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *Demographic Information and Individual Interviews*

Prior to beginning any data collection, participants completed a consent form (Appendix H) and were given an opportunity to select a pseudonym that would be used in all documentation. Subsequently a demographic information sheet was completed and the participants engaged in a 60-90 minute individual audiotaped interview. Although given the choice to be interviewed at any location, all of the participants chose the researcher's office on campus. These interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, dialogic manner with basic questions (see Appendix I: Individual Interview Questions) that were designed to encourage the description of the participant's experiences and perceptions regarding significant influences upon their retention and completion of the BSN program. Thus the sharing of control and structure of the interview was consistent with the feminist research approach that encourages collaboration and empowerment through the active contribution and interpretation of the data by participants (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000; Olesen, 2000).

After transcribing each individual interview, it was frequently necessary to conduct a short follow-up interview to amplify or clarify certain statements or questions. Also each participant was given a copy of her transcription to check for accuracy and allow her to alter or add any comments. This form of member-checking served to enhance the trustworthiness of the data (Lincoln, 1995; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002) and was eagerly received by the participants, with frequent comments such as, “I cannot believe you actually wrote and thought about all the things I said”.

Because this study was intended to generate a deductive working hypothesis about the relationship and strength of the influence of the programs, policies, curriculum, and social relationships in the institution, it was necessary to deepen the exploration of the emergent themes from the individual interviews. Thus the data from the individual interviews informed and shaped the topics that were explored in the concluding phase of the study that included a written questionnaire and focus group.

#### *Written Questionnaire and Focus Group*

A written questionnaire (Appendix G) exploring some of the emergent themes from the individual interviews was circulated to the participants prior to

attending the focus group. Because in some cases there was a three-month gap between the time of the individual interview and the focus group, discussion of this questionnaire served as a warm-up for the focus group.

A focus group was selected as a culminating source of data collection because it is a particularly useful method to foster collaboration and empowerment when working with women of color (Madriz, 2000), and can diminish the power differential between the participant and the researcher (Glesne, 1999; Madriz, 2000). Furthermore in the event a participant may have found the individual interview intimidating or difficult, it was intended that the addition of a focus group would stimulate interaction and decrease the possible intimidation factor. “By creating multiple lines of communication, the group interview offers the participants... a safe environment where they can share ideas, beliefs and attitudes in the company of people from the same ethnic, and gender backgrounds” (Madriz, 2000, p. 835).

The two-hour audiotaped focus group was held off-campus in an apartment clubhouse. This neutral, but informal setting, allowed for spontaneous discussion central to a focus group. The dynamic setting of the focus group allowed for epistemological construction that was not possible in individual interviews or from paper and pencil tools. Activity in the focus group included: individual and group ranking of themes from the individual interviews, discussion



of the ranking of themes, and culminated in a group discussion regarding the relative strength of each theme as a factor in retention and graduation from the BSN program. Following the audiotaped focus group, the session was transcribed and reviewed for participant comments about the rationale for their rankings and how they assessed the strength and relationship of the themes.

### Methods of Data Analysis

Analysis of the data included an inductive descriptive process in which a classification of categories evolved directly from the data and culminated in a deductive, working hypothesis about the relationship and strength of the factors that were influential in the retention and graduation from the BSN program. Theorizing from qualitative data involves both inductive and deductive processes: “At the heart of theorizing lies the interplay of making inductions (deriving concepts, their properties, and dimensions from data) and deductions (hypothesizing about the relationships between concepts” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.22). Chapter 4: *Report of the Findings* describes the initial, inductive stages of data analysis, including the identification of the units of data, the development of a classification of categories of data and themes, as well as the exploration of the relationship and strength of the themes. The deductive

theorizing regarding these findings follows in Chapter 5: *Interpretation of the Findings*. The following section describes the process of identifying units, establishing categories and recognizing the emergent themes from the individual interviews.

### *Methods of Analyzing Individual Interviews*

#### *Identification of Units*

The massive amount of information generated from the individual audiotaped interviews necessitated the creation of a system to sort and label primary patterns of data. Initially each individual interview was transcribed by the interviewer and coded twice. The coding was a process of noting small, discrete pieces of information that Lincoln and Guba (1985) have termed a *unit*. The first level of coding was done by making notations of potential units in the margin of the master transcript. Each interview was then coded a second time by cutting the section of information identified as a unit from the transcript and placing it on an index card.

In discussing the *unitizing* of qualitative data, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a unit has two defining features: it must be both “heuristic and discrete” (p.344). Merriam (2001) further characterizes the heuristic quality of a unit as not

only adding to the understanding of the data, but also it “stimulates the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information” (pp. 179-180). Using the aforementioned system of coding, every line in every interview was analyzed and resulted in the identification of 1,342 units.

### *Identification of Categories*

As the units were identified and accumulated in this study, a classification of categories that related to the research question was established with the use of the *constant comparative method* first described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This method compares and contrasts units of raw data with each other. Strauss and Corbin (1998) identified this process as “open coding” (p. 223) to emphasize the significance of the fluidity in the initial construction of analytical categories determining their properties and dimensions.

The units were grouped together in what became categories by noting recurring patterns, repetitious words or phrases. Thus categories emerged by the constant comparative method and were actual abstractions from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Table 1 depicts the 5 major categories and subcategories into which the individual interviews were sorted with the ultimate goal of beginning to find similarities and differences in the participants’ experience.

*Table 1. Coding Categories and Subcategories*

I. Significant factors that prepared the participant for the BSN program	II. Influence of programs, courses, organizations on retention and graduation from BSN program	III. Influence of interpersonal factors on retention and graduation from BSN program	IV. Influence of school policies and practices on retention and graduation from BSN program	V. Influence of factors outside of school upon retention and graduation from BSN program
<p>A. Academic preparation</p> <p>B. Selection of university</p> <p>C. Selection of major</p> <p>D. Perception of nursing as career</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. desirability</li> <li>2. percentage of Hispanic RNs</li> </ol> <p>E. BSN vs. ADN</p> <p>F. Perceptions of integration</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. main campus</li> <li>2. School of Nursing</li> </ol>	<p>A. Programs</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. mentor</li> <li>2. tutor</li> <li>3. Learning Center offerings</li> <li>4. other</li> </ol> <p>B. Courses</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. helpful</li> <li>2. not helpful</li> </ol> <p>C. Organizations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. nursing</li> <li>2. other</li> </ol>	<p>A. Students</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. study groups</li> <li>2. support groups</li> <li>3. Hispanic students</li> <li>4. other peers (not fitting in #1-3)</li> </ol> <p>B. Faculty</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hispanic</li> <li>2. non-Hispanic</li> </ol> <p>C. Staff</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. advisors</li> <li>2. others</li> </ol> <p>D. Perceptions of marginalization</p>	<p>a. Size of campus</p> <p>b. Class schedules</p> <p>c. Class size</p> <p>d. Financial support/concerns</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. type of assistance</li> <li>2. “disadvantaged scholarship”</li> <li>3. ongoing concerns</li> </ol> <p>e. Living arrangements</p> <p>f. Other</p>	<p>a. Distance from home</p> <p>b. Family/other support</p> <p>c. Employment during schooling</p> <p>d. Other</p>

### *Identification of Themes*

The analysis of the categories and subcategories resulted in the identification of the following 10 themes:

- (1) Relationships with the faculty and the staff in the School of Nursing
- (2) Relationships with Hispanic peers
- (3) Relationships with non-Hispanic peers
- (4) Relationships with AHNS
- (5) Relationships with UTNSA
- (6) Relationships with family
- (7) Feeling connected, cared for, respected in the university and the  
School of Nursing
- (8) Maintaining a job while in school
- (9) Receiving financial assistance in the form of scholarships, grants, loans
- (10) Feeling as though you had enough financial resources to fit in

These themes were divided into two groups for discussion in the focus group (Table 2) where the participants ranked them as to the importance to their retention and graduation.

*Table 2. Discussion Categories and Themes Used in the Focus Group*

Two General Topic Areas of Discussion	Themes from Individual Interviews and Written Questionnaire
<p>1. INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS THAT INFLUENCED COMPLETION OF THE BSN PROGRAM</p> <p>What was the impact of the interpersonal relationships embedded in the programs, policies and curriculum that influenced the participants' social and academic integration, persistence, and graduation?</p> <p>What was the impact of informal interpersonal relationships within the family and peer group on academic and social integration?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Relationships with the faculty and staff in the School of Nursing</li> <li>2. Relationships with Hispanic peers</li> <li>3. Relationships with non-Hispanic peers</li> <li>4. Relationships within AHNS</li> <li>5. Relationships with UTNSA</li> <li>6. Feeling connected, cared for, respected in the university and the School of Nursing</li> <li>7. Relationships with family</li> </ol>
<p>2. SOCIOECONOMIC FACTORS THAT INFLUENCED COMPLETION OF THE BSN PROGRAM</p> <p>What is the influence of socioeconomic factors on academic integration, persistence and graduation?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Maintaining a job while in school</li> <li>2. Receiving financial assistance: Scholarships, grants, loans</li> <li>3. Feeling as though you had enough financial resources to fit in</li> </ol>

### *Methods of Analyzing The Written Questionnaire and Focus Group*

The latter phase of the study concentrated on the dimension and strength of the ten emergent themes from the individual interviews. Strauss and Corbin (1998) specify, “dimensions represent the location of a property [of the data] along a continuum or range” (p. 117) and through *dimensionalization* of the data patterns emerge that consequently become the foundation and structure for theory building.

Discussion and ranking each of the ten identified themes occurred twice in the focus group: individually and as a group. The participants were first asked to use the Individual Ranking Tools (Figure J4 and K5 in Appendices J and K) to score each of the ten interpersonal and socioeconomic themes with a number from +5 to –5 (+5 being the extremely helpful to their retention or graduation and – 5 being not helpful). Themes were considered one-at-a-time; ranked individually, and then subsequently ranked as a group.

The group ranking began by each participant placing her ranking of each theme on the poster-sized Group Ranking Tool. Viewing the composite individual rankings, the group subsequently participated in a discussion about the variations within the group rankings concerning the interpersonal and socioeconomic themes. The Group Ranking Tool was laminated so that participants could

spontaneously add other factors or make adaptations to the tool. This invitation for group involvement is another example of the participants and researcher co-creating knowledge and sharing the research process. The concluding step of the group ranking of the themes involved totaling the numbers assigned to each theme and then discussing the groups' ranking of the factor in relation to individual experiences.

The individual and group ranking of each theme produced the analysis of the strength of each theme as a factor in retention and graduation from the BSN program. Thus the group ranking of themes became the basis for theory generation that is discussed in chapter 5. This method of analysis aided in the triangulation and saturation of the data. As the members discussed their ranking of the themes, it enhanced the data quality in that participants provide a check and balance and clarification of positions for each other.

While Patton (2002) warns group construction of knowledge may also serve as a limiting factor in that some members may chose not to share their viewpoint if they realize it is inconsistent with the group consensus, this did not seem to be the case in this focus group setting in that all members first ranked each item individually and then participated in a group discussion. At any time members of the group were free to change their ranking as a result of the group discussion. While there was individual variation within the group rating of many



themes, no participant altered her individual ranking as a result of the group discussion.

### Issues of Trustworthiness or Credibility

Validity, frequently referred to as *trustworthiness* is a concern in all qualitative research. Wolcott (1990; 1995) argues against the use of the term *validity* in qualitative research pointing out validity was first used in the context of quantitative studies to refer to a single “correct” interpretation of the data. Operating from a social constructionist stance that truth is socially constructed and not a constant, validity (trustworthiness) of the data and the constructed meaning in this study was achieved by aforementioned member-checking and triangulation of the data using various data sources and data collection methods. These strategies moved the constructed meaning of the inquiry into an arena of credibility rather than absolute truth. Moreover, trustworthiness was enhanced by searching for discrepant data in the coding and construction of themes.

The issue of credibility is potentially a substantial problem when the researcher does not share the same culture, race, socioeconomic status and/or gender as the participants (Fine et al., 2000; Scheurich, 1997). The potential for cultural bias and misrepresentation of the participant remained a central

awareness on the part of the researcher throughout the investigation. Because the nature of qualitative research involves the co-constructed meaning between researcher and the participants, the task was for a white female nurse educator to engage Latina students/graduates in an inquiry that facilitated the collaboration and authentic construction of meaning regarding their educational experiences.

Journaling, supervision and dialog with colleagues sensitive to cultural/racial issues provided assistance in this ongoing interrogation and reflexivity. Reflexive journaling was a tool used throughout the study to organize and guide the inquiry. The journal became a record of the thoughts, decisions, and questions that emerged throughout the inquiry. Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985) include this journal as a means of establishing trustworthiness of the data.

A Latina nurse who had earned a Ph.D. in nursing and taught in a BSN program provided supervision and consultation throughout this study. As the individual interviews were transcribed and the decisions about themes emerged, this data was shared with the consultant for guidance in the analysis process. In addition to supervision with this Latina consultant, numerous reviews were held with members of the committee and a peer reviewer who is a doctoral candidate and has expertise in student retention issues vis-à-vis employment as the Director of the Freshmen Interest Group program at the research site.

*Trustworthiness: Researcher as Instrument Statement*

I grew up in south Florida where I had many interactions and friendships with Cuban immigrants throughout my early schooling. However as I continued my education at a four-year university, I became aware of the notable absence of men and women of color on the campus in general and within the BSN program. Having experienced a culturally diverse community in my formative years, I value multicultural relationships and as an educator am deeply concerned about the uniculturalism in nursing. Thus I was eager to explore the experiences of Hispanic/Latinas in a BSN program hoping to find ways to facilitate their retention and graduation and ultimately move the profession of nursing forward toward the goal of increasing racial/ethnic diversity within the workforce.

I was employed as a clinical instructor at the selected site ten years prior to and during the study. A year prior to the beginning the study, I was selected by the Hispanic students and approved by the School of Nursing administration to be the faculty advisor for the Association Hispanic Nursing Students (AHNS) at the research site. The active membership of this group was a small percentage of all of the Hispanic/Latinas enrolled in the school. In the capacity of advisor, I guided the group in community outreach projects and attended monthly meetings. This group routinely socialized outside of the university, but because of the role as a

faculty member, I chose not to participate in these social events. Thus prior to the study, I may have had some affiliation with the participants, either as an advisor to a student organization or as an instructor.

### *Ethical Issues*

Every attempt was made to produce an ethical and meaningful study. The simultaneous roles of researcher and faculty member produced both assets and potential liabilities to the integrity of the research and the ethics involved in data collection. Krieger (1991) argues the use of self is integral to qualitative study. Furthermore, the researcher's use of self in qualitative work can be seen as a resource rather than something to be controlled or eliminated (Krieger, 1991; Schepher-Hughes, 1983). However to avoid the ethical quagmires of conducting cross-cultural research within the institution in which one works, rigorous attention was given to the recruitment of participants, the shaping of the interviews, and the interpretation of findings in this study. Throughout each phase of the study the use of supervision, consultation, and peer review, directly addressed ethical issues and care was taken to share the unfolding of the process and the analysis of the results with the participants. Because all of the participants were in the second-semester senior year or graduates, the researcher was not in a position to effect participants' grades or their progression in the School of

Nursing. As an additional measure to ensure confidentiality of the participants, pseudonyms were selected by the participants and used on all materials related to the study.

## CHAPTER 4: REPORT OF THE FINDINGS

### Introduction

The findings in this study were obtained from four sources: a demographic sheet (Appendix F), a 60-90 minute individual audiotaped interview, a written questionnaire, and a concluding focus group that explored themes from the individual interviews. The data was collected in two phases: (a) completion of the demographic sheet and an individual interview, and (b) completion of a written individual questionnaire and participation in a 120-minute audiotaped focus group. This chapter includes a description of the participants, data from the individual interviews, and concludes with the findings of from written questionnaire (Appendix G) and the focus group.

### Description of the Participants

Prior to beginning the study, a pilot group comprised of two BSN students completed the first phase of the study: the demographic sheet and an audiotaped 60-90 minute individual interview. The pilot-study participants were not eligible to complete all aspects of the study because they were in the second semester of

their junior year at the time of the study, and thus did not meet the criteria for participation. However their demographic information and some of their responses relevant to academic preparation prior to attending the four-year university appear in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

The nine participants in the study were either in the second semester of their senior year or recent graduates of the BSN program. Of the nine participants completing the initial phase of the study, (a demographic information sheet, and a 60-90 minute individual audiotaped interview); five went on to complete the concluding phase (the written questionnaire and participation in a 120-minute focus group). The four who did not participate to the focus group had scheduling difficulties and were unable to attend.

All of the participants, including the pilot group, were of Mexican American ethnicity. One participant was born and lived in Mexico until she was twelve years old, while the remainder of the group was born in the U.S. but had at least one parent who was born in Mexico. Spanish was spoken in the homes of all of the participants, however only seven participants described themselves as “fluent in both English and Spanish”. Prior to attending the university all of the participants lived in Texas: one with her husband and four children, two in single-parent homes, while the remainder of the group lived in homes with two parents.

Table 3 represents the variation in the study group's age, distance of the university from their homes, status in school, and highest level of parental education. Distance from home was a source of difficulty for most participants in that they described themselves as continuing to be significantly involved in family and community activities that required frequent visits home. Because distance from home was an important factor influencing retention and graduation from the BSN program, it is explored later in the chapter.

Seven of the study group members were the first in their families to graduate from a four-year university: one had a sibling who had completed a four-year degree and both parents of one participant completed graduate study. Four of the study participants attended a community college and two of those four, graduated from a community college prior to transferring to a four-year institution.



*Table 3. Description of Participants*

	Age	Distance in Miles from Home	Status in School	Highest Parental Educational Level
Pilot Group	33	350	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester junior	Both parents- junior high school
	21	236	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester junior	Dad: some college in Mexico; Mom: high school
Study Group	23	217	Graduate (2001)	Both parents – high school
	23	197	Graduate (2001)	Both parents – high school
	23	280	Graduate (2001)	Dad: high school, Mom: elementary school
	23	236	Graduate (2002)	Mom: some college
	23	65	Graduate (2002)	Both parents: some high school
	23	560	Graduate (2002)	Both parents: some college
	20	197	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester senior	Dad: high school, Mom: elementary school
	20	560	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester senior	Dad: some college, Mom: high school
	23	234	2 <sup>nd</sup> semester senior	Both parents: master’s degrees
Mean	23.2	285 miles		

## Findings from the Individual Interviews

This section describes the significant findings of the individual interviews and organizes the presentation according to the relevancy to the research question. The major sections are as follows: (a) significant factors that prepared the participants for the BSN program, (b) influence of institutional programs, courses, and organizations on the retention and graduation from a BSN program, (c) influence of interpersonal factors on retention and graduation from the BSN program, (d) influence of institutional policies and practices on retention and graduation from the BSN program, and (e) influence of factors outside the School of Nursing on retention and graduation from the BSN program. Substantial participant quotations were deliberately included to enrich the text with their perceptions and understanding of their experiences. Furthermore this inclusion of participant voice builds a foundation for the theorizing to follow in the next chapter.

### *Significant Factors That Prepared the Participants for the BSN Program*

Although their experiences varied, preparation for success in a BSN program began in early childhood for each of these participants. Prior to

beginning high school all of the participants had committed to a goal of completing a four-year college degree and had selected some area of healthcare as a focus of study. Lucy attributes her aspiration to attend college to the influence of her parents, both of whom completed master's degrees. Lucy recalls the following episode at age four:

I had a disagreement with my friend because she said her mom told her she did not have to go to college. I said, 'everyone has to go to college'. We were fighting about it. My mom told me I had to go to college and so I thought everyone had to go. It was instilled in us early that college is just a continuation of education. It was expected.

### *Academic Preparation*

Eight of the nine participants were enrolled in Gifted and Talented (GT) and/or Advanced Placement (AP) classes at some time in their elementary, middle and/or high school education. Three of the participants began these classes in elementary school; one in middle school, while the other three in began in high school. One participant attended a Health Magnet high school. Some students had to self-advocate to gain admission to these classes or programs, while others were chosen based on academic performance and/or achievement test scores.

