DUAL ENROLLMENT PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS: THEIR EXPERIENCE AND PERSISTENCE AS HISPANIC COLLEGE STUDENTS

A dissertation submitted

by

Chimere J. Jones

to

Benedictine University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Higher Education and Organizational Change

Lisle, Illinois

September, 2014

Bonnie Copeland, Ph.D. ______________ Date

Dissertation Committee Director Signature

Nancy Bentley, Ph.D. ______________ Date

Dissertation Committee Chair Signature

Quincy Martin, Ed.D ______________ Date

Dissertation Committee Reader Signature

Sunil Chand, Ph.D. ______________ Date

Program Director, Faculty

Eileen Kolich, Ph.D. ______________ Date

Faculty

Ethel Ragland, Ed.D ______________ Date

Acting Dean, College of Education and Health Services

ii
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables ........................................................................................................... vii

Abstract ....................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter 1 Introduction ............................................................................................... 2

  Statement of the Problem ....................................................................................... 2

  Overview of the Achievement Gap ...................................................................... 3

  Pre-collegiate Preparedness .................................................................................... 4

  College Access Programs ...................................................................................... 5

Purpose of the Study .................................................................................................. 7

Background of the Study ........................................................................................... 7

  East Bay Area University ....................................................................................... 8

  College Preparatory Academy and Dual Enrollment Program ......................... 9

Research Questions .................................................................................................. 12

Significance of the Study ........................................................................................... 13

Definition of Terms ................................................................................................... 14

Summary and Organization of Study ....................................................................... 16

Chapter 2 Literature Review ..................................................................................... 18

  The Postsecondary Achievement Gap ................................................................ 18

  Hispanic Students’ Achievement Gap ................................................................ 19

  Postsecondary Student Persistence ...................................................................... 20

  Academic Influences on Persistence ................................................................... 21

  Culturally Responsive Teaching ......................................................................... 22
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter 4 Profiles of Participants</th>
<th>52</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of the Participants</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concluding Remarks</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 5 Thematic Analysis</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being a First-Generation College Student</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of Having Additional Academic Preparation for College</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: College Perceived as a Viable Option</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Doubt Regarding the Academic Rigors of College</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Affordability</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to College Level Curricula</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Self-Confidence</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with East Bay Area University Staff</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with East Bay Area University Faculty</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5: Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement from Family Members</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Influence and Support from Friends</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Concluding Remarks ...........................................................................................................94

Chapter 6 Summary, Discussion, Recommendations and Reflections ............................95

Summary of the Study ........................................................................................................95

Discussion of Findings ......................................................................................................97

Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life .........................................................97

College Perceived as a Viable Option .............................................................................99

Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence ......................101

Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence .............................102

Positive Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence .............103

Implications and Recommendations for Educators .................................................104

Opportunities for Future Research ...........................................................................107

Final Reflections ..............................................................................................................107

References .......................................................................................................................113

Appendix A: Invitation to Participate in Research .....................................................124

Appendix B: Participant Demographic Survey ............................................................126

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form ..........................................................................129

Appendix D: Participant Interview Questions .............................................................132
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Impact of Community-Based Organizations on Students…………………………32
Table 2. Participant Demographic Information………………………………………………53
Table 3. Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life……………………………………73
Table 4. College Perceived as a Viable Option………………………………………………79
Table 5. Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence……………83
Table 6. Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence…………………87
Table 7. Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence…………………90
ABSTRACT

This qualitative, phenomenological study explores the influence that dual enrollment and other factors have had on the persistence of Hispanic students currently enrolled at the sponsoring university located in the southwestern United States. This study answers the main research question: How have the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University.

The factors that students believe as having an impact on persistence have been examined via qualitative research. A phenomenological approach is used. This study is beneficial because it adds to the current body of knowledge on students’ experiences in a college access program and underrepresented minority student persistence in college. The five themes that emerged, based upon the research questions and the sub-questions, were: (a) Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life; (b) College Perceived as a Viable Option; (c) The Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence; (d) The Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence; and (e) Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence. The study is unique in that it focuses on the persistence of Hispanic college students who participated in a college access program while in high school, a dual enrollment program provided by the university they currently attend.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Research on postsecondary completion rates in the United States indicates that four-year completion rates have been declining (Cerna, Pérez, & Sáenz, 2009). College completion is an initiative that has an impact on society as a whole (Achieve, 2013; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011). To remain globally competitive, from an educational perspective, and to foster economic growth, the number of students attending college and graduating in the United States must increase (Achieve, n.d.c).