Christina grew up in a family with five siblings and a single mother who completed some college. As a young child Christina remembers her mother's resolve, "you are all going to college, I don't know how we will pay for it, but

you will all go”. With this goal in mind, Christina decided she needed to get into AP classes in high school and describes her self-advocacy:

The summer before my sophomore year they had about 2,000 students with like five counselors. I said, ‘I am going to talk to a counselor, I don’t care how long I have to wait’. Finally I got in there – I said to her, ‘Look here are my grades, obviously I can make good grades, I want out of these regular classes – I’m not learning’.

Sarah’s father died when she was twelve and she became the surrogate parent for herself and her two siblings. She described her mother as “not home much ...and not caring much about their education”. However, before he died, her father inspired her to complete her education at least through the undergraduate level at a university. Immediately after her father’s death, she successfully petitioned her mother and deceased father’s family to allow her to attend an elementary school that had a Gifted and Talented program. She was admitted to the GT program and remained in accelerated classes throughout high school. Sarah went on to graduate with honors from the BSN program and upon graduation, received the Outstanding Student Award.

The participants in this study reported most of their peers in the Gifted and Talented programs were Anglo. Thus while these programs improved the academic preparation of the participants, they also provided these Latinas with opportunities to acquire cultural competence and skills needed to be successful on a predominantly white university campus. However, because of the limited

representation of minorities in the honors classes, the participants had diminished contact at school with their Hispanic peers. Selena began GT classes in middle school and explains, “I had to sever my friendships when I started GT. Yeah, I was in class with mostly white people”.

Even though the participants were successful in these advanced classes, several of them equated *whiteness* with intelligence and attributed their academic success to their *hard work* and *persistence*, to the exclusion of any innate intellectual ability. Sarah describes her early preparation as, “I was in honor’s classes from 6<sup>th</sup> grade on, there weren’t many minorities at all – a lot of Caucasian students and Asian people (because they are very smart)”.

Most participants perceived their family as being supportive, even to the point of making substantial sacrifices, to position them to attend college. Norma recalled when her family moved from the barrio to a predominantly white middle-class neighborhood:

It was a nice neighborhood... We moved to a foreclosure home... his [her father] idea was to bring us to a good neighborhood so that we could get a good education...but we still never fit in. I was prepared academically...I think I underestimated myself, I think it had a lot to do with once I was in that other school [predominantly white, middle class school], there were so few Hispanics, few Blacks, I sorta thought I couldn’t compete with these people who had educated parents, who encouraged them and taught them, and stayed home with them, and studied with them. So even though I was at a decent level there, I did not think I was [at a decent level].

Even though they had all been in Honor's classes in high school, all of the four students who went to a community college prior to transferring to the university found attending a community college detrimental to their academic adjustment at the university.

After I got out of high school, I did not think I was ready to move. Coming from a small town, I was afraid to leave my family and all of the responsibilities. I was the oldest, and I had to take care of my kid sisters and brother. I stayed back and went to a community college, which was probably one of the first mistakes I made... It was a mistake because it didn't prepare me for what this university was going to be like. And it probably it hindered a lot of things – for instance my study habits went from being really good to being mediocre. And I came here and had a really hard time getting use to a different style of studying. I figure if I had been here the first year I would have had it under my belt. I was not the least bit challenged in the community college (Christina).

Although both of her parents completed graduate degrees, Lucy chose to stay close to her friends after high school and attend a community college. As she reflected on that decision, she described it as “the biggest mistake of my life. When I got here, it was terrifying, ...and so I just got really intimidated. I was really depressed and I think it was my lack of preparation”.

### *Selection of the University*

The financial assistance package that was offered to these participants was the prevailing factor in their selection of the university. Most of them had interests

in other schools, but ultimately, for eight of the nine participants, finances were the most decisive factor in their selection. The student who was not influenced by finances in her selection of schools, was the only one who did not qualify for financial assistance and furthermore was the only participant whose parents had both earned master's degrees.

### *Selection of a major*

In general their interest in healthcare grew from a variety of childhood experiences including caring for sick family members, being the recipient of healthcare, or the influence of TV shows (ER and Rescue 911). During their childhood, five of the participants gave direct, and in several cases, ongoing care to a sick family member. Sally's mother worked the night shift as a clerk in an Emergency Room of a local hospital. Because the family lacked other resources for child-care, Sally recalled that she frequently went with her mother to work and slept curled up behind her mother's desk in the Emergency Room. She described seeing and valuing the work her mother did and at an early age decided to pursue a career in medicine. During her sophomore year, she transferred from pre-med to nursing because she believed nursing would give her more exposure to patient care and patient teaching.

Although all of participants were interested in some facet of healthcare, only two of them entered the university declaring nursing as a major. Those who began in pharmacy or pre-med changed their major to nursing at some time during their first two years because they wanted more contact with patients than they perceived a pharmacist or a physician to have, or because they did not want to remain in school the required years to become a physician.

### *Perceptions of Nursing*

In as much as nursing was not the early choice for most of these participants, it was interesting to elicit their perceptions of nursing as a career. In spite of their interest in healthcare during high school, none of the participants remembered receiving any guidance or suggestions from counselors or teachers that they consider a career in nursing. Most of them recalled being encouraged to pursue a career in medicine, business, engineering, or law. When explored further, most of the participants expressed their belief that the Hispanic culture values the profession of nursing and the delivery of nursing care; however the participants thought that Hispanics frequently fail to distinguish between the educational level and responsibilities of a professional RN and an unlicensed nurse assistant. Selena offered the opinion that “Hispanics just don’t think of choosing nursing – not as



much as engineering or becoming a doctor. Maybe they think we don't earn enough money". Lucy added, she did not know any of her friends who became nurses and thought it was because "it [nursing] is not prestigious". Although Maribel believed Hispanics respect nurses, she commented, "many Hispanics do not pursue nursing because they think, oh you have to go to school for that and they think they don't have the intelligence or the money to go to school".

It was interesting to note the participants were not dissuaded from pursuing a BSN, even though they did not receive encouragement or information regarding nursing in high school, and prior to beginning the BSN program, none of the participants knew a Hispanic RN. Furthermore, they had an exaggerated perception of the percentage of Hispanic RNs. When asked, "what percentage of RNs in the U.S. would you say were Hispanic", the responses ranged from 02% to 30%, with the mean being 13%. Most of the participants seemed surprised to learn in the year 2000 the national average was 02% (Health Resource and Service Administration, 2001).

### *Perceptions of Integration*

Tinto (1993) described integration as a vital factor in college student persistence. In Tinto's model (1993), social integration involves bonding to the

university by interaction with its members and the development of perceived congruence in the social and academic values and goals of the institution. The degree of perceived social integration in this study was measured by asking each participant in her individual interview: “On a scale of 0 to 10 with 10 describing an environment in which you feel completely comfortable, at home, welcomed, able to find the resources that you need, and 0 describing feeling isolated, disconnected, unable to master the environment, what number would best describe your feelings of connection to the main campus and the School of Nursing?” Using this scale, the participants’ mean integration score to the main campus was 6.3 and 6.9 in the School of Nursing.

Living arrangements is a means of interacting with others and thus a factor in social integration. All but three of the participants lived at some time on the campus. All of the three that never lived on the campus lived with family members or friends from their hometown. None of the participants cited their living situation as a factor in feeling positively connected or integrated within the university. Conversely, several perceived that living in a dorm detracted from their ability to study and work. Norma said, “I made a conscious choice to live off campus...I know I need lots of peace and quiet to study...I don’t think I missed being assimilated into the university by living in an apartment”. Maribel related, even though I lived on campus, I was not connected to the campus. I felt very lonely. I got thrown in with a random roommate. We were the only

Hispanics on the whole floor. I think they thought, ‘ well they’re both Hispanics, they should be compatible’.

By the time they entered the upper division of nursing, all of the participants were living off campus.

Perceptions of integration to the main campus and the School of Nursing were influential in preparing the participants to apply to the BSN program; once admitted, perceptions of integration were influential in retention and graduation. In that students in this BSN program began attending pre-professional sequence classes as early as their freshman year, the participants had experiences throughout their undergraduate education that effected their perceptions of integration.

Perceptions of integration were closely linked to finding and connecting with other Hispanic/Latina students both in the School of Nursing and on the main campus. It is noteworthy that the participants differed in their perception of the numbers and accessibility to other Hispanic students, but the common theme of forming relationships with other Hispanic students was integral to perceptions of integration.

Because they [the classes] were so large and because of the diversity – there didn’t seem to be many Hispanics in the classes and you have the tendency to gravitate toward other Hispanics – so you could speak your language, or laugh about the same type of familiar things that you’ve lived through. You try to find a common ground (Sarah).

Norma felt more integrated to the main campus than the School of Nursing because of her connection to other Hispanic students.

I felt more comfortable on the main campus [integration rank of 8] than the School of Nursing [integration rank of 4] because there were more Hispanics and Hispanic activities. In the School of Nursing there aren't many Hispanics – it isn't like anything awful happened... I kinda felt like, like I just didn't fit. But I did have a few very close Hispanic friends that made it somewhat comfortable.

Negotiating the complexities of a campus with more than 52,000 students and limited accessibility to faculty in large classes were detrimental factors in the study group's perception of integration. Sarah describes initially feeling “overwhelmed” with the size of the campus, “it [the campus] was so large, it was like a big city. I didn't get to know my professors well”. Victoria came from a small town in south Texas in which 95% of the 13,000 residents are Hispanic.

When I got here, it's about as large as my hometown! It was tremendous. I was in awe, the beauty, the landscape, just overwhelmed. And it wasn't until I got into the classrooms that I realized, hey, suddenly I stuck out! You look around the room and it's almost like you see everyone and you try to make a connection, visually, just to find someone who looks like you to sit close to or make some small talk with and that was very difficult... I felt very alone. Very.

The size of the freshmen and sophomore classes (some up to 600 students) influenced perceptions of accessibility to the professor, being known as an individual and recognized by name. The name recognition was a repeated theme that influenced the participants' perception of integration.

The classes at the School of Nursing were smaller and that was definitely better because you get more attention... Well you know, like professors calling out by your name, knowing you by name – you know that is a big thing for me and like that did not happen in a classes of 500 – definitely not (Selena).

In sum, by the time they applied to the School of Nursing, all of the participants felt well prepared to be academically successful, focused on completing a degree in nursing, and somewhat integrated into both the university and the School of Nursing. Additionally all of the participants had established some meaningful social connections with other Hispanic/Latina(o)s on the campus and within the community.

*Influence of Organizations, Programs, and Courses, and on the Retention and Graduation from a BSN Program*

*Association of Hispanic Nursing Students*

Prior to the formation in 2000 of the Association of Hispanic Nursing Students (AHNS) there were two student organizations in the School of Nursing: The umbrella organization, University of Texas Nursing Student Association (UTNSA) and a subsidiary organization, African American Nursing Students Association (AANSA). The impetus to begin a chapter of AHNS began with two

Hispanic students with the guidance of one faculty advisor (Anglo). Christina was one of the founding members and the first president. She remembers,

I thought it was so weird how we don't have an organization, I thought it would really help get more Hispanic students in [the School of Nursing]. The professor who helped us had worked in Corpus Christi, and she knew a lot about the Hispanic culture. We just got fired up about it and said, 'let's do it, I think we can'! So we just kinda joined forces and started the organization.

Norma, the other co-founder recalls her motivation to begin a chapter of AHNS was "to form an organization where Hispanic nursing students could find a safe place, where they could share experiences, and strategies for success in the School of Nursing".

Other participants in the study who were also involved in beginning AHNS described finding both support and resistance. "Some of the faculty were really supportive ...I think we had three or four faculty pushing for us and donating money and that kind of stuff". On the other hand, they also perceived resistance to the formation of the organization, in that they believed some faculty members and members of UTNSA viewed it as detrimental to the unity of the students.

In terms of coming together to make an organization, we found a lot of resistance from faculty...they were like, 'this is going to create a separatism' so to speak. I think in essence they thought we might destroy the unity of the school... You know we had a lot of students not wanting to get involved with UTNSA, both Hispanic or African American. They weren't finding the support they were looking for. They weren't finding that group, that place where they can call 'home'.

In spite of some initial mixed responses about its usefulness and impact on student unity, the participants who were active in AHNS described their involvement with the organization as overwhelmingly positive to their retention and graduation. It provided a place for students to find culturally compatible friendships, informal mentors, and a means of connecting with others.

It provided me access to the others, like S1 and S2 students [seniors, first semester and second semester]. Like the president, was in S2. I asked her how those classes were going, what teachers did she know, and it just connected to me what the program was like...like what to expect, what not to expect and kinds of things like that.... Yeah, it provided me with a lot of student support and resources like where to go for this, what to do for that. (Christina)

#### *Mexican-American Health Professionals Organization (MAPO)*

Two participants were active in MAPO and found it very helpful in their initial integration to the campus.

They were just so accepting, when I came to the first meeting, they just pulled me in like family – because that’s what they were all missing too – people like them, and Hispanic families are so loving and accepting. So when I first come in, they said, ‘Mucho gusto’, they hug you feel welcomed and safe. So when I went to this group, they were so supportive, we had tutors, we had a bank of tests, they helped me, not only educational, we had socials, they’d say, ‘call me at any time’, they’d let you come over. (Norma)

### *Other Organizations*

Six participants were members of University of Texas Nursing Students Association (UTNSA); however none of them commented in their individual interview as to its influence in their persistence or connection with the School of Nursing. However, it is noteworthy, that in the subsequent focus group (discussed later in this chapter), UTNSA was perceived to be a negative factor in their integration in the school of nursing in that participants described feeling ignored in the meetings and excluded in the discussions. Other organizations in which participants were active included: Kappa Beta Chi (Mexican American Sorority), Women in Medicine, and Sigma Theta Tau (Nursing Honor Society).

### *Tutoring, Mentoring Programs*

Three participants utilized tutoring services that were provided either through the university or the School of Nursing in their freshman year. All three found it useful to their academic persistence, however none of them continued to participate in the program beyond their freshman year. The consensus both in the individual interviews and focus group was that while participation in peer mentoring and tutoring programs would probably have been beneficial to their



academic success, they did not participate because of constraints on their time. It is interesting that while none of the participants engaged in formal tutoring or mentoring programs beyond their freshman year, all of the participants described involving themselves informally in these types of supportive activities with other Hispanic nursing students.

### *Learning Center*

The Learning Center is available to all nursing students. A full-time director, librarian, and a part-time Learning Enhancement Coordinator (LEC) have offices in the center and are available to assist students in improving study skills, locating online resources and information, and in acquiring mastery of basic computer utilization skills. This facility houses a computer lab, several study rooms, and a small library. Similar to the peer mentor and tutor programs, the participants acknowledged the probable academic benefit of the services offered by the Learning Center, but few reported attending the of formal classes, citing time limitations as the most significant barrier. However, several participants noted the usefulness and easy access to computers and the staff a benefit in completing assignments. Selena voiced the sentiment of several

participants, “the Learning Center helped me a lot – just the computers, and tapes and study rooms. I liked to study there”.

### *Courses*

Most participants had positive comments about the clinical courses offered during the upper-division in the School of Nursing. Noteworthy is the repetitious comment that they were asked to translate in clinical settings, the near complete agreement that the experience was positive, and contributed to their feeling valued. However most of the participants also voiced some ambivalence about their translation experiences. A graduate of the program recalls her experiences of being asked to translate as:

Actually I was always being taken from what I was doing [in clinical rotations] to help translate.

Interviewer: Did that effect your learning or clinical experience?

A lot of people thought, ‘Oh, this is great, she’s here, she can speak Spanish. But it was helpful to me too. But there were some times when I had to learn to put my foot down. I helped one student practically all the time translate, so I felt like I had double the load of what I had to do. The population [of Spanish-speaking patients] there [in the hospital] is just so great.

Another participant related:

What I like about clinical courses is...I guess just the feeling of helping others, like I want to do a good job. I am asked to translate all the time. It makes me feel good actually. When you are among three people that know Spanish, its like you have to help. They even tell me, if you don't want to, you don't have to, but they have the need.

Nursing courses in the Pre-Professional sequence were frequently mentioned as positive experiences, primarily because of the smaller size (30-60 as compared to 600) and the increased opportunity to interact with faculty and to be known as an individual, as previously mentioned in the Perceptions of Integration section.

*Influence of Interpersonal Factors on Retention and Graduation from the BSN Program*

*Peers*

The study group's perceptions about the significance of their interaction with their peers on their persistence in the BSN program, fell into distinct categories: "helpful" or "not helpful" and nearly always mentioned race, particularly Hispanic or Anglo. Rarely was there any mention of other minorities either on the campus or in the School of Nursing. In general the comments about other Hispanic students were experiences of feeling "connected, understood,

safe”, et cetera. Comments about Anglo peers were generally neutral or negative in the sense of feeling labeled as “not as smart”, or “more poor”, or marginalized in some way.

*Hispanic peers in the School of Nursing.*

The importance of finding and connecting to Hispanic peers while in the BSN program cannot be overstated. In general there was a sense of sharing a culture and a language that provided cohesion and support for the participants. These students described an emotional connection of feeling cared for, safe, connected; as well as a physical connection of sitting together in class, eating together, and studying together. One participant commented:

I like to speak Spanish to my friends here in school. We speak mostly Tex-Mex and I would love to do it more. I would feel a lot more connected to my culture, but I feel like I am not... So it is nice to have people to be able to communicate with. They can say it to me in Spanish, and I will know what they are talking about. Also being able to share different pieces of the culture, the food, music, and stuff like that helps me.

Norma, a graduate of the program, recalls her effort to find and connect with Hispanic peers:

I picked out people in class – I looked for Hispanic people, I wanted see some kind of familiar face, someone who looked like me. I would go sit

by them and talk to them and I knew what they were going through was a lot what I was going through and maybe even worse. And it was funny, all the Hispanic students, we all sat together, in the last two rows in a cluster sort of in the school of nursing. It was strange, it was like we felt comfortable around each other.

Several participants commented on the necessity of having culturally consistent support in the same city. Sarah expressed, “you need someone where you are. My sisters were so far away. They would call me on the phone, but it is something different about having someone here...living here- just to remind me where I came from”.

In addition to sharing a culture and language, many of the participants described feeling bonded to other Hispanic/Latinas because of common social or economic difficulties. Some of the most frequently mentioned difficulties were financial and involved obtaining reliable transportation, as well as the need to send money home to assist their families. Selena, a graduate recalled:

We bonded and we talked about the struggles we were going through. In fact some of the struggles that other students talked to me about were a lot worse than my own, so I almost felt advantaged – but when I talked to them I would think, ‘gosh, here I am feeling bad about myself because I am sending money home and struggling’, and a lot of them were going through things that were even worse and doing the same thing – sending money home. And not just students in the nursing school, but other students, they were sending money home... yeah, a lot of responsibility.

Maribel concurred that sharing socioeconomic status, as well as ethnicity, provided a basis for social integration.

I definitely felt more connected with the Hispanic students, just because of the similar backgrounds. But I felt more connected to the non-Hispanic students that had to work, the ones that didn't have their parents paying their way. Because you would sometimes meet students who got a car from their parents, but a lot of us had to pay for our own car –had to work for that car payment, for transportation to go home.

*non-Hispanic peers in the School of Nursing.*

While some participants expressed extreme discomfort with their Anglo peers, most felt neutral or at times, moderately marginalized.

The girls here, I believe they are kinda racist. But that's just my opinion. They have very different values, very different opinions. I don't know, I don't fit in with them. In the clinical setting – they would never sit down to lunch with me, I would be alone, and I would only hang around with my friend who is also Mexican American and we speak Spanish a lot.

The class [nursing cohort] is difficult and it could just well be my class – there are clicks, I'd say. I have no desire to be in any click. It seems childish. I am here to do a job; I'm here to learn. But I feel left out, very, very. I have one good friend in class out of 40. She's not Hispanic, but she's from a small town.

While Lucy described having a variety of both Anglo and Hispanic friends, she reports she routinely selected a seat in class with her Hispanic friends in the back of the room.

I never felt excluded here, but I guess it just doesn't phase me, like I just really don't care. But some of my Hispanic friends would always be, 'Oh my gosh we are the Mexicans, we are sitting in the back of the room'. But I like the back of the room. It isn't like Mexicans have to go in the back,

but my friends, they notice it. I don't feel any less of myself because I sit in the back. I don't think anyone puts us down, not that I am aware of and I don't need to be only with Hispanics to be connected.

Alex expressed some loneliness, but quickly took responsibility for it:

I feel left out sometimes, I am excluded, but I feel like it is my own fault for not being open and to participating. But I feel like if they [Anglos] are not asking me to, then why should I? Maybe I'm not wanted, but I feel like that's not the case at all, I just feel like it is a personal thing.

*study groups.*

Most of the participants engaged in informal study groups that emerged spontaneously once they were admitted to the upper-division in the nursing school. These groups were primarily based on friendships that were formed in the initial upper-division courses. Once formed, the groups tended to remain stable in membership throughout the two years. These informal groups provided a means of both academic and social integration for the Latina students and the participants reported the study groups had an overall positive influence on their retention and graduation from the BSN program. A majority of these groups were exclusively Hispanic, however, two participants were in heterogeneous groups of Anglos and other minorities. Looking back over her experiences in the BSN program, Sally commented:

My study group has helped me the most in classes and clinicals in the School of Nursing. There are four of us- we are all Hispanic. We will get together and discuss questions we've got about certain assignments and definitely study for major exams. Also we just share our frustrations about what's going on, it's not just the course work that is difficult... So we will just discuss that and get our frustrations out and then go about the next day and we are able to deal with it all. We've been getting together since our J1 semester. Pretty much you get together when you get into the upper-division sequence because, I guess we know we can count on each other. We are in the program. We're going to stay.

Selena noted the cohesiveness of her study group that led to social integration; as well as its usefulness to academic persistence:

We got together ourselves said, 'we need to study for this class – we should get together', so we just set a time and the place. It's all Hispanic students. We would let someone else in, but it's just that we are so close knit, now we are very good friends.

Norma's experience of the study group included not only social and academic support, but a context in which to express feelings of marginalization:

Yeah, we had a study group. It was with Hispanic students and we would put things together ourselves. It was funny because we would make jokes about the other students who weren't Hispanic – like that we realized they thought that we weren't as smart as they were. I don't know what they really thought, but that's how it seemed to us.



## *Faculty*

The area of interpersonal relationships with faculty members as a means of providing both cultural capital and academic integration was explored. Of particular interest was whether the participants had exposure to a Hispanic/Latino faculty member and if so, the impact of that relationship. Four of the participants took a Mexican American Studies class on the main campus that was taught by a Mexican-American faculty member. Two of the participants found it valuable to their academic development to be taught by someone who shared their culture while the other two were neutral as to its importance to them. Christina commented about the social, cultural and academic value of having a Hispanic professor:

I took a Mexican American class on campus. I would say it was a positive experience to have a Hispanic faculty. The class was about theory, but when he talked to us about us, when you got him on one-to-one, he was so supportive of everything and about what we were doing and his experiences and got us involved in the Hispanic community. I got to see a lot of different stuff that year, debates, discussions on all sorts of things in reference to the Hispanic population here. And I hadn't gotten involved in that aspect before then. So having him that semester was really enlightening because there was a whole realm of academia that I was not aware was there.

Victoria also expressed a cultural congruency with a Mexican American professor that aided academic persistence:

I took a Mexican American class from a Mexican American woman. She was pretty young, it seemed like she understood where you were coming from. Just knowing she's from your culture, there's a connection that I'd feel. Like just little things that you know that you can relate to and understand, like, 'hey I did that' or like *respecto*, respecting your family and elders and being much more connected to our families – like eating dinners together.

During the time that all the participants were at the School of Nursing there were no Hispanic/Latina(o) faculty members; however several of the participants commented about feeling more connected to the few Anglo members of the faculty who were fluent in Spanish. Several of the participants mentioned they noted the lack of Hispanic nursing faculty and felt that it diminished their education. Norma, a graduate commented:

I just know that we need Hispanic educators in this school [nursing] period! Even in my pre-req [pre-requisite] classes, none of my professors was Hispanic. I think I missed something, just because I didn't have someone, a professor to connect with. I just think the professors I did have, especially in the nursing school are very understanding, but there's a difference in understanding and connection.

Interviewer:

What does it mean to have connection?

Norma:

To be connected means, well, I think they would be aware of my background more, and be understanding of that. Of course I don't want to say that professors who were not Hispanic were not understanding, because they were very understanding – but that connection – there's a limit.

While Christina described a positive experience of taking a class on campus from a Mexican-American professor, she noted the lack of Hispanic/Latina(o) faculty in the School of Nursing:

Not having a Hispanic faculty at the School of Nursing has been hard. The faculty is very good, they are very supportive and there are various Hispanic people within the School of Nursing that have helped. But sometimes it just helps to know you have someone there. And that can just see your point of view or hear your background, where you are coming from – that sort of thing.

Before coming to the university, Sally attended public school in Dallas with mostly Anglo instructors. She reported although she has never had an Hispanic instructor, she did not feel it had a detrimental effect on her education:

I've never had a Hispanic professor, I guess I never thought about it much. I think it would have been nice to have that extra connection, but otherwise I don't think it would have applied academically.

*facilitating faculty behaviors.*

In addition to the cultural/ethnic background of the faculty, participants described numerous interpersonal styles used by faculty members that served to facilitate or became barriers in the fostering of supportive professional relationships. Repetitious themes of facilitating interpersonal interactions with the faculty in the School of Nursing included perceptions of availability,

encouragement, validation, and caring. Maria, a graduate, summarized the sentiments of many participants, “in general, the nursing professors I had were excellent – they were accessible, knowledgeable and compassionate within reason”. Being accessible before and after class to answer questions, taking an interest in students, making social conversation, and being available during office hours were behaviors that were frequently reported as very helpful in facilitating perceptions of integration, being cared for, and respected. One student commented, “it helps me a lot when professors will just like talk to you, make conversation, take an interest in you”. Several participants described helpful interaction with faculty included helping them with personal problems, extending office hours, and calling to “check on them”.

Norma described an experience she had of feeling cared for by a nursing faculty:

One time I was having a hard time and I happened to see her [faculty member] and she asked me how I was doing and I said, ‘I could be better’. She brought me in and said, ‘Come in let’s talk’. And I spent about an hour and half to two hours in her office, crying and just letting out my frustrations and stuff. She said, ‘hey, this is a tough thing that you are doing, but you’re doing it. Pat yourself on the back. Keep it up’. Yeah, I would actually say it is the same faculty member, that is a mentor as well. I don’t see her much, but there’s no hesitation, I could pick up the phone and we could talk.

The perception of being able to ask questions was another important factor in facilitating student to faculty interaction. The participant’s experience was that

at times Hispanic students are hesitant to ask questions of faculty members for fear of appearing “stupid” or “being made fun of” or “we just don’t know the language or vocabulary well enough”. Christina recalled:

When I first came to the school, I took a communication class and the professor was really receptive and interactive and would say, ‘talk to me, discuss this, tell me what you don’t understand’. I always felt a lot of support just from being a student, not because I was Hispanic, to be able to ask questions or ask for help of any kind.

*non-facilitating faculty behaviors.*

Although most of the comments about the faculty reflected a warm, caring interaction, some students described incidents of feeling stigmatized or misunderstood because of cultural differences. Participation in class was one of those areas that participants repeatedly conveyed feeling misunderstood. Several participants described a process of becoming reluctant to speak in class when they feared a negative response to their questions or comment; thus becoming more withdrawn and isolated. Norma recollected:

When I came to the School of Nursing, I noticed how few Hispanics there were. I think because it was a smaller group – so things were a little more obvious. With a big group you just get lost in the crowd. A lot of times I was afraid to speak in class here for fear I would be made fun of.

Interviewer:

By who?

Norma:

the professor and other students. Even though nothing would be said outwardly, sometimes you would say something and you would see the professor make a face and then other students, and then it's just like, 'Well I'm not talking anymore'.

Furthermore, the participants perceived that some faculty members misunderstood this isolation or reticence to participant in class discussions or ask questions as a lack of initiative, or even lack of knowledge. Alex remembered an incident she labeled as "painful" in which she felt misunderstood:

I had a clinical instructor and at first I was very intimidated, I don't know if it was the persona or what. So I always kept a distance. And at midterm evals [evaluations] I was told that I was *lazy* [italics added]. And I was like, 'Lazy oh my gosh!' I had *never* [italics added] been called *lazy* [italics added] before! I am a hard worker! My instructor thought this because I wasn't participating enough, so I said, 'that's the way I am. I'm shy and I know my material and if you want to know, then I will let you know'.

The participants used the phrases, "lazy, stupid, and dumb" as perceptions they believed others had of them. Thus, several of the participants conveyed the belief that they needed to perform at a higher level than the Anglo students to be perceived by clinical faculty as being satisfactory. Sally describes her perceptions of being held to a higher standard because of her ethnicity:

I think there can be the stigma of seeing a person's culture. I think sometimes some faculty see different ethnicity and think, 'Oh, maybe they aren't that smart or fast or they aren't up to speed on things'. Because you

know there is that social stigma of Hispanics as being lazy, slow and dumb. And that's in your mind, way in the back, but it comes up. You really feel like you have to do extra well compared to your counterparts to be accepted and not necessarily appreciated, but just given that, 'okay, this person is capable of doing all these things'.

Norma, a graduate of the program remembered an exceptionally painful incident with a clinical faculty member when she was a student in which she felt stigmatized and treated unfairly because of her ethnicity. In spite of the lapse in time from the incident to the interview of 18 months, she described it precipitating feelings of dismay, despair and, "I never felt worse in my life".

I was so stressed out because of one professor in clinical – I didn't want to go back, I was at the point – I don't want to see her, I'm scared, I was just under so much stress I was at the point of, 'I don't think I can do it' I had really hit the bottom – I never felt worse in my life, I was like – I don't think I can take this anymore. I knew she was like going to be questioning me – so the night before I would be like trying to memorize as much as I could and I knew I couldn't memorize everything – It was just overwhelming. I knew I didn't do well on the spot. At times I did feel like I was singled out ...just the way she would talk to me. I thought she didn't like me –Then I realized there were others who felt that way too - actually it was me and a couple of other Hispanic students and it wasn't all Hispanic students, but a majority were – and then there were a few from other states and I think she didn't like their attitude – so she singled them out too. So at that time I didn't just feel like I had to worry about displaying my intelligence, but I also had to worry about being nice and making sure she liked me.

In addition to feeling personally misunderstood because of cultural differences, the participants expressed a lack of accurate information regarding the cultural content of the curriculum. A graduate noted:

And another thing that bothered me is when we would have those big cultural talks about how we need to be culturally sensitive. It was almost comical what they would say because I would think, this is not what it was about – it's funny what they would come up with – like words that would describe a certain race or things that you would associate with a certain race. Even though there is some truth to it, it just misses the whole picture. It was just like they are trying to make you be culturally sensitive to everyone, but it was almost embarrassing how they would talk about a certain race. We'd all be sitting in the back looking at each other and be like, 'how could you say that'?

Several of the participants commented about the perception that some faculty members did not seem to understand or appreciate how hard they were working both academically and in their outside employment: consequently they felt they were chastised by the faculty for not earning higher grades or for not studying enough prior to examinations. Furthermore, some participants sensed a barrier with certain instructors and perceived the instructors to be insensitive to the financial strain that going to school imposed on them and their families. For instance, unlike most students on a university campus, it was necessary for the students in this BSN program to arrange for transportation to clinical settings within the community. Some of these clinical sites were up to 60 miles away from the campus. Additionally, in that the hours of these clinical courses varied from 6:30 AM to 11:00 PM, it was difficult to use public transportation. Thus possessing and maintaining a car was a substantial investment that added strain to the financial concerns. Upon entering the upper-division, one participant recalls feeling “astonished and disappointed” when she was discussing her transportation



problems with her faculty member who told her to “get a taxi” two days each week.

### *Staff*

The Learning Center staff and student advisors were the most frequently mentioned staff in this study. In general the participants described, “wanting to participate in these programs more” but cited not having enough time and needing to work as the main reasons for not participating. However, the participants expressed a general appreciation for the option to attend the programs, particularly the peer mentoring and tutoring. They did avail themselves of the academic support from the librarian and Learning Enhancement coordinator.

#### *Staff: Advisors.*

Student advisors play a critical role in guiding students during the pre-professional sequence of their education and throughout the application process to the professional sequence of the School of Nursing. During the time period that the participants were nursing majors (either pre-professional or professional nursing students), undergraduate advisement took place with student advisors in the Student Affairs office of the School of Nursing, or during some semesters,

was delegated to faculty members. All of the participants expressed strong feelings about their advisement, seeing it either as an obstacle or an asset in their recruitment and retention in the School of Nursing. At the time of the study there were three advisers in the Student Affairs office of the School of Nursing: two Hispanic/Latina(o) and one Anglo adviser. These individuals provided advisement to the pre-professional students. Some participants found the commonality of culture with the Hispanic/Latina(o) to be beneficial to the advisement process. Sarah had a positive experience with her adviser and perceived that relationship aiding her retention in the program:

I got to know an advisor who was Hispanic and that was helpful. I don't know exactly *how* [italics added] they helped me, it's just that connection that I tried to tell you. You feel this kind of connection to them and it makes you feel kinda like at home, just because you see people similar to you.

However in contrast, several participants described feeling unsupported by their advisor during the pre-professional sequence and actually discouraged from applying to the upper-division. One S2 participant remembers, "this particular advisor told me that there was probably no way I was going to make it, that there was no way I was going to get in". However, she was not discouraged and took these comments as incentive to "prove them wrong", she commented:

When my advisor told me I would not get in, I just thought, 'Well you don't know me, you don't know what I'm about'. And I've always felt tension from this advisor— always. Friends of mine have left this school because of this person.

Another senior describes a painful encounter with an advisor in which she felt unsupported.

My specific advisor made it clear to me that there was no way I was getting in. So I might as well start looking for something else. And I actually applied one semester and I didn't make the cut and was advised me not to try again. And I applied the next semester and I made the cut, when I went in for my advising, I made the assumption that all these years this person has been my advisor and this person was in my corner. And all that was said was, 'I assume by now you know you got into the program, this is what you need to take, make your choices out of this, sign the paper' and that was it. So it was made clear to me that my advisor didn't agree with me getting into the program. So that was interesting that my advisor was very discouraging throughout.

*Influence of School Policies and Practices on Retention and Graduation  
from the BSN Program*

*Scholarships, Loans, and grants*

Overwhelmingly the availability of financial assistance was one of the most influential factors in the recruitment and retention of the participants in this study to the university and the BSN program. Because most of these participants were honor's students in high school, various colleges and universities recruited them. Eight of the nine participants declared they did not believe they would have

been able to attend any university without the financial assistance and attributed the financial package offered them by The University of Texas at Austin as the primary reason they selected this particular program. Sarah remembered:

I applied to several other schools (state and private), but they didn't offer a lot of scholarships. Like my mom couldn't pay my way – so it was based totally on me – getting loans in my name or just any financial aid. UT Austin offered to pay my way – it was a four year scholarship, and plus I got grants.

Feeling the burden of financing her college education, Maribel chose the BSN program because of the financial package:

I had gotten admitted other places, but when I saw their financial plan, I said, “Nope, can't afford that” and UT gave me a scholarship. Lucy did not qualify for this assistance due to her family's financial

income level; however the other eight students had a diversified financial assistance package that included scholarships of varying amounts, loans and grants. Many of the students were limited to loans that they could qualify for based on their signature because their parent's income was inadequate for them to qualify for a loan. A graduate regretted her reluctance to seek financial assistance.

I did not know about scholarships, I guess I could have found out, but at that time I just wasn't thinking, I just thought, ‘Oh you must have to be really smart to get scholarships’ – but I think now I really could have, but back then I just thinking, ‘No I won't qualify’. Now I am \$30,000 in debt.

The School of Nursing administers a Federal Grant program entitled,

*Scholarship for Disadvantaged Students*. The Bureau of Health Professions, Division of Health Careers Diversity and Development defines *disadvantaged* as (a) one coming from, “an environment that has inhibited the individual from obtaining the knowledge, skill and abilities required to enroll in and graduate from a health professions or nursing school, or (b) from a family with an annual income below a level based on low-income thresholds according to family size published by the U. S. Bureau of the Census adjusted annually for changes in the Consumer Price Index, and adjusted by the secretary, HHS, for the use in health professions and nursing programs”. Six of the eight participants received this scholarship. It paid for tuition and books. The label *disadvantaged* puzzled several of the participants and a few were offended. Sally, a graduate of the program commented:

How are we disadvantaged, is what I want to say,... that’s my question...I don’t feel like I was at a disadvantage at all where I grew up. I mean I went to a great school, my parents and my family in general instilled great values in us and always encouraged us. I see disadvantaged as say, maybe a student who has grown up in foster care all their life and just never had that core family encouragement surrounding them that was very consistent. That’s what I think of in terms of disadvantaged.

Maribel had a 3.7 grade point average in her sophomore year at college. She did not intend to apply for the *Scholarship for Disadvantaged Students* because she did not think she would qualify in that she did not perceive herself to be disadvantaged. It was only at the insistence of her advisor that she did apply and receive this scholarship.

I think they defined *disadvantaged* by not having a lot of funds maybe or maybe the parents not going to college, but I never considered applying for it. I always considered myself to have the same advantages. What comparison did I have? I never thought my family's financial situation or losing houses, or us needing to live with my grandmother a disadvantage. It never prevented me from going to college. Also in high school, it was drilled into you, 'do not give the excuse that you don't have the money'. It was just drilled into you - so it was just like, well - I never considered.

### *Schedules*

Once accepted in the School of Nursing, upper-division, students must be enrolled full-time and thus classes were usually offered at limited times. In that most of the participants in this study worked in addition to being in school, scheduling was frequently an issue. All of the participants managed to obtain work that allowed them flexibility to meet their school schedule; however many commented that flexibility in the school schedule such as more Internet courses, evening and weekend courses would have been very helpful to them.

*Influence of Factors Outside the School of Nursing on Retention and Graduation  
from the BSN Program*

*Financial Concerns*

Financial concerns continued to be a considerable concern for this group in spite of receiving varying amounts of financial assistance and working while they were full-time students. All but one of the participants bore the complete financial responsibility for obtaining scholarships, grants and loans; as well as finding the means to support themselves while they were full-time BSN students. These working participants came from homes in which their parents were unable to provide any financial support to offset the expense of earning a college degree. One participant who was working 20 hours a week related, “every semester there is a financial question. How will I make it? But at this point in the program, if I need to, I will do what I have always done- get another job”.

### *Employment.*

In order to be able to pay for housing, day-to-day expenses, have transportation and whatever else was needed, eight of the nine participants worked while going to school. The amount they worked varied from 8 to 40 hours/week, with one participant working as much as 60 hours/week when necessary. In addition to supporting themselves, several of the participants worked to send money home to their families.

My parents didn't have money to give me for college. I worked 40-hours a week at a home health agency as an aide. Part of my pay went to help my mom. I sent money home to pay the phone bill and the electric bill. I worked all night and it was good because you take care of them and then a lot of time, they would go to sleep. Then I would just sit there studying, like with a little light. It was hard just because I had to work, but I was lucky because I had a job like that.

Because this BSN program required that professional sequence students be enrolled full-time, finding employment with flexible hours was often problematic for these participants. Thus they frequently worked during evening, night, and weekend hours.