Underrepresented minority (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Pacific Islanders) and economically disadvantaged college students have had disproportionately low college completion rates, as compared to other student groups (Johns Hopkins University, n.d; Otero, Rivas, & Rivera, 2007). Llagas and Snyder (2003) reported that 10% of Hispanics between the ages of 25 and 29 received bachelor’s degrees, as compared to 18% of African Americans and 34% of Whites in the same age group. This disparity is often related to first-year attrition rates: 28% of first-year students at four year colleges do not return for their sophomore year and 44% of those enrolled in two year colleges do not return for their sophomore year (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011).

Taking into account academic preparation and socioeconomic status, first-year persistence rates of minorities (except Asians) are lower than those of White students (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). Some students are unable to persist beyond their first year of college because they are not intellectually or cognitively ready for the challenges of college (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011). Accordingly, many
students leave college because of a lack of basic skills and fluency in the strategies needed to succeed in college, such as writing ability, reading strategies, and time management (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Swail et al., 2003; Texas Guaranteed Student Loan Corporation (TGSLC), 2003).

The number of underrepresented minority students who persist beyond their freshman year is significantly lower than that of nonminority students (Friedman & Zimbler, 2011). A report prepared by the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education (2005) indicated that even though more minorities and low-income students have been enrolling in college, the “majority of minority students will not graduate” (p. 6).

**Overview of the Achievement Gap**

Although the need to improve college completion rates has an impact on all racial/ethnic groups, the gap among minorities and between minorities and Whites is particularly harmful (Carter, 2006). Attainment of a degree can result in a greater net dividend for minorities (Carter, 2006). The lack of degree attainment can hinder the economic capital and social mobility of minority group members. Holzer and Lerman (as cited in Achieve, n.d.a) indicated that “80% of jobs are ‘middle and high’ skilled and require education beyond high school (e.g., associate, bachelors, and professional, industry-recognized certifications)” (p. 1). The Achieve (n.d.b) Future Ready Project reported that 62% of new jobs in 2018 will require some education beyond that offered in high school. Based on these statistics, if the degree attainment gap does not decrease, minorities will be at a disadvantage when competing in the workplace, thus negatively impacting their economic and social mobility.
Factors that affect student persistence rates can be divided into two major categories: nonacademic and academic (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011). Some of the nonacademic factors include social support, self-beliefs, and preparation for the social aspects of college (Cerna et al., 2009; Otero et al., 2007; Reyes & Nora, 2012). A few of the academic factors include high school academic achievement and college grade point average (Achieve, 2013; Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; T. Y. Smith & Vura, 1999; Swail et al., 2003). Academic preparation in high school is positively associated with college entrance exam scores, college enrollment, and attendance in more selective colleges (Achieve, 2013; Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; T. Y. Smith & Vura, 1999; Swail et al., 2003). Factors such as pre-collegiate perceptions, pre-collegiate preparedness, familial obligations, financial factors, and having to work while in school may play a role in college completion (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Fry & Taylor, 2013; González & Ballysingh, 2012; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Sandoval-Lucero, Maes, & Chopra, 2011).

**Pre-collegiate Preparedness**

Students who seek to earn a degree must have adequate pre-collegiate preparation at the secondary level (Achieve, n.d.a; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Factors that heavily influence both college readiness and college completion are the alignment of “policies, programs, and initiatives” at the P–12 and postsecondary level (Achieve, n.d.a, para. 4). P–12 and postsecondary institutional collaborations can enhance students’ academic preparedness prior to college and thereby aid in improving completion rates (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2010; Callan, Finney, Kirst, Usdan, & Venezia, 2006; Kurlaender, Jackson, & Howell, 2012; Nelson, 2013). To enhance college readiness, nationwide initiatives such as the American Diploma Network
have been created to focus on closing the “expectation gap between knowledge and skills of current high school students and what graduates really need to know to be successful in college and the workforce” (Achieve, 2013, p. 5). Additionally, this initiative focuses on:

- creating comprehensive accountability and reporting systems that promote college and career-readiness for every student;
- aligning high school academic content standards in English and mathematics with the demands of college and the career force;
- establishing graduation requirements that require every student to complete a college and career-ready curriculum; and
- developing statewide high school assessment systems that have a foundation in college and career-ready expectations. (Achieve, 2013, p. 5)

Each of these policy items is focused on closing the expectation gap by emphasizing pre-collegiate preparedness at the high school level.