*Consequences of employment.*

It is interesting that without exception, none of the working participants complained about their outside employment. In fact, most described it as useful in that it enhanced their ability to manage time, contribute to their family's income, and appreciate their education. Sarah who was supporting herself through college and sending money home recalled:

I did not have a car, or lots of money to spend on going out partying, which probably which was very very helpful. So I had to save my money on things that were important like food, my long distance bill. Those were priorities to me. And you would just meet other students who had more money to spend and would go out more and had more money and would actually do worse in school because they had that extra money. And they had more time on their hands. When you have a job, you learn how to manage your time for your classes.

Norma felt that working and paying for her education increased the value, and thus her appreciation for her degree:

It's [working while in school] had a dual impact. I think having to work throughout the entire time I have been in school, I haven't been able to count on my parents financially, not because my parents don't want to – they just can't do it, really makes me value my education – tremendously, it's not something to take lightly.

Several of the participants used phrases such as, "I am fortunate" with regard to finding a particular job, boss, or schedule that was compatible with their responsibilities as a student; however most readily described some negative

consequences of their employment that included inadequate time for rest, exercise, socialization, time to study, and the inability to earn the grades they perceived they were capable of had they not had to work.

I can't spend nearly as much time studying as my friends that don't have to work and I wonder how good my grades could be if I didn't have to work. I've maintained mostly a B average, but it's been tough.

In summary, one student succinctly concluded, "I think the socioeconomic difficulties are the hardest thing I have had to face in getting a BSN".

*Family: Education, Influence and Support.*

Seven of the nine participants were the first in their families to attend a university. One participant's sister just completed a Bachelor of Science in Aerospace Engineering, while another student's parents both have master's degrees. Many participants perceived their parent(s) to be supportive of their decision to pursue their education at a university; however a few participants experienced a mixture of support and ambivalence from their parents. One participant from a small town approximately 200 miles from the university campus reported, "My parents really did not want me to get a university degree. They wanted me to get an RN, but that was good enough from them and they wanted me to do it at a community college in our hometown"

A few participants perceived their parent(s) to be neutral or indifferent to their decision to continue their education. Although her father had been influential in shaping her desire to go to college, after he died when she was 12, Sarah experienced her mother as being indifferent to her educational aspiration. “Frankly my mom did not care what I did, even though she wasn’t very encouraging, my dad was always encouraging, even though I had him for such a short time”. A graduate described never discussing her decision to go to college with her father until after she had been accepted to the university:

My dad really wasn’t involved with me. The night I graduated from high school, we all went to dinner – I had already sent all my applications and I knew I was going to UT. We had not really talked to him about it, because he never asked. So he said, ‘what are you going to do now?’ And I said, ‘I’m going to college’ – and he’s said – ‘Oh really where are you going?’ .... ‘I’m going to UT!’ And then he’s said, ‘did you get in? ... ‘Yes’, then he said, ‘Oh they’re probably just going to weed you out anyway’. And he was real negative, but now he shows me off like I’m his trophy because nobody has graduated and now he’s real proud.

#### *Family, Community: Distance from Home*

Most of the participants struggled with the distance between their home and Austin as they transitioned to the university. Although she has been at the university four years, Selena continues to be homesick, “being away from home (200 miles) is difficult. I am always homesick”. Alex transferred to the university

after completing two years in a community college in her hometown. While she had the shortest commute home, she found the distance and separation from friends and family a formidable barrier to remaining in the BSN program. Although her family lived the closest (65 miles) to the campus, Alex found the distance from home an obstacle to her retention in the BSN program.

The distance from home oh, my gosh, that was hard. It was very hard. It was my first time away from home, away from my family, all by myself, I had to make new friends, I had to find a new place, find new things to do – I gave myself like a goal – if I stayed in Austin, two to three weeks at a time, then it would be okay to go home. But I couldn't. I had to go home every week.

Christina's home was 225 miles away from the campus. Her single mom depended on her for assistance with her five younger siblings. While at home, she gave support to the family and received support to continue her education.

The distance from home was tough. It's just that family support. I come from a family of 6 people: my mom, and three sisters and brother... yeah, I went home a lot. I think they [the family] managed to adjust a lot better than I did. At first I think it may have been hard for them, I think they didn't want show that they wanted to keep me there, otherwise they'd think I would have turned around and come back and right then. They were very supportive.

Victoria was married with four children, however her mother and grandparents continued to depend on her for assistance. Victoria described the distance of 350 miles as "difficult".

I go home frequently, enough to where it can be difficult.

Interviewer:

Why is that?

Victoria:

There's that link to the family, to the grandparents, to those things that need to be done. Let's say for example one summer I went home for a week and tore down the walls of my grandparent's house so we could rebuild them. We painted and another year we redid the bathroom. These things needed to be done and there is no one else doing them – so I pack up and go home and get busy.

### Summary of the Findings from the Individual Interviews

In sum, the individual interview data indicate the importance of obtaining financial support and the necessity for the participants to find, establish, and maintain relationships in which they perceive support, respect, and cultural congruence. The summation of findings from the individual interviews as they relate to the research question can be clustered in three broad areas: (a) the elements of institutional policies, programs, and nursing curriculum that foster and impede perceptions of meaningful interpersonal and cultural connections leading to academic integration or persistence, (b) the experience of interpersonal relationships that influence perceptions of social integration and (c) the influence

of factors outside the university and School of Nursing that influence retention and graduation.

*Institutional Policies, Programs, and Nursing Curriculum that Influenced Perceptions of Meaningful Interpersonal and Cultural Connections*

*Experiences that Fostered Academic and Social Integration*

Overwhelmingly the data indicate that the participant's perceptions of institutional factors that fostered their retention and graduation included programs and organizations in which they could readily connect with other Hispanic/Latina(o) students, faculty, and staff to receive academic and financial support. The formal relationships that occurred within the context of institutional programs and organizations were vital to the participant's perception of social integration; however these relationships were eclipsed by the influential nature of the informal interpersonal relationships that occurred between peers. Establishing and maintaining friendships with other Hispanic/Latinas was fundamental to the perception of social integration for the participants in this study.

Additionally, informal support in the form of study groups and lunch groups was also instrumental in facilitating strategies to enhance academic

persistence. It was in these informal study groups that the participants perceived acceptance and were not embarrassed to ask questions regarding information they did not understand, reframe information in a way that was culturally or linguistically congruent for them, and share studying strategies.

Just as it was important to establish relationships with other Latinas, it was also important to form working relationships with peers from all racial and ethnic backgrounds. Although they preferred to form close friendships with other Hispanic/Latinas, most of the participants described incidents in both the classroom and clinical areas of working well with non-Hispanic peers on projects or in small groups.

Even though there were no Hispanic/Latina(o) faculty members at the School of Nursing during this study, the participants described the significance of good relationships with non-Hispanic faculty and staff. Specific behaviors that fostered these positive relationships were faculty and staff members who were readily accessible, gave individualized attention, and who knew the participants by name. Programs that were cited as particularly helpful in their academic persistence were offerings by the Learning Enhancement Center, such as the tutor and mentor programs, computer assistance tutorials, and assistance offered by the School of Nursing librarian.

### *Experiences that Impeded Academic Integration or Persistence*

Participant's perceptions of institutional factors that impeded their retention and graduation included programs, policies, and interactions in which they felt marginalized, misunderstood, or stigmatized because of the race or ethnicity. Establishing friendships that would lead to social integration was complicated for some of the participants in that they felt isolated because of their underrepresentation on both on the university campus and in the School of Nursing.

Most of the descriptions of the interactions with the nursing faculty were neutral or fairly positive. However some participants described feeling that they were held to a higher or different standard than Anglo peers and that they were expected to engage in competitive or highly interactional behaviors that were culturally incongruent for them. Furthermore, some participants held the opinion that a few faculty members were not culturally savvy and gave erroneous stereotypic information about cultures other than Anglo.

Advisors play a crucial role in guiding and preparing potential BSN students for the application process into the School of Nursing. The importance of this role is amplified because pre-professional students have limited exposure to the nursing faculty members and students in the professional sequence; thus



they rely heavily on the advice and guidance of the advisors. Several participants in this study were forthcoming in describing their feelings of being unsupported in pursuing their application to the school; as well as being given what they perceived to be inaccurate advising regarding classes and schedules.

Lack of finances was mentioned throughout the interviews as a barrier to both academic and social integration and manifested itself as a barrier in issues of transportation, the capacity to engage in recreational activities, time to socialize, and time to study. As a group, these participants tended to be very frugal, responsible, and most saw themselves as struggling financially. Being recipients of the scholarship entitled, *The Scholarship for Disadvantaged Students* was repeatedly cited as being problematic for the participants in that they did not perceive themselves as disadvantaged. They described ambivalence in feeling appreciative of receiving funds they needed to continue their education, yet were offended at being labeled in this manner.

*Participant Perceptions of the Influence of Factors Outside the University and  
School of Nursing on Retention and Graduation*

Family support in the form of encouragement and pride was a recurring theme voiced by the participants as a significant factor in their persistence and graduation from the BSN program. Not all participants perceived this support from parents; however, all did perceive family support from at least one parent, or sibling. Related to family support was the distance from their families while attending the BSN program. Prior to attending the university, most of the participants were active members of the family: providing childcare for younger siblings and contributing to the family income. All of the participants described themselves as coming from families (immediate or extended) that were *very close*. Thus the distance from their families and communities was difficult in that these connections provided perceptions of feeling loved and valued and gave opportunities to participate in culturally important activities and customs.

Finally being able to obtain financial assistance in the form of scholarships, loans, and grants was extremely important and mentioned by nearly all of the participants as being vital to their retention and graduation. Additionally because most participants had outside employment while going to school full-

time, finding accessible and employment compatible with their school schedule was necessary to their persistence in the BSN program.

#### Findings From The Written Questionnaire and Focus Group

The concluding phase of the study utilized a written questionnaire and a focus group to further explore the ten themes that emerged from the individual interviews (see Appendix L).

The written questionnaire (see Appendix G) that explored some of these emergent themes was circulated to the participants prior to attending the focus group. The results of this questionnaire are listed in Table 4. It is noteworthy that when asked to describe themselves as students, none of these participants described themselves as intelligent, but rather all described themselves as “hard workers, determined or diligent”. Also they believed they pursued a BSN degree because it would help them gain access to a career, grow as a person, or meet family expectations. All but one of the respondents perceived the support from their family as the most helpful factor to them in achieving their BSN, while their greatest barrier was connected to inadequate finances.

Table 4. Results of the Written Questionnaire Following Individual Interviews

1. List 3 words that describe you as a student				
Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
Diligent Organized Dependable	Determined Persistent Goal-Oriented	Hard-working Motivated Visual Learner	Hard-Working Enthusiastic Persistent	Hard-working Motivated Organized

2. Think of the most difficult time for you while you were pursuing your BSN A. What made this time difficult?
---

Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
Being away from home; not knowing anyone	Pharmacy 228, it was one of the last classes before applying to nursing	Not knowing what to expect. I felt others had an advantage because they had clinical experience	Family difficulties. Parent's divorce added responsibility to me	1 <sup>st</sup> semester nursing program – having to juggle clinicals, course work and work off campus.

2B. At what point in your education did this difficult time occur?
--

Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
Sophomore year	Transition from community college to the university	J1 (1 <sup>st</sup> semester junior year).	Sophomore year	J1 (1 <sup>st</sup> semester junior year).

2c. How did you overcome this difficult time?
---

Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
Got use to being by myself and being in a big city	Used different tools: like flashcards and studied late at night	Learned to deal with it, made friends, and got support	Learning not to feel guilty about my decisions when my mom disagreed.	Studied hard, asked questions, and never lost confidence.

Table 4. Results of the Written Questionnaire Following Individual Interviews

(Continued)

3. Many of your peers from high school did not go on to college, or chose to attend a community college. What influenced you to pursue the rigorous course of a BSN?

Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
I knew a degree from a 4-year institution would help me advance. I wanted to be recognized as a college graduate.	The media (ER on TV), my grandmother's experiences as a Nurse Assistant	My sister graduated from college; my whole family was supportive of her and me	I have always thought a formal education was extremely valuable in help one secure a job and grow as a person	My goal was to graduate from a 4-year university. I just did not want to settle for less.

4. Who or what was the most helpful to you in achieving your BSN?

Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
Family and friends. Self-motivation to become something in life	My family	My family and scholarships that paid my tuition	Support of family, friends, classmates, and co-workers. My determination to achieve a BSN helped me to carry myself	Support from my family: my sisters and husband

5. Who or what presented the greatest barrier to you in achieving your BSN?

Alex	Maribel	Selena	Sally	Sarah
Language, being away from home, feeling insecure about myself	Resources – like needing a car to get to clinicals	Finances	Finances and time because I have to work to meet my needs of daily living	Financial: having to work off-campus, but I managed

## *Findings from the Focus Group*

### *The Influence of Interpersonal Relationships Within the Institution and the Family*

Seven of the ten themes were clustered in the *interpersonal* category for discussion in the focus group.

Themes Relating to the Influence of Interpersonal Personal Relationships to Academic Persistence included:

- Relationships with family
- Relationship with Hispanic peers
- Relationship with non-Hispanic peers
- Relationships with School of Nursing faculty and staff
- Relationships with UTNSA
- Relationships with AHNS
- Feeling connected, cared for, respected within the university and the School of Nursing.

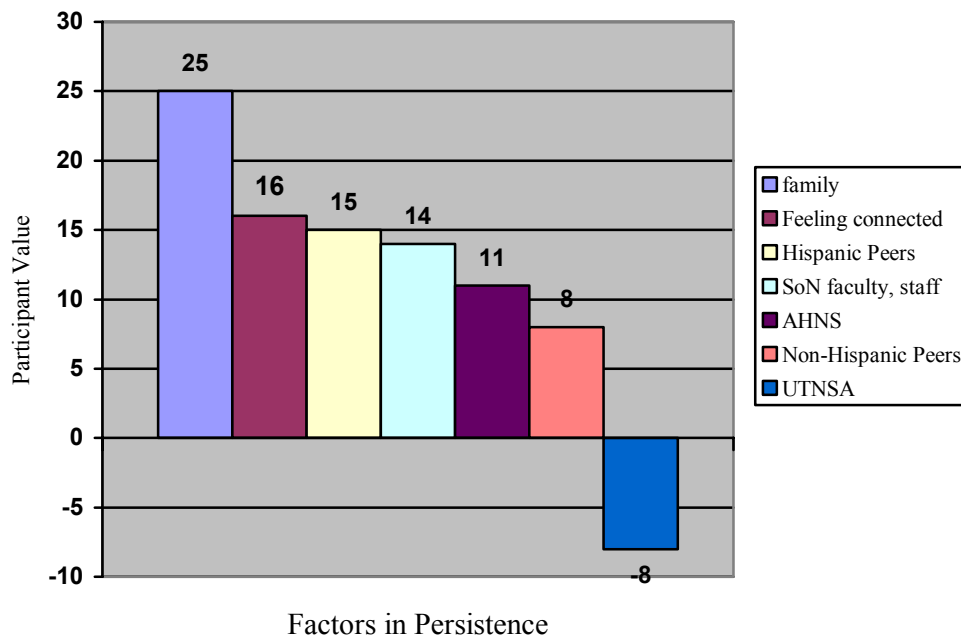
Each of these factors was ranked on a scale of -5 (an extreme barrier to persistence and graduation from the BSN program) to +5 (a very strong asset in the persistence and graduation from the BSN program) using the Individual

Ranking Tool for Interpersonal Factors on Retention (Figure J4 in Appendix J). In that there were five participants in the focus group, the highest score any factor could be rated was +25 and the lowest –25.

It is essential to note that while individuals differed in their perceived the strength of the themes to their retention and graduation, through discussion the group readily reached consensus ranking them from the most to the least influential: (a) family support, (b) feeling connected, cared for, respected in the School of Nursing and on the campus, (c) relationships with Hispanic peers, (d) relationships with School of Nursing faculty and staff, (e) relationships/participation with AHNS, (f) relationships with non-Hispanic peers, and (g) relationship/participation with UTNSA. Figure 1: The Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on Academic Persistence depicts the relational strength of these themes as perceived by the participants.

Figure 1

Perceived Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on Persistence in the BSN Program



It is significant that UTNSA received the only negative ranking by the group. The comments from the participants for this ranking was their perception of UTNSA was a group comprised of “Anglos”, and was “cliquish”. Maribel commented, “they had a lot of cliques and I just didn’t fit in there”. Selena reacted negatively to the seating arrangement in rows at the meetings, “Everything was in rows, no one looked at each other and there wasn’t any participation or anything”. Selena concurred that she felt ostracized at UTNSA and the group was so large,



“they don’t even know who I am”. The sentiment of the group was that UTNSA was mostly about fundraising to go to Student Nurses Association conventions. Because of their work schedules the participants were seldom available for funding raising activities; furthermore, expressed little interest in attending the state Student Nurses Association convention.

The findings of the participant rankings of the influence of interpersonal relationships on academic persistence were consistent with the data from the individual interviews and written questionnaire. However, allowing the participants to rank these items, the strength and relationship between these factors is a vital step in understanding their experience and generating a working hypothesis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### *The Influence of Socioeconomic Factors*

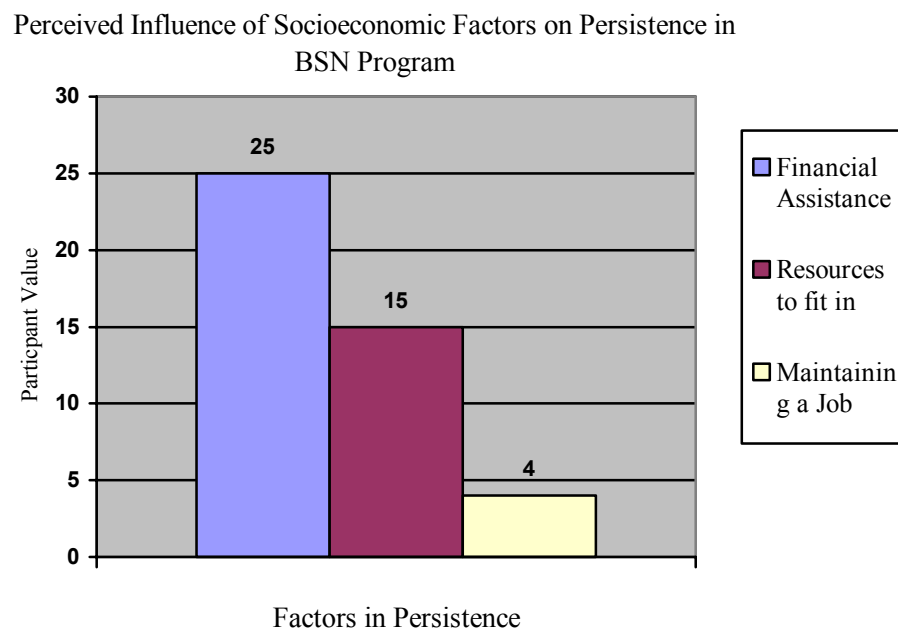
The three socioeconomic themes were clustered in a *socioeconomic* category for discussion in the focus group:

#### Themes Relating to Socioeconomic Factors Leading to Retention

- The influence of maintaining a job while in school
- Financial assistance: scholarships, grants, and loans
- Feeling as though you had the resources to fit in

Using the Individual Ranking Tool for Socioeconomic Factors on Retention ( Figure K5 in Appendix K) with the same scale of -5 (an extreme barrier to persistence and graduation from the BSN program) to +5 (a very strong asset in the persistence and graduation from the BSN program) the group scored the importance of these factors on their retention and graduation. Figure 2: The Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Academic Persistence depicts how the group ranked these socioeconomic factors from most to least important: (a) receiving financial assistance, (b) feeling as though they had the financial resources to fit in, and (c) maintaining a job while in school.