**College Access Programs**

Pre-collegiate programs play a part in students’ college readiness. The basis for many college readiness programs is an early intervention, student-focused model that emphasizes one or a combination of the following elements: P–12 integration, informational outreach, career-based outreach, and academic support (Gullatt & Jan, 2002). Pre-collegiate programs that focus on informational outreach often provide knowledge to students and their families on how to navigate the process of college acceptance (Gullatt & Jan, 2002). Career-based pre-collegiate programs often provide “motivational, academic, and informational interventions that are centered on students’ career aspirations” (Gullatt & Jan, 2002, p. 16). Academic-based pre-collegiate programs often provide instructional services designed “to improve a student’s opportunity to enroll in such classes” (Gullatt & Jan, 2002, p. 16). Personal attention, mentors, early
intervention at P–12, financial aid counseling, and an emphasis on college being a long-term investment are the benefits of many pre-collegiate programs for minority students (Dolan, 2008; Gullatt & Jan, 2002; Michaels, 2007; Schramm & Sawaga, 2008). College access programs are important because they provide academic and informational resources to help prepare minority students and their families for the college admissions process and requirements, and for the collegiate environment (Michaels, 2007).

There needs to be a shift in the focus of high school administrators and policymakers from concentrating only on high school dropout rates to ensuring that low-income and underrepresented minority students do not think of high school as a final destination, but instead as a launch pad to their collegiate and career success (Schramm & Sawaga, 2008). To influence minority student persistence in college, mentors (i.e., faculty and/or support services staff) can provide academic and student support to these students while in college (Dolan, 2008). Underrepresented minority students themselves must also understand the academic requirements and social environment of being a college student so they might persist and achieve a degree (Dolan, 2008). The theoretical backdrop for the proposed research, to a great degree, is based on the work of Dolan (2008), Gullatt and Jan (2002), Michaels (2007), and Schramm and Sawaga (2008), who emphasized that pre-collegiate college access via programs such as the Dual Enrollment Program, provide program participants with personal attention, mentors (e.g., college faculty), early intervention at the high school level, financial aid counseling, and an emphasis on college as a long-term investment.
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study is to explore how the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic college students. Many college access programs have a stated mission to prepare students for postsecondary education (Gullatt & Jan, 2002). The percentages of students who go directly to college from high school vary according to ethnicity: approximately 76% of White high school graduates and 86% of Asian high school graduates go directly to college, compared to 71% of both African American and Hispanic high school graduates (Haycock, 2001). Underrepresented minority high school students are at a disadvantage when it comes to entering college directly from high school. The aim of this study is to describe the experiences and perspectives of Hispanic student participants of a dual enrollment program to find out how it prepared them for college success and influenced their persistence as college students.

Background of the Study

This research study examines the lived experiences of a group of Hispanic college students and explores the influence that a dual enrollment program and other factors have had on their persistence in college. In this study, pseudonyms are used for the student participants, the university (referred to as East Bay Area University or the university), the college preparatory academy (referred to as College Preparatory Academy), and the college access partnership (referred to as Dual Enrollment Program).

East Bay Area University is the research site for this study. According to the Fall 2012 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) survey, 38% of the
undergraduate student population at East Bay Area University identified as Hispanic (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). This is relevant to this study because Hispanics have disproportionally been impacted by the degree attainment gap. Despite an increase in the number of Hispanic college students in the United States, a disproportionate number of Hispanics do not complete college compared to other ethnic minorities and Whites (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011; Otero et al., 2007; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011). Additionally, Hispanic students take longer to enroll in and complete degree programs. In 2009, “the median time from enrollment to graduation for Hispanic students was 70 months, as compared to 56 months for other ethnic groups” (Cerna et al., 2009, p. 132).

**East Bay Area University**

East Bay Area University, a private for-profit university located in the Southwest, has a mission of providing “postsecondary education for Hispanics and others grounded in cultural respect, bi-literacy, and diversity for engaged students who will become local, national, and global leaders” (East Bay Area University, n.d.c, para. 1). The university grants associate, bachelor’s, and master’s degrees. As explained on the university website (East Bay Area University, n.d.a) relative to education,

> We believe in Familia™, a signature approach that applies a unique combination of cooperative learning and mutual assistance among students, faculty, and community/business partners in a personal and culturally relevant environment. The interactions with responsive and caring professors, staff, and community members help to create a caring and supportive environment with a high degree of authenticity in all interactions. (East Bay Area University, n.d.a, para. 3)
In Fall 2012, the university reported enrollment of 287 graduate students and 500 undergraduate students (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). The racial/ethnic distribution of the undergraduate student population was 38% Hispanic/Latino, 45% racial/ethnicity unknown, 10% White (non-Hispanic), 2% Asian, 1% African American/Black, 2% Native American, and 2% two or more races (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). IPEDS survey totals of undergraduates enrolled at the university indicated 73% of students were women and 27% were men (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). There were more younger students (55% of the students were 24 years old and younger) than older students (44% were 25 years old and older), and more undergraduate students attended full time (52%) than attended part time (48%) (U.S. Department of Education, 2012b). The university has more than 1,200 alumni (East Bay Area University, 2013).

**College Preparatory Academy and Dual Enrollment Program**

Having recognized the importance of college preparedness, East Bay Area University created the Dual Enrollment Program, a partnership between College Preparatory Academy and East Bay Area University (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d.). The program provides high school students with an academically rigorous university experience and an instrument to transition into a university environment while still in high school. While enrolled in the Dual Enrollment Program, College Preparatory Academy juniors and seniors take a combination of high school and university courses to earn a high school diploma. These students also graduate with 10–40 transferable college credits (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d.).
The partnership between the university and the College Preparatory Academy was piloted in Spring 2008. Based on results of the pilot, the Dual Enrollment Program was officially launched in Fall 2008. The College Preparatory Academy is a charter high school grounded in bi-literate educational programming. Its mission is to “enable underserved high school English Language Learners to become bi-literate in English, Spanish, mathematics, and science. These skills will ensure students’ ability to successfully complete requirements for a high school diploma and pursue postsecondary educational opportunities of their choice” (College Preparatory Academy, n.d., para. 1). The vision of the academy is to “be recognized as the premier provider of High School English Language Learner educational programs, thus ensuring innovative, successful leaders with critical thinking, decision-making, information technology, and communications skills” (College Preparatory Academy, n.d., para. 1). The Dual Enrollment Program furthers the mission of East Bay Area University, to serve underserved students, by exposing participants to college level curricula and providing them with transferable academic units (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d.).

The mission of the Dual Enrollment Program is “to offer juniors and seniors at the College Preparatory Academy transferable college units that also count toward high school graduation in order to shorten the amount of time it takes them to complete a baccalaureate degree after high school completion” (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d., p. 3). Goals of the program are to:

- increase the rigor of the College Preparatory Academy’s academic programs;
- provide an authentic college experience for high school students;
- increase the College Preparatory Academy’s performance on standard measurements of academic effectiveness;
• increase the number of Hispanics and underrepresented students who enter and finish university degree programs;
• save students and their families money and time by decreasing the time and money spent earning a bachelor’s degree; and
• increase the pipeline of College Preparatory Academy students who enter and complete degree programs at East Bay Area University. (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d., p. 3)

Participants in the Dual Enrollment Program are enrolled as students at East Bay Area University through a special enrollment status that waives the high school graduation requirement based on qualifications for college-level work, as demonstrated through English and math placement exams administered by the university. The college preparedness model used in the Dual Enrollment Program is a concurrent enrollment model; such programs are also known as early college or dual enrollment (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d.). In accordance with the concurrent enrollment model, students take high school classes taught by the College Preparatory Academy teachers during the morning session and university courses taught by East Bay Area University professors in the afternoon.

The Dual Enrollment Program works to increase the number of underrepresented minority students attending college directly from high school. It exposes its participants to the academic rigors and the social environment of college (e.g., interacting with and around college students and professors; being on a college campus) because participating high school students take college-level classes at the university. The program provides its participants with academic preparation in areas including math and English, as well as access to academic advising services, computer labs, library services offered by the
university, extracurricular activities, financial aid counseling, and tutoring (East Bay Area University, 2013).