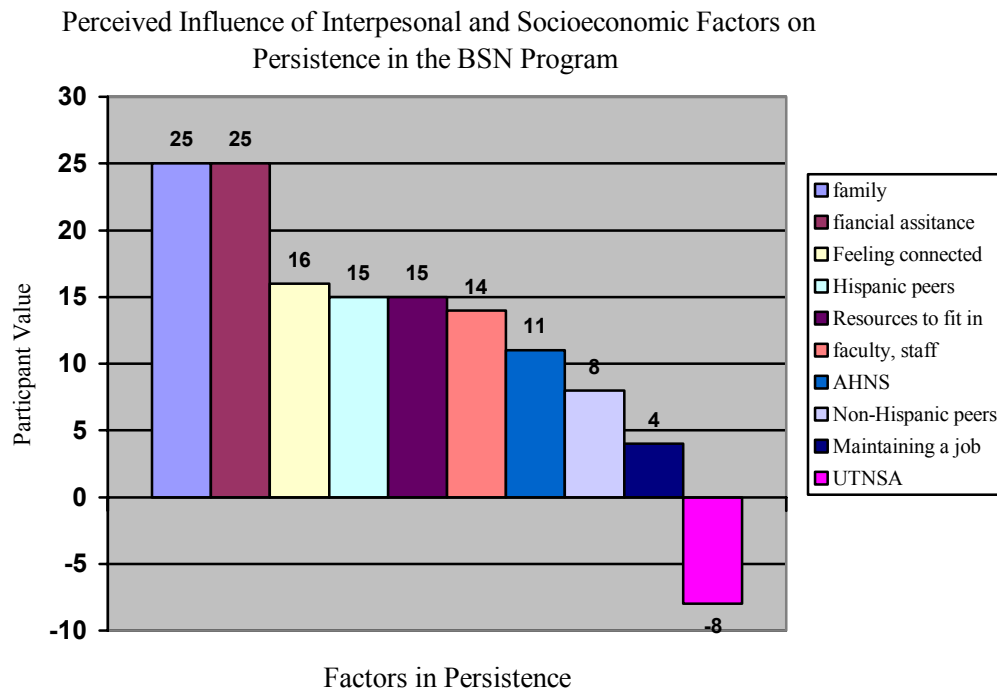
Figure 2



As with the interpersonal factors, the ranking of the socioeconomic factors was consistent with the individual interviews and the written questionnaire. Obtaining sufficient financial assistance is paramount to the retention and graduation of these participants from the BSN program. However, ongoing concern regarding obtaining adequate funding for day-to-day living expenses was a continuous theme in all sources of data in this study. The category, *having the resources to fit in* was important to the participants and they included such things as having dependable transportation and computers at home.

Figure 3 depicts the perceived strength of all ten factors discussed and ranked in the focus group.

Figure 3



In conclusion, the data from the individual interviews, written questionnaire and focus group indicate the strong influence of three factors on retention and graduation from the BSN program: (a) perceptions of feeling cared for, respected, (b) maintaining formal and informal relationships with other Hispanic/Latinas and (c) receiving adequate financial support. The deductive process of constructing hypotheses about relationship of these factors and consequent theory building follows in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

### Introduction

The interpretation process of a qualitative study involves making inferences and ultimately imposing meaning on the descriptive data. The issues of objectivity, validity, and bias all become paramount as the data is filtered through the constructed reality of the researcher. Delgado-Gaitan urges the examination of how the value system of the researcher influences the inquiry and notes, “to counter our own ignorance and biases as researchers, we must integrate into our research rigorous and systematic joint analysis with our participants”(Delgado-Gaitan, 1993 p. 409).

Participants were involved in numerous ways throughout this study: in the generation of data, collaboration in the construction of themes, and ultimately by ranking the themes as to their importance regarding the central questions of the research. In addition to the participants’ co-construction of knowledge, several others served as consultants and advisors throughout the study: a Hispanic nurse with a Ph.D. in nursing examined the data and served as a consultant, a doctoral candidate who was also the director of the Freshman Interest Group Program at the University of Texas at Austin served as a peer reviewer for the sections of the

study that dealt with retention issues, and a faculty advisor with research expertise in bicultural education served as a guide throughout the entire process. This ongoing collaboration from multiple sources was an attempt to reduce in some measure the inevitable bias of the researcher in generating and interpreting the data.

The findings of this study were collected and analyzed in light of the guiding question: What are the institutional factors that influence the persistence and graduation of Latinas from a BSN program? The participants in this study overwhelmingly and repeatedly emphasized two factors as central to their persistence and graduation from the BSN program: family emotional support and financial assistance. Secondly, factors that reflected caring relationships with peers, faculty, and staff members in the institution that fostered the retention of their bicultural orientation and improved their access and successful utilization of institutional programs and resources were important in their retention and graduation.

It is difficult to account for these findings in light of the traditional retention and departure theories that highlight the role of the institution: its programs, policies, and curriculum and the students' ability to integrate or assimilate to the culture of the university (Tinto, 1993). For instance the

participants frequently described feeling isolated and lonely within the institution, they shunned traditional involvement in campus activities such as participation in organized groups and programs and living arrangements; yet reported feeling integrated within the campus community with a sense of belonging. They had numerous descriptions of holding values different than the majority students in terms of their perception of the value of work, importance of material possessions, assertiveness and competition as learning styles; however this did not result in incongruence and departure as Tinto (1993) hypothesized. Thus the findings of this study require the exploration and interpretation of the data be grounded in theories that explain social and academic integration from a wider lens than the traditional explanation of internal institutional factors that lead to retention and graduation, to include the personal qualities of the individual, the importance of culture and language, and external factors such as employment, finances, and family support.

The complexity and nature of the research question demanded that culture, gender, and ethnic considerations be paramount in the analysis. Accordingly, a theoretical framework that included aspects of both feminist and critical race theories was used to analyze the findings. Caring theory from the feminist perspective is useful in exploring the repeated themes of interpersonal relationships that saturate the data and a bicultural orientation helps to explicate

the importance of remaining connected to ones' cultural roots. It is noteworthy that while the original research question was couched in terms of institutional programs and policies, the participants overwhelmingly described their experiences and perceptions in relational terms, that is their relationships with people: people in the institution, people who administer the programs, peers, and their family members. Thus the relational aspects of these theoretical frameworks were accentuated in the analysis. These combined perspectives help to explain the academic success of these participants.

#### Caring as a Theoretical Foundation for Institutional Support

The findings of this study are consistent with the vast body of research that demonstrates the importance of caring relationships to the academic achievement of the student (Cole & Griffin, 1987; Nestmann & Hurrelman, 1994; Noddings, 1992). Moreover scholars who have focused on the academic achievement of Hispanic/Latino students, have clearly demonstrated that institutional programs and policies designed to facilitate the educational experiences of all students, including minority students, best occur in the context of authentic caring and nurturing relationships, rather than in a mechanical or impersonal manner. (Stanton-Salazar et al., 1996; Trueba, 1998; Valenzuela,



1999). However, the caring and relational aspects of institutional support are complex and may be compromised when the institutional agent, that is those administering or delivering the programs or curriculum, do not share the same culture and language as the students.

The notion of caring relationships and education are intricately interwoven in the Hispanic culture and language. *Educación* in the Spanish culture is primarily embedded in the nurturing relationship of the family. As a social construct, *educación* includes moral and ethical aspects in the educational process (Reese, Balzano, Gallimore, & Goldenberg, 1991). Valenzuela (1999) notes that the term *educación* incorporates the foundation of all learning in that it includes the family's role to teach moral, social, and personal responsibility. "Though inclusive of formal and academic training, *educación* additionally refers to competence in the social world, wherein one respects the dignity and individuality of others" (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 23). Thus Valenzuela concludes that *educación* is both the means and the end to academic achievement and is characterized by respect and authentic caring.

Perceptions of feeling cared for and respected were themes that permeated the data of this study. Using the individual ranking tools (Appendices J and K), the participants ranked caring, feeling connected and cared for within the institution as an important factor in their retention. (See Table M2: Perceptions of

the Influence of Interpersonal and Socioeconomic Factors on Persistence in the BSN Program in Appendix M). Feeling cared for and respected were necessary ingredients in the participants' ability to form meaningful relationships and participate fully in institutional programs and services such as: tutoring, mentoring, student advisement, financial assistance packages, various aspects of the curriculum, and their classroom experiences. Also themes of caring were central to the participants' evaluations of the relationships with peers, faculty, and staff in terms of the helpfulness of the relationship and their ability to perceive a connection that facilitated their persistence in the BSN program.

Caring theorists distinguish types of caring frequently found in educational institutions. *Authentic* caring is characterized by nurturing relationships that value relationships and collaboration; while aesthetic caring is characterized by attention to things and ideas (Noddings, 1984, 1993). In numerous studies regarding relationships, institutional factors, and the phenomena of caring, feminist researchers have found that authentic caring is superior in supporting academic achievement to the more mechanical, impersonal aesthetic caring (Collins, 1990; Goldstein, 1999; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Noddings, 1984, 1992; Valenzuela, 1999). In fact some critical theorists, posit that aesthetic caring may actually detract or impede the academic success of minority students with the implementation of curriculum, programs and policies, which marginalize

their ethnicity, culture, and language. (Darder, 1991; Spring, 2001; Webb-Dempsey, Wilson, Corbett, & Mordecai-Phillips, 1996).

It was noted that the participants in this particular study described an absence of authentic caring in the pre-professional classes that had several hundred students. In these large settings it was difficult to establish the relational qualities that are the hallmark of authentic caring, that is nurturing relationships that individualize the educational strategies. The lack of a caring relationship was most frequently reflected in comments about not being known by name, not knowing the professor, and not feeling connected or establishing relationships with the peers in the class. Conversely, when attending classes in the School of Nursing, the smaller class sizes enhanced the opportunities to create and maintain personal relationships in which the participants felt known, cared for, and respected.

#### Biculturalism as a Theoretical Foundation for Institutional Support

Several scholars have used the metaphorical term *border crossings* to represent the psychological, linguistic, social, and cognitive fluidity of moving between cultures freely, being in both without sacrificing one's native culture (Anzaldúa, 1987; Trueba, 2002) Early views purported that acculturation was

essentially a linear and one-dimensional process in which the immigrant or non-majority culture relinquished its defining characteristics and adopted those of the dominant group (Banks, 1999; Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980). More recent views have included the notion of biculturalism, that is that acculturation involves a complex process in which an individual maintains some values and attachment to the culture of origin, but modifies others to accommodate to the host culture, resulting in the ability to function in both cultures (Banks, 1999; Suarez & Fowers, 1997). Current work in the area of biculturalism is challenging the deficit models that have stereotypically labeled non-dominant cultures and languages as liabilities to academic achievement (Valencia, 1999) by reframing biculturalism as an asset and “crucial for success in a modern diversified society” (Trueba, 2002, p. 7).

All of the participants in this study were simultaneously and actively involved in the Anglo and Hispanic cultures while enrolled in the BSN program. Sánchez and Fernández (1993) found a decrease in acculturation stress with Hispanic undergraduates who maintained a bicultural orientation, that is retention of the Hispanic/Latino ethnicity as well as the simultaneous integration into the predominantly White institution. Several of the participants in this study described being told by high school teachers, peers, and family that they were coming to a “White campus”; however they were not dissuaded and anticipated

the hurdles they would face in pursuing their BSN on this campus. They continued their relationships with their Hispanic families and communities while forming supportive relationships with Anglo peers and institutional agents that contributed to their academic and social integration on the predominantly White campus.

Numerous scholars have found that biculturalism enhances academic success and social adjustment in immigrant and ethnic/racial minority children and youth (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994; Stanton-Salazar et al., 1996; Trueba, 1998). Maintaining close connections to the family, the culture, and the sociocultural community has been demonstrated to be particularly predictive of academic achievement in Hispanic youth (Delgado & Trueba, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1987; Trueba, 1998, 1999). Conversely, the academic skills seem to deteriorate if immigrant youth are separated from their language and culture (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995a; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 1995b; Trueba, 1998). The participants in this study described spontaneously forming studying group that were comprised of other Hispanics; in these groups they reported feeling *safe, secure, connected* and thus were able to help each other learn the material and prepare for examinations, without fear of being labeled inadequate, “lazy or dumb”.

There is an emerging body of literature that demonstrates a bicultural orientation facilitates resilience and ultimately improves the success in school of minority students (Buriel, 1984; Gibson & Obgu, 1991; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Stanton-Salazar (1997; 2001) has developed a network analytic model that includes constructs of resilience, hardiness, and help-seeking behaviors as integrated aspects of maintaining a bicultural stance while being underrepresented in a dominant institution. These constructs are relevant to the interpretation of the data in this study and are woven throughout the analysis.

Resiliency is an important characteristic in the acculturation process. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) define resiliency as, “ a set of inner resources, social competencies, and cultural strategies that permit individuals to not only survive, recover, or even thrive after stressful events, but also to draw from the experience to enhance subsequent functioning” (p. 229). The hardiness model moves beyond the individualistic exercise of determinism; in that it includes support from others that may actually moderate or eliminate the effects of stress by altering one’s perception of the stressor (Wiebe, 1991). Research on academically successful minority youth suggests that the ability to manage conflict inherent in bicultural worlds and the ability to develop a supportive network are critical elements in the formation of resiliency and hardiness (Jarrett, 1995; Valenzuela, 1999).

The ability to recognize that one needs help and a basic belief that others will provide help are the integral ingredients of help-seeking behaviors. Stanton-Salazar & Spina, (2000) argue that in addition to early attachment experiences with caregivers, cultural norms, and social relationships operating in various institutions also play an important role in the development of help-seeking behaviors. It becomes vital to the socialization process for non-dominant students to acquire help-seeking skills so that they can connect with key persons in institutional settings (institutional agents) that can provide information, assistance, and “de-code” or decipher institutional inexplicit norms (Delpit, 1995; Spina, 1998; Spina & Tai, 1998). Stanton-Salazar (2001) posits that when utilized in a supportive network, help-seeking behaviors can assist the minority student to overcome institutional barriers, stimulate participation in multiple community and institutional programs, and strengthen social relationships to access institutional support. Both the willingness and reluctance to ask for help and the personal qualities of resilience and hardiness were important factors in the participants’ ability to access support embedded in institutional programs in this study.

The remainder of this chapter explores the following relevant findings: (a) personal characteristics of the participants, (b) the influence of relationships with institutional agents as a means of accessing institutional support, and (c) the influence of finances and financial support upon retention and graduation.

Interspersed throughout these categories are the themes of the importance of caring relationships and bicultural border crossings. The concluding section of the chapter addresses the construction of a *working hypothesis* that explores the strength and relationships among the relevant themes in the findings (Y. Lincoln & E. Guba, 1985 p. 124). Attempts are made throughout this interpretative process to avoid simplistic linear causal relationships and to view the data as a representation of complex human interactions that are sociohistorically constructed realities of both the researcher and the participants.

#### Analysis of Emergent Themes Related to Current Theory

##### *Personal Characteristics Of The Participants*

Fundamental to a discussion of participants' utilization of institutional support systems within the university is the importance of the personal qualities or characteristics of the participants. As in Gándara's (1995) study with high achieving Latinas, the participants in this study described themselves as belonging to two cultures (bicultural), receiving significant family support, were hard-working, and committed to completing their BSN degree. These characteristics fostered the construction of self-identity that was resilient, motivated, and



determined, thus directly impacting their initiation and persistence in establishing supportive relationships and accessing institutional support throughout their participation in the BSN program.

### *Bicultural Orientation*

The participants in this study began their bicultural orientation long before they were admitted to the university. They all came from homes and communities that were rooted and engaged in the Hispanic culture, language, and customs. Furthermore, their experiences in school provided them with significant exposure and opportunities to develop competence to function successfully in the Anglo culture. Nearly all of the participants in this study were enrolled in college preparatory courses when they were in high school. As was true in Gándara's study (1995), this tracking into college preparatory classes, "*cocooned* them with higher achieving peers and exposed them to information necessary for getting ahead in the system" (p. 70). Thus it was early in their education that these participants had opportunities to acculturate, that is to become more familiar with the Anglo culture, specifically in terms of competition and establishing relationships with authority figures.

However being a Latina in a college-preparatory track posed some

difficulties and fostered resilience and hardiness in the study group. The participants described themselves as underrepresented in the college-preparatory classes, and in some cases perceived that they had to sever ties with Hispanic friends. Furthermore some of the participants perceived stigmatization both from their White peers as well as their Hispanic peers who accused them of “trying to act White” because of their academic excellence. These difficulties strengthened their resolve to go to college and graduate.

Once admitted to the university, the participants continued their bicultural orientation. Studies have demonstrated that Hispanic college students have a high incidence of bicultural orientation. In a study of 372 Hispanic undergraduates from 4 institutions, Torres (1999) found 71% were either bicultural or primarily Anglo in their cultural orientation. Suarez and Fowers (1997) found that 67% of the 138 Hispanic college students in their study identified themselves as bicultural, and that this dual cultural orientation decreased perceptions of loneliness and alienation among Hispanic college students. Furthermore, in a study with 244 undergraduate Latinas attending a 4-year public university, Gomez and Fassinger (1994) found that the more bicultural an individual, the wider her range of achieving styles and that perceptions of being similar to one’s family, that is continuing to share Hispanic culture and values, not only enhanced

bicultural identity, but also led to perceptions of well-being, feelings of belonging and reduced stress.

The data from this study demonstrate that the participants had a high degree of engagement in both the Hispanic and Anglo cultures while they were BSN students. Maintenance of the Hispanic part of their bicultural orientation primarily came from frequent interactions with their Hispanic families, establishing a significant academic and social support group among Hispanic peers, as well as socializing with Hispanic friends. However, this ongoing participation in Hispanic culture did not preclude successful and meaningful relationships and support from other ethnic/racial minority and majority peers, or establishing supportive relationships with non-Hispanic institutional agents. While maintaining a bicultural orientation may increase achieving styles and add to resiliency, it does not come without some emotional and social price. Selena commented on the energy her bicultural orientation required noting that, “sometimes at the end of the week, I am just tired of living in the Anglo world and just hang with my Hispanic friends”.

### *Family Support*

Constant throughout the individual interviews, the written questionnaires, and the focus group were the unequivocal responses concerning the importance of the emotional support of the family to their retention and graduation from the BSN program. Family support received the highest possible cumulative rank in the focus group of 25. (See Table M2: Perceptions of The Importance of Interpersonal and Socioeconomic Factors in Persistence in the BSN Program, Appendix M). The findings of this study as well as nearly every study done on factors that influence Hispanic student retention, indicate that the family's support and encouragement are paramount (Gándara, 1982, 1995; Hernandez, 2000; Rodriguez et al., 2000). Interestingly, unlike many of their Anglo peers, family support did not take the form of financial support or encouragement from personal experience, but rather was verbal encouragement by instilling the value of education and encouraging the participants to work hard to achieve their goals. Only one of the participants received any financial support from her family, and most of the participants were the first in their family to attend college. Nonetheless, every participant included *family* as part of her answer to the written questionnaire item, "Who or what was most helpful to you in achieving your

BSN”. These findings were very similar to Gándara’s (1995) high-achieving Latinas.

The data in this study overwhelmingly confirm not only the importance of family support to pursue education, but also the importance for Hispanic/Latina college students to maintain a continued connection to their family and culture while they pursue a college education. *Familialism* is a significant value of Hispanic culture, incorporating a strong identification with one’s nuclear and extended family. Marín and Marín (1991) note that this value consists of “strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family” (p. 13). The participants in this study repeatedly cited distance from their family and community as a source of difficulty in persistence at the large university. The mean distance from the university to the participants home was 285 miles. Even though they worked and carried a full-time course load, they frequently commuted home. The participants attributed their frequent trips home to “missing their family, friends, and community”. One graduate commented,

I didn’t have much money. I couldn’t afford a car, or lots of money to spend going out which was probably very, very helpful. I had to save my money on things that were important like food and my long distance bill to call my sisters.

Several of the participants described working long hours and being very frugal with their money to buy a car so they could go to work off campus and

have transportation home to see their families. Remaining connected to their family and culture provided relational and cultural continuity. As one participant succinctly stated, “My family reminded me where I came from”.