The Dual Enrollment Program indicates that the partnership between the College Preparatory Academy and East Bay Area University benefits students because it:

- adds value and rigor to the high school experience;
- increases student motivation;
- increases university enrollment and completion;
- shortens the time to complete a four-year degree;
- uses a 5-point grading scale instead of the typical 4-point scale, allowing the students the opportunity to earn a 4.0+ grade point average (GPA);
- saves the students and their families money because there is no charge for the college units earned while in high school; and
- allows the students to access Cal Grant funding during their first year out of high school at a higher rate, because they will graduate from high school with a higher GPA and have already started to accumulate the 30 college units required for increased funding. (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d., p. 2)

This research seeks to describe the participants’ experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program and how it and other factors have influenced their persistence in college.

**Research Questions**

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was used to explore the experiences and perceptions of the Dual Enrollment Program participants regarding their college persistence. The data collected were obtained primarily through individual, in-depth interviews that elaborate on the study’s main research question and sub-questions. This study answers the main research question: How have the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University? The sub-questions are:

1. What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment?
2. From their perspective, what internal and external factors (i.e., past and current attitudes, family, peer, educational, and life experiences) contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college?

3. From their perspective, in what ways has the Dual Enrollment Program contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college?

4. What were their experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program and how did they prepare them for the academic and nonacademic aspects of college?

**Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because “all beginning college students face enormous challenges, ranging from the academic to social, and the first year of college marks the period of greatest vulnerability for student attrition. However, minority students have significantly lower persistence rates than non-minority students” (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011, p. 1). No known studies to date have been conducted on how the Dual Enrollment Program offered by East Bay Area has influenced the college persistence of program participants. This qualitative study will enhance the knowledge base regarding college access programs by exploring in what ways the Dual Enrollment Program has influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of its participants while enrolled in college.

The knowledge gained from the findings of this study are beneficial to both the program and the university. Knowledge of students’ experiences and perceptions can provide administrators at both the high school and the college level with insight into how
to better create or reinforce effective college preparation practices and strategies to promote student persistence among Hispanic students and other underrepresented groups.

This research is also significant because no known research has been conducted on the persistence of Hispanic students who participated in a dual enrollment program partnership, resulting in a gap in the knowledge base for this population. Therefore, the insights gained from this study are relevant to understanding the achievement gap experienced by underrepresented minority students, especially the perceived impact for Hispanic students.

**Definition of Terms**

Terms used throughout this study are defined as follows.

**Achievement gap.** “The gap between ethnic minority students and ethnic majority students in the attainment of higher education degrees” (Carter, 2006, p. 33).

**Attrition.** A college or university’s loss of a student (TGSLC, 1999).

**Bi-literacy.** All instances in which communication occurs in two or more languages in or around writing (Hornberger, 1990).

**College access.** “Providing assistance to encourage and help individuals successfully complete education beyond high school” (National College Access Network, n.d., para. 11).

**College access programs.** Organizations designed to increase the number of students who pursue education beyond high school. The mission of these organizations is to expose students to postsecondary education by providing financial counseling, college visits, career guidance, tutoring, and test preparation courses (National College Access Network, n.d.).
Career and college readiness. The unifying agenda across the P-20 education pipeline under which high-quality early education and strong, foundational standards in elementary school to rigorous career and technical education programs and college completion goals thrive (Achieve, n.d.a).

First-generation college student. “An individual both of whose parents did not complete a baccalaureate degree. Or in the case of any individual who regularly resided with and received support from only one parent, an individual whose only such parent did not complete a baccalaureate degree” (Federal Early Outreach and Student Services Programs, Definitions, 2011, p.9).

For-profit college. A college or university managed and governed by a private organization(s) and corporation(s) (National Conference on State Legislators, 2013). For-profit colleges and universities do not file as 501 (c)(3) tax-exempt institutions (Kinser, 2006).

Graduation rate. The percentage of a college or university’s first-time, first-year undergraduate students who complete their program within 150% of the published time for the program. Entering students who complete a four-year degree program within six years are counted as graduates (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.e).