### *Connection to Hispanic Peers*

Consistent with other research findings, the data of this study support the notion that culturally consistent social support is integral to successful persistence of the Latina student in the BSN program. The bonds that were formed with these peers fostered a resiliency and bolstered the determination of the Latinas to persist even in the face of discouragement. Stanton-Salazar and Spina (2000) describe this cultural affiliation with one’s peers as an important ingredient in resiliency. “Successful transitions require simultaneous participation in multiple sociocultural worlds and institutional domains, where opportunities exist for the development of social relationships with various agents – relations geared to the tailored provision of key forms of social and institutional support” (Stanton-Salazar & Spina, 2000, p. 241).

Researchers have demonstrated that the maintenance of a bicultural identity by participation in ethnically oriented support networks has a positive

influence upon Latinas' retention and graduation from college (Buriel, 1984; Capello, 1994; Gomez & Fassinger, 1994). Arellano and Padilla (1996) found that a strong affiliation with Latino peers fostered the resiliency and invulnerability to stressors associated with attending a highly competitive and private university. In a national, longitudinal study of the Latino students Hurtado, Carter and Spuler (1996) found peer relationships were the most helpful during the transition to college in the freshman year. Furthermore they found that it was "imperative" for Latinos to maintain their cultural ties by formal and informal relationships with other Hispanic/Latinos on campus and in the community. In a study with 357 undergraduate Chicanas Gloria (1997) found that Hispanic friends as well as family provided cultural support that was integral to academic persistence. Capello (1994) urges the implementation of Latina support groups as a means for Latinas to explore their bicultural identity and generate coping strategies for difficulties they encounter in college. Hernandez (2000) found that maintaining relationships with other Latinos enhanced college retention by providing access to role models and mentors.

The participants in this study reported, "feeling safe", "cared for", and "connected" to others who understood their background and culture. Furthermore, this strong cultural support among Latina BSN students is consistent with research findings that establish the significance of a cultural network for minority

students as a means to strengthen resiliency, overcome institutional barriers, and enhance individual interpersonal skills necessary to *decode* tacit rules that are a part of a *hidden curriculum* (Delpit, 1995; Spina, 1998; Spina & Tai, 1998). These ongoing ties with Hispanic peers, whether through formal or informal relationships served as a cultural connection, promoted bicultural resilience, provided a context for caring relationships, and ultimately were a central factor in their persistence in the BSN program.

#### *Work Ethic and Determination*

Each participant described entering the BSN program with a clear and strong determination to complete the program, bolstered by a hard-work ethic, and a willingness to make financial and social sacrifices to ensure her success. The self-identity of being a “hard worker” was a consistent finding in all three sources of data: the individual interviews, written questionnaire, and focus group discussion. When asked on a written questionnaire (Appendix G) to select three words that described them as students, *every participant* included words such as “hard-worker, diligent, persistent, and determined”.



One of the attributes that stood out for the researcher in the individual interviews was the participants' strong work ethic and emotional maturity. They uniformly spoke of rigorous work habits: working long hours both in school and at outside employment and deliberately avoiding social situations in order to study more. Additionally they described a self-imposed discipline that included rigid time and financial management strategies. Sally came to the university as a freshman at the age of 17 and reported, "right from the beginning I came here knowing I had to pass these classes. I never missed a class. So I studied all day, every day, and I made all A's the first semester". Alex also described this *no-nonsense* approach to her schoolwork: "I came over here with my mind on studying...I'm struggling, but I'm making it". Another graduate recalled, "I never missed a class my first two years, I thought ' I have a scholarship and someone is helping to pay for this – I owe it to them and to me to show up' ". Furthermore, the employed participants frequently described their need to maintain a job while in school as a "good thing" and portrayed additional work as something they took pride in and valued because as Norma commented, "working hard and having a job while I was in school made me appreciate my education".

Gándara (1995) found in her study of 50 high achieving Latinas that hard work and determination were first modeled and valued in the family. Nearly every participant in this study described seeing her parent(s) work hard to support the

family, many having more than one job at a time. Because the parents worked outside the home, the participants frequently assumed significant household responsibilities including caretaking of younger siblings. Thus for these Latinas, training in responsibility and independent behaviors was shaped by the parent(s)' modeling of a strong work ethic, internalized and then applied in their scholastic endeavors.

A final characteristic that contributed to the ability of the participants to remain focused on their goal of completing a BSN program, and maintain their responsibilities at work and school was the ability to keep distractions to a minimum. One of the strategies the participants described as a useful coping mechanism assisting them in their academic persistence was the avoidance of conflict. They repeatedly described ignoring controversies and disagreements that occurred predominantly with their Anglo peers or faculty/staff members. Both in the individual interviews and the focus group, the sentiment prevailed that by avoiding conflict they were able to maintain their focus on their work in school and in their employment as well as their determination to complete their education.

*Simpatía* is a value of the Hispanic culture that highlights the smooth and pleasant social relationships, emphasizing empathy for others. "A person with *simpatía* behaves with dignity and respect toward others and strives to achieve

harmony in interpersonal relations” (Marín & Marín, 1991 p. 12). When the participants described situations involving interpersonal conflict or perceptions of being marginalized in some way, they regarded it as a “distraction”, requiring more time or energy than they were willing to give it. Thus in order to move toward their goal of graduation, several participants described using avoidance as a coping strategy to keep from exacerbating the conflict. A graduate commented, “when negative things happened to me here, well, I tried not to think about it and just go on”. In describing a conflict with a professor in which she felt demeaned, another participant noted, “ Yes, it chips away at your self-esteem, but I grow from it...it’s [perceived discrimination] just a fact of life, you’ve dealt with it all the way through...you just go on”. However it is worth noting that some participants felt that their preference to avoid conflict was misunderstood by dominant peers or faculty as passivity or acceptance.

### *The Influence of Relationships with Institutional Agents*

The pervasive finding of this study was the central impact of interpersonal relationships upon the student’s ability to connect with others as a means of achieving social and academic integration as they pursued a BSN degree. Access to institutional support depended on the ability of the student to engage in help-

seeking behaviors and have access to persons who can administer, negotiate or guide the individual in finding the institutional support needed. In their Network Orientation model, Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) have termed these individuals, *institutional agents*. Institutional agents are those individuals who because of their positions of power and privilege in the social network and institution, “have both the capacity and commitment to either directly provide or negotiate the institutional resources, support, and opportunities for others” (Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995 p.117). In their study Stanton-Salazar and Dornbusch (1995) defined institutional agents as faculty members, staff, mentors, or advanced peers who delivered tangible resources such as linking relevant institutional resources and opportunities with the students. Additionally these institutional agents established relationships that were individualized, genuinely supportive, and caring. Summarizing the complex interactions of implementing institutional support, Stanton-Salazar et al. (1996) conclude it is the “direct, personal, social relationships are the most important channel” (p. 102).

Gilligan (1995) argues that the feminist ethic of care begins with human connections and is fundamental to human life. “Care speaks to the dissociations which lead people to abandon themselves and others; by not speaking, not listening, not knowing, not seeing, not caring and ultimately not feeling by numbing themselves or steeling themselves against the vibrations and resonances

which characterize and connect the world” (Gilligan, 1995 p. 125). Implementing a caring construct can assist Anglo institutional agents to cross the cultural borders and build caring relationships with minority students who may otherwise struggle in isolation. Goldstein (1999) suggests that practicing a caring paradigm can facilitate a cross-cultural connection, specifically in situations with white faculty and students of color, that is useful to the students’ intellectual growth and development.

Institutional agents are central in providing assistance to minority students as they develop social capital to function successfully in the institution. *Social capital* is a term frequently found in the literature describing the interaction of ethnicity, culture or race in the acquisition of knowledge. (Coleman, 1988; Stanton-Salazar, 2001; Stanton-Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995). Social capital connotes the exchange of resources to gain an objectives that could not be met individually. In the context of social capital in education, Valenzuela (1999) reflects, “academic achievement is best understood not as an individual attribute but as a collective process” (p. 27).

According to the social capital model, individuals must have knowledgeable persons teach them the tacit rules of what it takes to be successful in the institution and coach them in appropriate responses. Because ethnic minority students may be at a disadvantage in understanding some of the cultural

disparate aspects of predominantly White institutions, it becomes important that they have institutional agents to assist them in gaining this social capital. Thus by accumulating social capital one is able to access socially valued resources and opportunities.

The most common institutional agents named by participants were faculty members and staff who gave career guidance, served as mentors, and assisted with financial aid applications. Additionally the librarian who assisted with computer skills and acquisition of reference materials was cited as providing institutional support along with the Learning Enhancement Coordinator who provided tutoring services and conducted supportive classes such as time management, stress management and test-taking skill programs. It is significant that several participants credited their academic advisor with encouraging them to apply for the Disadvantaged Scholarship. This is an excellent example of the function of *decoding* and providing social capital to understand the system because none of the participants in this study considered themselves *disadvantaged* and several would not have applied for this scholarship were it not for the encouragement of their advisor.

Advanced peers were also considered institutional agents in that they provided valuable information regarding strategies to access services, formal and informal mentoring and tutoring assistance, and informal guidance in coping

strategies. All of the peers named by participants in this study that provided such services were Hispanic nursing students. Through the Association of Hispanic Nursing Students (AHNS) many students formed relationships in which that could give and receive this type of support. Sarah the co-founder and first president of AHNS describes this relationship:

Being in AHNS was good because it was a great opportunity to just meet other students who were just starting like I did, and I could share with them what I had learned. I think that was helpful because I would have appreciated someone telling me when I was pre-nursing how nursing school was going to be, especially from another Hispanic student with similar background. It was like, ‘Oh look, they did it, I can do that’ or these are the teachers I should take or how to work and go to school at the same time.

Another graduate commented:

Being in AHNS helped me feel at home, it provided me access to other Hispanics, like S1 and S2 students. I asked one S2 student about classes, what teachers did she know, what to expect and things like that. I really helped a lot.

The terms *interactive scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), *social scaffolding* (Stanton-Salazar et al., 1996), and functioning in the *Zone of Proximal Development* (Cole & Griffin, 1987; Vygotsky, 1986) have been applied to this supportive learning of a more capable, advanced, or knowledgeable person instructing or supporting a less knowledgeable person. Vygotsky (1978) defined the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as “the distance between the actual

developmental level and determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined thought problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Consequently the ZPD becomes that space where learners move from gaining knowledge and skill with assistance, to independent functioning. Thus the advanced Hispanic students were able to act as institutional agents, providing caring social scaffolding within a bicultural orientation.

### *The Influence of Finances and Financial Assistance*

Consistent with the vast body of literature, (Muñoz, 1986; Nora et al., 1987; Olivas, 1986b; Vásquez, 1996) this study found finances, financial concerns, and financial assistance to be vital to the retention and graduation of these participants from the BSN program. The participants in the focus group awarded maximum ranking to the factors of *receiving financial assistance* along with *family support* as the vital aspects in their retention (Appendix M). Although all of the participants in the focus group were employed while they were full-time students, they all agreed that they “would not have been able to attend college” without financial assistance. Furthermore the financial assistance package that



was offered to the participants was a primary factor in their selection of the university.

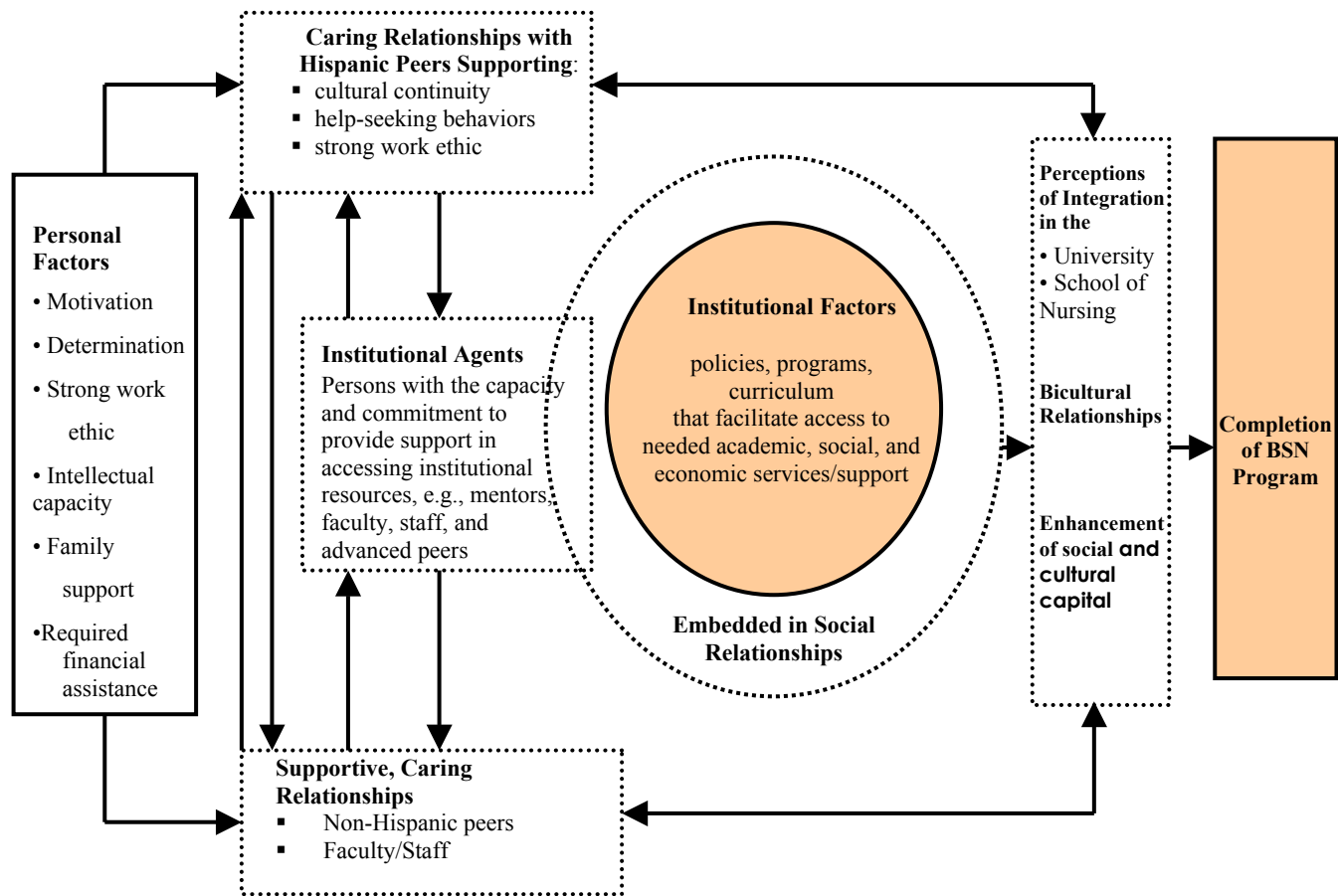
The participants were able to maintain employment while attending the BSN program as full-time students, however they were ambivalent about its influence to their retention, ranking it with a modest score of 4. Although the participants described themselves as careful with money, they uniformly felt as though they had enough money to fit it. When probed as to what this meant, they did not interpret their financial situation to be deprived in any way, but rather described their ability to purchase transportation, have the money to call home, buy books, and a computer as the primary ways in which their employment assisted them to have enough money to fit into their college life.

### Working Hypothesis

The epistemological intent of this study was to gain an understanding of the meaning Hispanic/Latinas gave to their experiences in pursuing a BSN degree from a large predominantly White institution. Having explored their experiences, analyzed the data, collaborated with the participants in the construction of themes, the question remains: what does this mean? Are these results credible and is there anything in these data that can be transferred to other settings?

A dilemma of qualitative analysis lies in attempting to draw conclusions beyond the description of the data. Lincoln and Guba (1985) give substantial attention to the issues of *generalizability* or *transferability* concluding that, “at best only working hypotheses may be abstracted, the transferability of which is an empirical matter depending on the degree of similarity between sending and receiving context” (p. 297). Patton (2002) describes the tension between describing the phenomenon, allowing the interdependence of the data to reflect the complexity of human behavior with a need for order and meaning-making, but cautions, “simple statements of linear relationships may be more distorting than illuminating” (p. 480). Figure 4 presents a model in a schematic form of the working hypothesis. It is important to stress that although laid out in a linear fashion, this model represents intersecting loops and interdependent relationships within the human experience. Rather than attempting to produce a truth statement or create firm causal relationships, the following description of the working hypothesis is just that, an interpretation of the researcher to offer some explanation and extrapolate lessons. However it is noteworthy that the ranking of the themes was done by the participants and became the basis for the generation of the model.

Figure 3: Working Model of Hispanic/Latina Student Nurse Perceptions of Institutional Factors that Influence Retention and Completion of a BSN Program



### *Personal Factors*

It is important to locate the particular characteristics of the participants within the discussion of the institutional factors that fostered or impeded their persistence and graduation from the BSN program. The participants in this study closely resembled the subjects in Gandará's (1995) work with high-achieving Latinas with respect to their bicultural orientation, motivation, determination, hard-work ethic and intellectual capacity. These factors prepared and sustained the participants during their college experiences, influenced their ability to initiate and maintain relationships, and access resources that were integral to their completion of the BSN program.

### *Caring Relationships*

The participants experienced caring relationships with diverse groups of individuals who were embedded in the institution including: peers, faculty, and staff. Perceiving the relationships to be genuine, authentic, and caring as well as one in which the participant was respected were important commonalities in these relationships. These relationships became bridges to access academic, financial, and the social resources necessary for successful completion of the BSN program.

### *Hispanic Peers*

The participant's ability to find and maintain relationships with Hispanic peers was central to their ability to experience cultural continuity. Because of their cultural familiarity, these friendships promoted resilience and the acquisition of new knowledge and personal growth. The ongoing formal and informal associations with other Hispanic/Latina BSN students furthered the participants' social integration by diminishing their potential for incongruence and isolation as described by Tinto (1993). Lastly these relationships with other Latinas seemed to promote a trust and self-confidence that facilitated the participants to extend beyond their cultural boundaries, form relationships with non-Hispanics, and strengthen the bicultural orientation.

### *Relationships with non-Hispanic Peers, Faculty and Staff*

Their personal attributes along with the support of Hispanic peers influenced the participants' ability to develop relationships with diverse groups within the institution where they were able to access the necessary resources and find interpersonal support to complete the BSN program. These caring

relationships became bridges to access academic, financial, and the social resources necessary for successful completion of the BSN program.

### *Institutional Agents*

Once access to institutional support was obtained by establishing an exchange of genuine concern and helpfulness, the participants were able to receive an acquire social capital, that is information, resources, and/or support that was necessary to function effectively in the institution thereby acquiring institutional knowledge. This institutional knowledge varied from academic and intellectual capital to tacit information about how to navigate in the institutional setting to gain social resources. Institutional agents were comprised of advanced peers, faculty, and staff who both had the ability and the commitment to provide a form of social scaffolding during the acquisition of these skills or resources. It was common for the participants who received this form of social support (scaffolding) to in turn, provide it for younger or less experienced peers in the form of being a friend or mentor.

Access to institutional agents was vital to acquiring institutional support vis-à-vis programs and institutional resources that were integral to academic and social integration. All of the institutional support systems were embedded in

social relationships that required the participants have a substantial bicultural orientation, and help from institutional agents to access the support and resources.

### *Integration within the Institution*

Perceptions of integration both within the university's main campus and the School of Nursing were primarily dependent upon access to other Hispanics and secondarily upon caring relationships with non-Hispanic peers, faculty, and staff. Thus unlike an assimilationist model that would seek to distance the minority student from his/her cultural roots, this model, grounded in a bicultural and caring orientation, posits that integration of Latinas is enhanced by expanding the social resources found in maintaining the primary cultural orientation and including the dominant culture as it become expedient and desirable. This holistic approach to social and academic integration allows minority students to use the cultural capital from their native culture, while being assisted by culturally similar and different persons to acquire the social, cultural, and academic capital to complete the BSN program.

## CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to deepen the understanding of the influence of various institutional programs and policies upon the retention and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas from a BSN program. The particular factors that emerged from this study as being influential in the retention and graduation of Latina BSN students were: (1) the personal characteristics of the Hispanic students that facilitated accessing institutional support: persistence, intellectual ability, and a commitment to complete the program combined with (2) the ability to secure financial assistance, (3) ongoing family emotional support while in the BSN program, (4) operating within a bicultural orientation, and (5) authentic caring relationships with other Hispanic and non-Hispanic peers, faculty and staff. While other researchers have studied the influence of some of these factors on undergraduate retention, there are no studies to date that have focused on them as they relate persistence and graduation of Latinas in a BSN program.



## Importance of the Study

The shortage of nurses to deliver healthcare in the U.S. is reaching a crisis and is compounded by the growing ethnic diversity of the U. S. population, and the unicultural aging nursing workforce. Hispanics are the fastest growing minority group in the U.S., the most underrepresented in the U. S. nursing workforce, and the most unknown as a group in terms of factors that promote academic success in a BSN program. This study contributes to the nursing and education fund of knowledge by examining institutional factors that have contributed to successful retention and graduation of Latinas in a highly competitive BSN program.

The salient findings of the study demonstrate the importance of majority faculty and staff to implement teaching and student services from a caring, respectful, individualized, and culturally sensitive perspective. While it is true that all students profit from relationships founded on these nurturing qualities, the caring and connecting qualities in relationships seemed essential to building connections for Latinas, who were underrepresented on a predominantly White campus. The data from this study demonstrate that Hispanic students will lag in seeking academic assistance in the classroom, requesting information about important students services, and joining a student organization if they perceive the

institutional agents to be uncaring, aloof, or prejudiced against Hispanics. Thus in sum, the quality of the relationship with the majority faculty, staff and peers was central for the Latina in her ability to access and utilize institutional support. Secondly, the ability to find, establish, and maintain relationships with other Hispanic BSN students was vital to both their academic and social integration, thus promoting retention and ultimately graduation.

#### Limitations of the Study

Several limitations to the present study should be considered. First, the researcher was a faculty member at the research site and served as the faculty sponsor for the Association of Hispanic Nursing Students. Although the participants were not enrolled in any classes with the researcher at the time of the study, these relationships may have influenced the participants' reporting of their experiences or the researcher's interpretation of the data.

Hispanic/Latinas are reluctant to disclose personal information (Molina & Franco, 1986), discuss conflict (Marín & Marín, 1991), and often operate from a power-distance model, being less likely than their Anglo peers to engage in informal relationships with authority figures (Marín & Marín, 1991). The combination of these factors may have further served as a filter to the data the

participants were willing to disclose in the three sources of data collection: the individual interview, written questionnaire, and focus group.

As a group, all of the participants were Mexican-American and shared several resemblances of personal characteristics and demographics, thus narrowing the exploration of divergent perspectives and experiences. Similarities of the participants included: a three-year range of age, with a mean age of 23 years, and all but one participant (a) came from academically advantaged positions in that they participated in Gifted and Talented programs, advanced placement classes, or college-preparatory tracks in middle and senior high school, (b) were all single without children, (c) were first-generation immigrants with varying degrees of bilingual ability, and (d) received financial assistance from the institution.

This qualitative study emphasized gaining an understanding of the participants' perceptions of their experiences, regarding retention and completion of a BSN program. However, in addition to describing their experiences, the participants contributed to the analysis of the data by reviewing and ranking the emergent themes. Furthermore, although the participants' commitment to completing the BSN degree was vital in their persistence and determination, it was not included as a ranked factor in their retention.

## Implications for Institutional Programs and Policies

Although the study was designed to investigate the effectiveness of institutional factors upon retention, it evolved primarily into an exploration of the influence of family support, financial assistance, and the maintenance of a bicultural orientation. Secondarily, the data indicated the importance of interpersonal relationships with those persons involved in administering institutional programs and policies. Accessibility, as well as the ability to form caring relationships with institutional agents, was integral in the creation of either bridges or barriers to the social and academic integration of the Hispanic/Latinas BSN students.

While most of the data referred to interpersonal and financial elements as retention factors, some inferences can be made from the data related to institutional programs and policies including: (a) creative and comprehensive financial assistance packages, (b) building supportive networks with the family members of Hispanic students, (c) support of culturally specific student organizations, (d) curricular and faculty/staff initiatives that promote caring relationships and foster academic and social integration for ethnic minority students, (e) mentoring programs, (f) tutoring programs and (g) the importance of creating a learning community.

### *Comprehensive Financial Assistance*

The results of this study were unequivocal in demonstrating the importance of financial assistance to the participants' completion of the BSN program. In spite of the fact that eight of the nine participants received financial assistance, they also found it necessary to obtain outside employment to support themselves and assist their families while they were in school. Creative grants and loans that provide financial support beyond tuition and books may decrease the necessity for additional employment and thus allow for more time to study and participate in extracurricular activities. Additionally healthcare organizations that would benefit from employing more baccalaureate-prepared Hispanic nurses could create loans with the stipulation that the loan could be repaid by working within the organization after graduation. Finally, creating more low-cost cooperative housing programs would reduce overall cost of obtaining a BSN degree and may increase the social integration of the Hispanic students.

Each of the participants who received the *Disadvantage Student Scholarship* described the label in a negative manner. Because none of the participants viewed themselves as *disadvantaged*, some did not apply for the scholarship, while others were confused and offended by the label. Thus descriptors of program and policies should be clear and culturally inclusive.

### *Supportive Networks With Family Members*

It was interesting to note that while all of the participants considered family support as a most helpful factor in completing the BSN program, most of them described significant ongoing family obligations while they attended college. Some of these responsibilities included: helping with family finances, assisting with younger siblings and translating for family members, repairing houses, and helping to resolve conflicts between family members. Although none of the participants in this study reported feeling burdened by these continuing responsibilities, Hispanic students may experience greater social integration while in college if a supportive information network could be established to strengthen the family's support of the student during the college experience.

The supportive network could include family visits to the campus, brochures, and videotapes designed to familiarize families with the responsibilities inherent in successful college persistence. Programs designed to invite family members to the campus to meet faculty and staff provide another dimension to the learning community. These programs can encourage family members to continue their education and form the basis for a secondary support group among family members. Additionally, a videotape or brochures could be developed for those families who were unable visit the campus: acquainting them

with the environment, interviewing faculty, administrators, staff members, and students regarding college life, and suggesting things families can do to support students while they are in school. This support information could also relate the descriptions of Hispanic family members' experiences of having a child or spouse in the BSN program, emphasizing what to expect and how to support students in the BSN program. All of these interactions: campus tours, brochures, and videotapes directed toward Hispanic families should be provided in English and Spanish.

#### *Culturally Specific Student Organizations*

The Association of Hispanic Nursing Students served an important role to the participants providing a structured organization where ethnically oriented support networks were formed. These networks provide specific information regarding Hispanic student support services and opportunities for financial assistance. Additionally these meetings provide the participants with an opportunity to interact socially and gain academic assistance by: discussing experiences in the BSN program, sharing coping strategies, and by forming study groups. This informal support within a structured organization offers

opportunities to develop leadership skills and the encouragement to enact these skills within majority organizations.

### *Curricular and Faculty Implications*

Ninety percent of the 10,000 nursing faculty members in the U.S. are White, while the Hispanic nursing faculty figures have stagnated with a 0.4% increase in nearly two decades (See Appendix C, figure C3). Thus until there is ethnic parity in nursing faculty members and administrators, majority faculty and staff must implement some strategic interventions to assist Hispanic/Latino(a)s to graduate from BSN programs and continue their academic preparation through graduate programs.

The qualitative data of this study suggest that curricular and pedagogical strategies that emphasize diverse teaching styles and culturally inclusive material may be useful in the retention and graduation of Latinas. Additionally, armed with information about interaction and learning style preferences, majority faculty can attempt to assist minority students to gain the social and academic skills necessary for successful completion of the BSN program. Specific behaviors that may be useful include: being available for small group tutorials, encouraging students to contribute to the discussion if interaction is required for a course, and attempting



to integrate the students' culture into the course content. Hispanic students will find learning activities that foster collaborative skills and group efforts more culturally congruent than competitive, individual achievement oriented activities.

A policy that seemed to create some difficulty for these participants was the scheduling of classes. Because this curriculum is sequenced in a hierarchical manner, with required classes offered once a semester, it is difficult for students to move through the program on a part-time basis. In that all but one of the participants were employed while attending school, the inflexible schedules as well as the full-time credit load created barriers in finding employment, attending to family responsibilities, and maintaining successful academic progress. Thus more flexible course schedules such as evening and weekend classes, as well as course taught through the Internet, would provide more options for students who have obligations outside of school. Furthermore, it should be noted that the participants in this study were exceptional students, products of Gifted and Talented programs or college-preparation tracks in high school; other Hispanic/Latinas with less adequate preparation, may be more successful in BSN programs that allows students to carry a reduced course load or be a part-time student.

In that nursing is a profession that is practiced in the context of collaboration with others, Hispanic students may be useful resources to majority

faculty and staff in the co-creation of diversified programs and curricula that are more accommodating to Hispanic students. Specifically, Hispanic students may be useful collaborators in the inclusion of culturally relevant material in the course content and in the processes of distributing information about student services. The inclusion of Hispanic students in the development of programs, policies, and curricula that are culturally congruent can benefit both the institution and Latinas.

Finally, administrators must provide regular continuing education programs to all faculty and staff with regard to offering student support services and developing curriculum that is culturally inclusive and that facilitates varied learning styles. Ideally Hispanic educators who can accurately address the cultural and education aspects of administering programs, development of curriculum, and culturally inclusive pedagogical styles within the BSN program should provide these programs.

### *Mentoring Programs*

Mentoring is a valuable interpersonal relationship that frequently involves the notion of social scaffolding: an experienced person entering into a caring relationship and assisting a less experienced person until he or she can function

independently. Although several of the participants thought it would have been useful, they did not participate in a mentoring program because they were “too busy: and reported, “I just did not know much about them. However, mentoring programs can facilitate both academic and social integration and thus should be encouraged with readily available information, easily accessed, should begin early in BSN students’ college experience, and continue through graduation. During the first semester Hispanic students should be connected with a both a Hispanic BSN upper-division student and faculty member who will serve as mentor. In addition to one-on-one guidance, these mentors can initiate face-to-face group sessions and Internet chat room discussions to further the mentoring process and social integration.

During the last two years of the BSN program, the Hispanic/Latina student should be encouraged to be a mentor to a younger student, and in addition to her faculty member, should be linked with a BSN graduate who is practicing nursing. This reaching back to help a younger student and stretching forward will provide a network to facilitate caring and bicultural relationships, and ultimately be helpful in retention and graduation from the BSN program.

### *Tutoring Programs*

Each academic advisor should periodically review the grades of the students and as appropriate, recommend tutoring services that include generic academic support such as writing assistance, test preparation, test-taking skills, and studying skills. Additionally each faculty member should receiving specific continuing education in strategies to individualize tutoring to particular subject matter that utilizes diverse learning styles.

Tutoring services are available for students in academic settings, but Latinas may be reticent to access these services independently. Early in the academic career of each Hispanic/Latina student, she should be linked to an ongoing tutoring group and peer tutor. The diversified approach of providing academic assistance in both a one-on-one and small group format will increase the effectiveness of the tutoring in that it will attract more students with different learning styles. Levin and Levin (1991) argue, “ a group model for the delivery of academic assistance is superior to the individualized tutorial model” (p. 326). These small study groups and tutorials can assist Latinas to translate culturally inconsistent vocabulary or concepts, thus improving their academic and social integration.

### *Creating a Learning Community*

Because of the persistent and profound underrepresentation of Hispanics in nursing and the importance of a bicultural orientation as a retention factor to Hispanic/Latina BSN students, institutional support must move beyond the walls of the university to create learning communities for Hispanic students that include the collaboration and support of the community (Taxis, 2002). These learning communities can include mentors from other parts of the campus and professional role models from the community that foster self-confidence, leadership, and strengthen the cultural network of support.

Another aspect of a learning community is the service-learning opportunities in which Hispanic BSN students form relationships and serve as role models to Hispanic youth in middle and senior high school. The participants in this study initiated such a program in which they routinely provided programs in local schools for Hispanic students with information about how to get into college, how to apply for financial assistance, and the career opportunities in nursing.

Because the family is an important part of the supportive network for Hispanic students, programs designed to invite family members to the campus to meet faculty and staff provide another dimension to the learning community.

These programs can encourage family members to continue their education and form the basis for a secondary support group among family members.

### Implications for Further Research

Further examination of the interpersonal factors embedded in the design and implementation of institutional programs will be useful in increasing nursing educators' understanding of factors that foster and impede Hispanic/Latinas' retention and graduation from BSN programs. This study only included the perceptions of successful BSN students and graduates. It is important to gain understanding of the experiences of those who departed from the program or changed their major as well. In that most Hispanic/Latinas enter nursing through the Associate Degree in nursing, it is important to determine the importance of the emergent themes in this study in the community college nursing population. Furthermore it would be useful to explore the experiences of Hispanic men in BSN programs; particularly to investigate the role of biculturalism and caring relationships as retention factors in their persistence.

Social integration that resulted from a caring and bicultural orientation emerged as an important theme. A mixed method study would be useful to quantify each of these factors as they related to retention and graduation.

Additionally it would be useful to know how important caring and bicultural connections are in academic integration. Lastly, if future studies have Anglo primary investigators, it would be helpful to have a Hispanic co-investigator to conduct the interviews.

### Summary

This qualitative study highlighted the importance of caring and bicultural affiliations within the institutional programs as a means of fostering retention and graduation from a BSN program. These factors were secondary to the ongoing support of the family and obtaining adequate financial assistance. In that there is scant research about retention factors of BSN students, future research must target the retention of this important population in the nursing profession. Furthermore institutional policies and programs must reflect research findings in effectively addressing issues of acculturation, student support services as well as curricula that is presented in a culturally congruent and respectful manner.

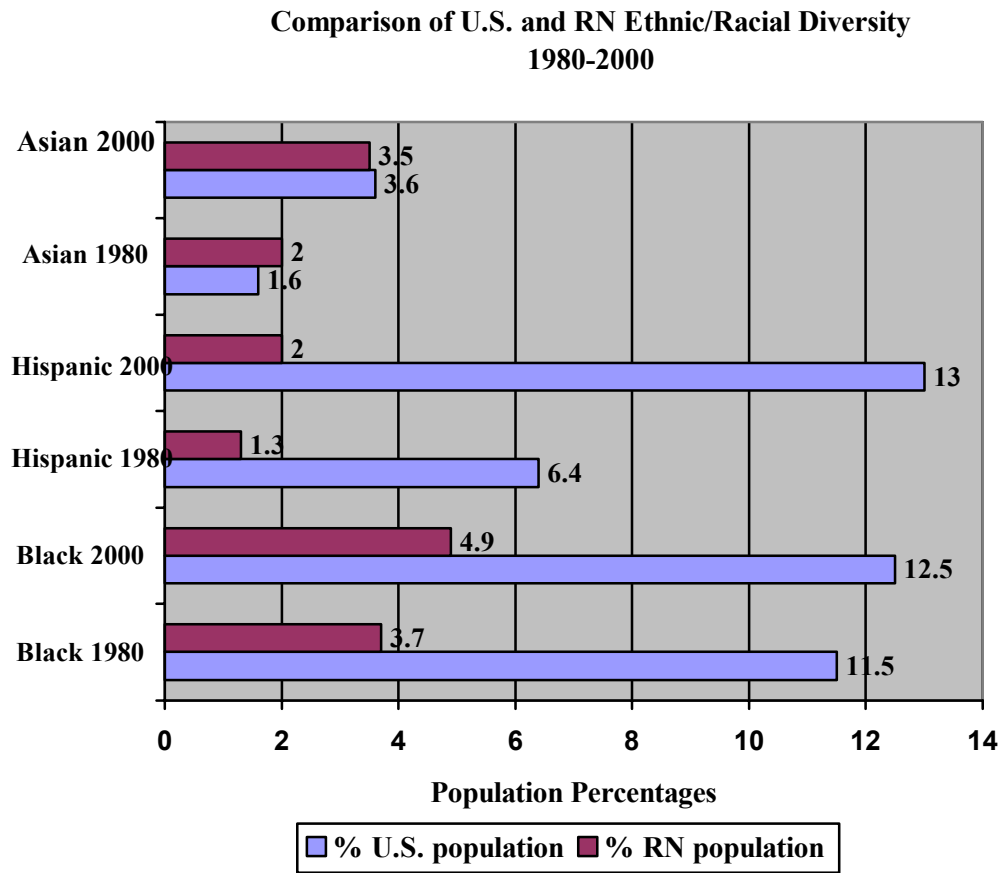
The effects of persistent and pervasive racial hegemony must be altered with the inclusion of the voices and perspectives of nurses and nursing students of color. The changes necessary in nursing education in order to retain and graduate more Latinas must be intelligent, informed, and a result of sound research. If

informed changes are made nursing education programs can become models for multicultural work environments that honor diversity, creatively work with difference, and include multiple perspectives within the discourse.



Appendix A

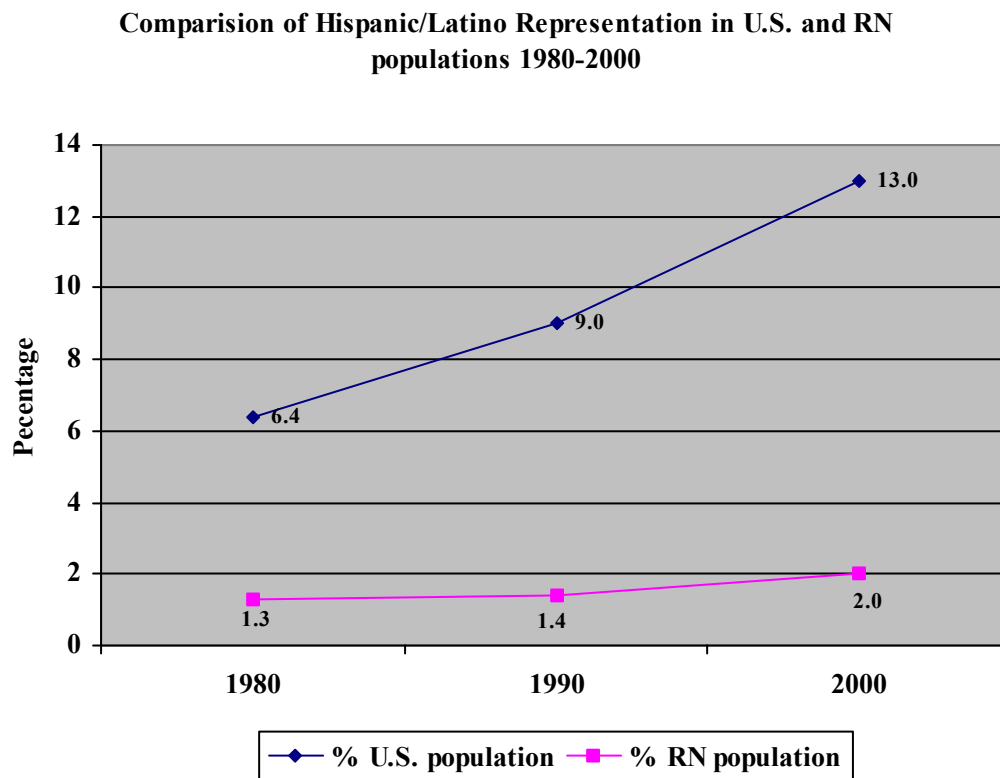
Figure A1. Comparison of the U.S. and Registered Nurse Ethnic/Racial Diversity, 1980 and 2000.



Sources: (American Nurses Association, 1982; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Professions: Division of Nursing, 2001. Census Bureau, 2001b).

## Appendix B

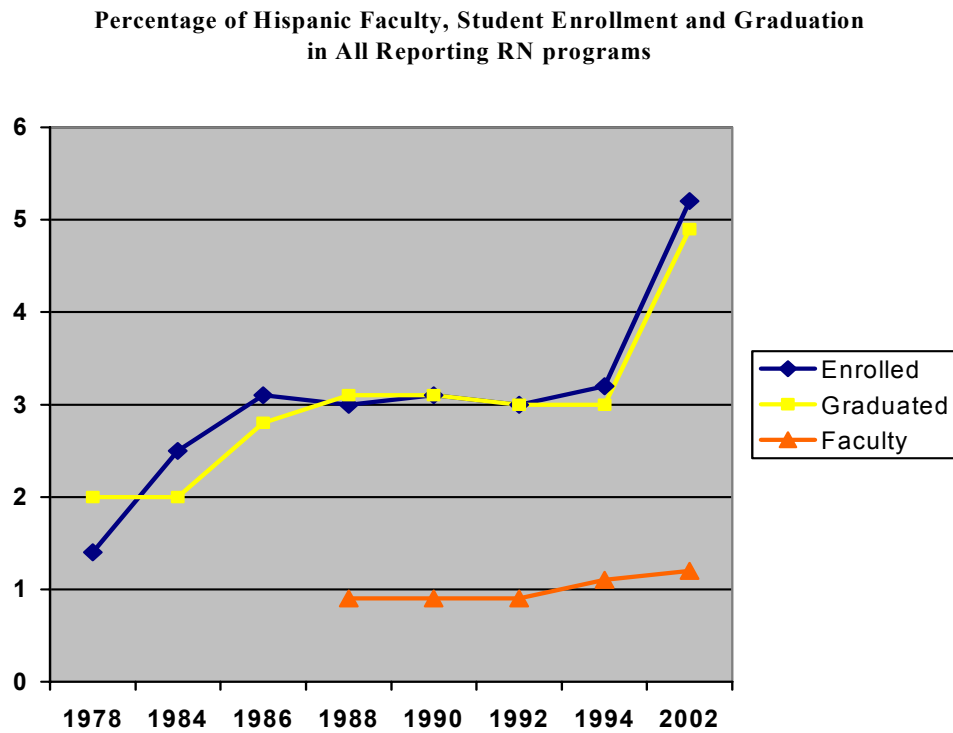
Figure B2. Comparison of Hispanic/Latino representation in the U.S. and R.N. populations, 1980-2000.



Sources: (American Nurses Association, 1982; U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Health Professions: Division of Nursing, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2001b). Used with permission of Springer Publishing, Inc. Taxis, J. C. (2002). The underrepresentation of Hispanics in nursing education: A deafening silence. *Research and Theory in nursing practice: International Journal*.

Appendix C

Figure C3. Percentage of Hispanic Faculty, Hispanic Student Enrollment and Graduation



(American Association of Colleges of Nursing, 2002; National League of Nursing, 1986, 1991)

## Appendix D

Table D1: Percentage Full-Time BSN Student Enrollment By Ethnicity (1998-2002).

	White	Hispanic	Asian	Black	Native American
<b>Spring 1999</b>					
Pre-professional n= 279	67 %	17 %	10 %	7 %	0
Professional Sequence n= 158	75 %	14 %	8 %	2 %	0
Total n= 437	71 %	14 %	9 %	5 %	0
<b>Fall 1999</b>					
Pre-professional n=303	68 %	15 %	09 %	07 %	0
Professional Sequence n= 169	75 %	14 %	08 %	02 %	0
Total n = 472	71 %	14 %	09 %	05 %	0
<b>Spring 2000</b>					
Pre-professional n= 260	68 %	15 %	10 %	07 %	0
Professional Sequence n=178	76 %	14 %	07 %	02%	0
Total n = 438	71 %	14 %	09 %	05 %	0
<b>Fall 2000</b>					
Pre-professional n=272	65 %	16 %	10 %	09 %	0
Professional Sequence n=177	77 %	11 %	07 %	07 %	0
Total n = 449	70 %	14 %	09 %	06 %	0
<b>Spring 2001</b>					
Pre-professional n= 236	63 %	17 %	11 %	09 %	0
Professional Sequence n=189	74 %	13 %	09 %	03 %	0
Total n =425	67 %	15 %	10 %	06 %	0
<b>Fall 2001</b>					
Pre-professional n= 298	63 %	16 %	13 %	06 %	0
Professional Sequence n=187	76 %	15 %	06 %	03 %	0
Total n = 485	67 %	16 %	10 %	05 %	0
<b>Spring 2002</b>					
Pre-professional n= 287	61 %	19 %	11 %	8 %	0
Professional Sequence n= 187	77 %	14 %	05 %	04 %	0
Total n = 474	67 %	17 %	8 %	06 %	0
<b>Fall 2002</b>					
Pre-professional n= =381	64 %	17 %	11 %	07 %	0
Professional Sequence n= 191	74 %	15 %	06 %	04 %	0
Total n = 576	67 %	16 %	09 %	06 %	0

\*Percentages do not add to 100 because of rounding

The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing. (1999-2002). *Undergraduate enrollment summaries*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

## Appendix E

### Script Posted on the School of Nursing Listserve to Recruit Participants

A study will be conducted this summer/fall with upper-division Hispanic/Latina upper division nursing students and recent graduates to determine the student perceptions of the institutional factors that influence the recruitment, retention and graduation of Latinas at the University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing. Participation in this study will involve a 30-60 minute audiotaped individual interview, completion of demographic information form and a 1.5 to 2.0 hour audiotaped focus group.

The information you supply will be useful in that no such information is available to date in the indexed nursing, medical or educational literature. Furthermore, there is nothing in the indexed literature regarding causes and solutions to the underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latina(o)s in nursing. Your participation may provide information that is valuable promoting the recruitment, retention and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas with a BSN.

The interviews will occur between May 15, 2002 and August 1, 2002 and the focus group will be held in September, 2002. If you are willing to participate please contact [ctaxis@mail.nur.utexas.edu](mailto:ctaxis@mail.nur.utexas.edu).

Thank you,

Carole Taxis

Appendix F  
Demographic Data Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Enrollment status:                     Full Time                     Part Time

Are you receiving financial aid?     Yes                     No

How many hours a week do you work while enrolled in school? \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status    Married    Single    Divorced    Separated

# of Dependents \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have any other family responsibilities while attending school?

Yes    No

If yes, please describe

# Hours completed at The University of Texas at Austin \_\_\_\_\_

# Hours transferred to the University of Texas at Austin \_\_\_\_\_

Expected date of graduation \_\_\_\_\_

University group(s), organization(s) you are affiliated with

\_\_\_\_\_

Distance of The University of Texas at Austin from your hometown \_\_\_\_\_

Has anyone in your immediate family completed a baccalaureate degree or higher?  Yes  No

If yes, who, what degree and how long ago?

## Appendix G

### Follow-up Written Questionnaire

1. List 3 words that describe you as a student
  
2. Think of the most difficult time for you while pursuing your BSN
  - a. What made this time difficult?
  
  - b. At what point in your education did it occur
  
  - c. How did you overcome it?
  
3. Many of your peers from high school did not go on to college, or chose to attend a community college. What influenced you to pursue the rigorous course of a BSN?
  
4. Who or what was the most helpful to you in achieving your BSN?
  
5. Who or what presented the greatest barrier to you in achieving your BSN?

## Appendix H

### Informed Consent to Participate in Research The University of Texas at Austin

I am conducting a study regarding Hispanic/Latina student and graduate nurse perceptions of the institutional that foster or impede the successful completion of a Bachelor of Science Degree in nursing (BSN). The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing is the location of this case study. This study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Curriculum and Instruction at The University of Texas at Austin. You were selected as a possible participant because either you are a Hispanic/Latina student in the School of Nursing who has completed at least one semester of the upper division sequence, or a graduate of the University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing within the last 5 years.

Participation in this study will involve a 30-60 minute audiotaped individual interview, completion of demographic information form and student/graduate nurses will be asked to participate in a 1.5 to 2.0 hour audiotaped focus group. You will be given the opportunity to select a pseudonym prior to participation in the study. The name will be used on all transcripts and any future use of this information. Your participation and all information obtained from you as a participant will be confidential. Your decision to participate or not will not affect your future relations with the University of Texas at Austin or the University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time.

The information you supply will be useful in that no such information is available to date in the indexed nursing, medical or educational literature. Furthermore, there is nothing in the indexed literature regarding causes and solutions to the underrepresentation of Hispanic/Latina(o)s in nursing. Your participation may provide information that is valuable promoting the recruitment, retention and graduation of Hispanic/Latinas with a BSN. I do not anticipate any risk to you in participating in this study. You may keep a copy of this consent form.

I will be glad to answer any questions you may have prior to or during your participation in the study. You may contact me at [ctaxis@mail.nur.utexas.edu](mailto:ctaxis@mail.nur.utexas.edu) or 471-7935 or Mary S. Black, Ph.D. Assistant Professor in Curriculum and Instruction at [msblack@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:msblack@mail.utexas.edu) or 232-3528.

Your signature on this form indicates your consent to participate. Thank you for sharing this information.

---

Signature

---

Date



## Appendix I

### Individual Interview Questions

1. What influenced your decision to come to The University of Texas at Austin?
2. What influenced your selection of your major?
3. Describe your academic preparation prior to attending The University of Texas at Austin.
3. What is your reactions to and experience with the:
  - a. Size of the campus, school of nursing?
  - b. Distance of UT from your hometown?
  - c. Living arrangements at the university?
  - d. Class sizes?
  - e. Class schedules?
6. Have you worked with or taken a course from a Hispanic/Latino faculty member?
  - a. If so, was this influential to your connection to the university or the School of Nursing?
  - b. If not, was this influential to your connection to the university or the School of Nursing?
7. Have you established an academic relationships with any faculty or staff member that you would consider supportive to you pursuing your education?
8. Do you have someone you consider to be a mentor to you in pursuing your BSN?
7. What (or who) has helped the most with your classroom and clinical experiences at UT?

Appendix I (continued)

8. Describe your feelings of connection (on a scale of 0 to 10, with 10 being the highest) to:
- UT in general
  - the School of Nursing.

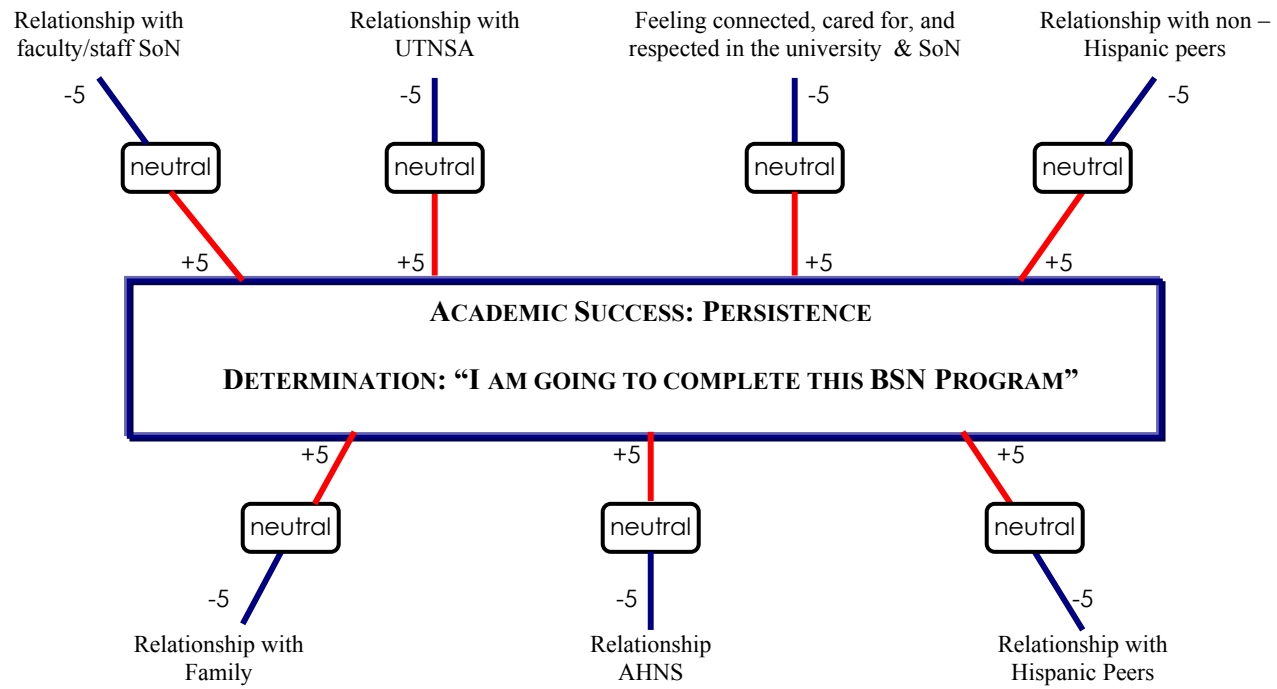
What experiences have contributed to shaping these feelings of connection?

9. What experiences have you had with other people associated with your education that have been influential (both helpful, and not helpful) to you?
- Peers
  - Faculty
  - Nurses in the clinical area
  - Advisors
  - others
  - Name specific programs, groups, organizations, classes that have been influential (both helpful and not helpful) to you?
  - Have you participated in the Peer Tutor and/or Mentor programs in the School of Nursing?
  - What obstacles do you perceive for yourself in your nursing education?
10. Are you receiving any scholarship money, financial aide or loans?  
If yes, would you have been able to come to this university without this money?
11. Hispanic/Latinas have been described as being a “triple oppressed group”, that is socioeconomic, gender and race/ethnicity. What is your response to this statement in relation to your college experiences?
12. What else would you like to tell me that would describe your experiences that have fostered or impeded your retention or graduation from the BSN program at The University of Texas at Austin?

## Appendix J

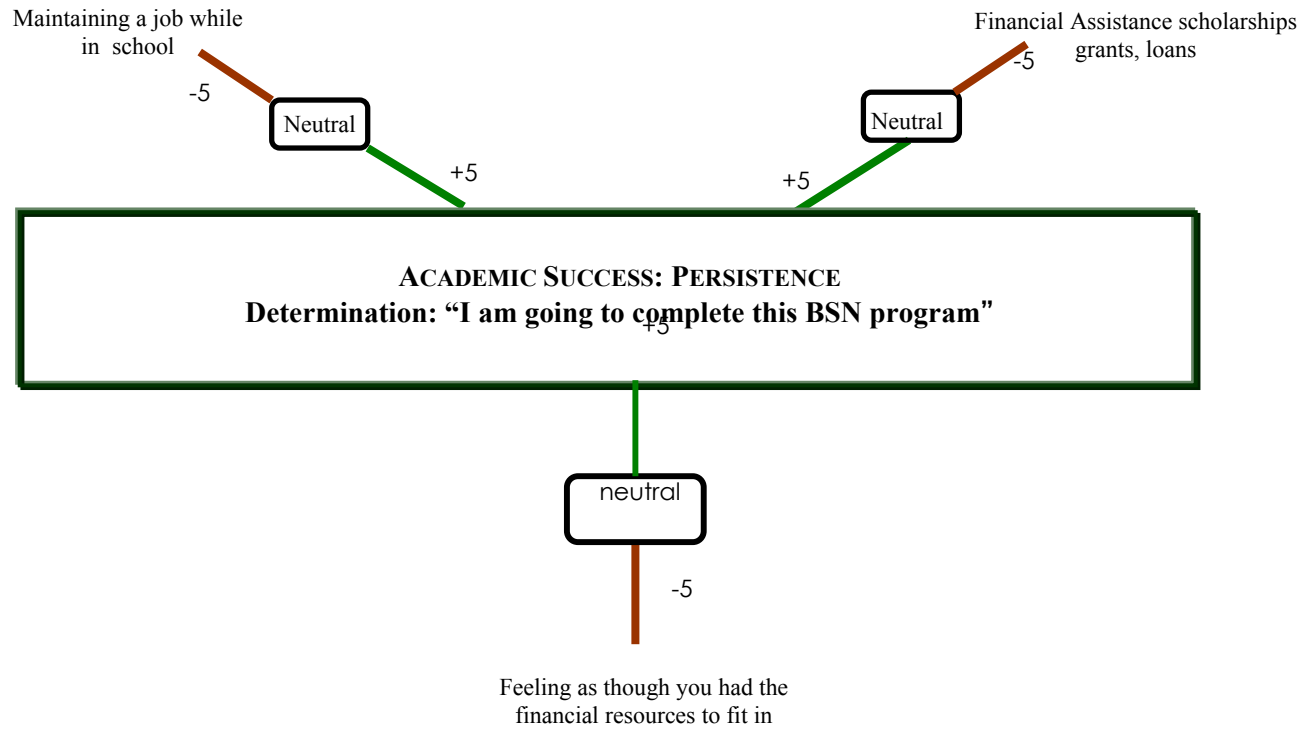
Figure J4. Individual Ranking Tool of the Perceived Influence of Interpersonal Relationships on Persistence

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Appendix K

Figure K5. Individual Ranking Tool of the Perceived Influence of Socioeconomic Factors on Persistence



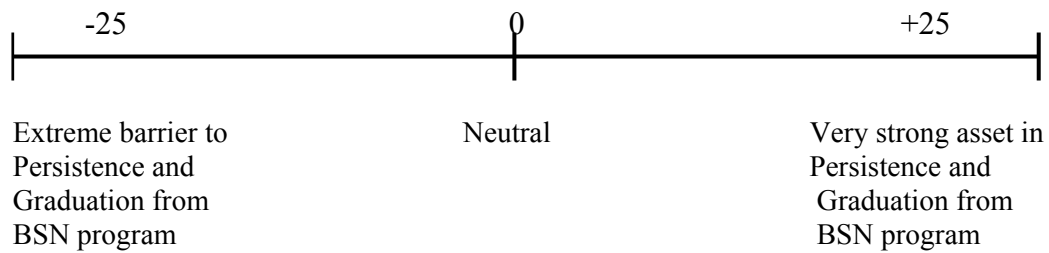
## Appendix L

### Emergent Themes From the Individual Interviews

1. Relationships with the faculty and staff in the School of Nursing
2. Relationships with Hispanic peers
3. Relationships with non-Hispanic peers
4. Relationships with Association of Hispanic Nursing Students (AHNS)
5. Relationships with the University of Texas Nursing Students Association (UTNSA)
6. Relationships with family
7. Perceptions of feeling connected, cared for, respected in the university and the School of Nursing
8. Maintaining a job while in school
9. Receiving financial assistance: Scholarships, grants, and loans
10. Perceptions of having enough financial resources to fit in

## Appendix M

*Table M2: Perceptions of the Importance of Interpersonal and Socioeconomic Factors in Persistence in the BSN Program*



<b>Factor in the Persistence in the BSN program</b>	<b>Weight</b>
Supportive Relationship with Family Member(s)	+25
Receiving Financial Assistance: Scholarships, Grants, Loans	+25
Feeling Respected, Cared for in the University and School of Nursing	+16
Relationships with Hispanic Peers	+15
Having the Resources to “Fit In”	+15
Relationships with School of Nursing Faculty/Staff	+14
Relationships in Association of Hispanic Nursing Students (AHNS)	+11
Relationships with non-Hispanic Peers	+8
Maintaining a Job While in School	+4
Relationships in University of Texas Nursing Student Association	-8

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## VITA

Jean Carole Taxis grew up in Hialeah, Florida. After receiving an Associate of Science Degree from Miami Dade Community College in 1967 she went on to graduate from Florida State University with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree in 1970 and a Master of Science in Nursing degree from Texas Women's University in 1972. During the following years she worked in nursing as a clinician, administrator, and educator. Upon completion of the degree of Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology from the University of Houston Clear Lake in 1985, she expanded her career to include a private psychotherapy practice and consultation in the healthcare field. In 1991 she began teaching at The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing as a clinical instructor, and entered the Graduate School of The University of Texas at Austin in January 2000 to pursue a doctorate in education.

Permanent Address: 7920 Ridgeline North, Austin, Texas 78731

This dissertation was typed by the author.