Hispanic or Latino/Latina. Individuals of Puerto Rican, Mexican, Central, or South American, Cuban, or other Spanish culture or origin, regardless of race (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a).

Low-income. For the purposes of this study, those students who are Pell Grant-eligible (Koirala, Davis, & Cid, 2010). The Federal Pell Grant Program promotes access
to postsecondary education by providing need-based grants to low-income undergraduate and certain post baccalaureate students (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.d).

**Minority.** For the purposes of this study, minority is defined as Hispanic, Black (not of Hispanic origin), American Indian, and Alaska Native (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.a).

**Persistence.** A student’s continuing behavior leading to a desired goal and student goal achievement (TGSLC, 1999).

**Retention.** “A percentage measurement showing how many students re-enrolled at an institution they attended the previous year” (TGSLC, 1999, p. 5).

**Underrepresented minorities.** “African Americans, Mexican-Americans, Native Americans (American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians), Pacific Islanders, and mainland Puerto Ricans” (Johns Hopkins University, n.d., para. 1).

**Summary and Organization of Study**

Underrepresented minority groups have lower college retention rates, high first-year attrition rates, and take more time to complete their degrees than non-underrepresented minorities and Whites (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Llagas & Snyder, 2003; Otero et al., 2007). Hispanics have the lowest rates of educational attainment in the United States, when compared to other racial/ethnic groups (Cerna et al., 2009). The number of Hispanic students completing college degrees is not consistent with the number of Hispanic students entering college (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; González & Ballysingh, 2012; Otero et al., 2007; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010; T. Y. Smith & Vura, 1999). Factors such as pre-collegiate perceptions, pre-collegiate preparedness, familial obligations, financial factors, and having to work
while in school may play a role in college completion (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Fry & Taylor, 2013; González & Ballysingh, 2012; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). College access programs play an important role in exposing students to postsecondary education because they provide academic and informational resources to students and their families (Gullatt & Jan, 2002; Michaels, 2007). One of the goals of the Dual Enrollment Program is “to increase the number of Hispanics and underrepresented students who enter and finish university degree programs” (Dual Enrollment Program, n.d., p.3). This research provides an in-depth analysis of how the participation in a dual enrollment program along with other internal and external factors have influenced the persistence of a group of Hispanic students.

This study is organized into six chapters. Chapter 1 provided the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, background of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and definition of terms. A review of relevant literature is presented in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology by which the data will be collected, analyzed, and reported. Chapter 4 includes the individual profiles and demographic data of the participants. The findings are presented in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 provides the summary, discussion of implications, recommendations, and reflections of the study.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly sources reviewed in this chapter provide a framework of the achievement gap and support for the factors that relate to the focus of this study. Common academic and nonacademic factors that influence underrepresented minority student college preparedness are examined in this chapter. The review of literature focuses on the persistence of Hispanic college students because they represent over half of the student body at East Bay Area University. Additionally, this review of literature explores (a) the postsecondary achievement gap, including the achievement gap of Hispanic students; (b) postsecondary student persistence; (c) academic influences on persistence; (d) nonacademic influences on persistence; and (e) P-20 accountability and collegiate success.

The Postsecondary Achievement Gap

The postsecondary degree achievement gap has been defined as “the gap between ethnic minority students and underserved ethnic majority students in the attainment of higher education degrees” (Carter, 2006, p. 33). This achievement gap has an adverse impact on society, with a disproportionate burden falling on the shoulders of ethnic minorities (Carter, 2006; Dolan, 2008; Haycock, 2001; Koirala et al., 2010; Swail et al., 2003). The achievement gap is particularly detrimental because of its impact on the social mobility and economic growth of ethnic minorities (Carter, 2006; Swail et al., 2003). Degree attainment is one of the surest ways for individuals to increase their economic and social status (Swail et al., 2003). In 2001, Hispanics and African Americans earned less than two-thirds of the income earned by White households (Swail
et al., 2003). Low socioeconomic status hinders an individual’s or family’s ability to save and invest in future security (Swail et al., 2003). As of 2010, African American and Hispanic students made up 25% of the postsecondary student population yet represented only 17% of degree recipients (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Time required to complete bachelor’s degrees were different by ethnicity as well, with 60% of White students graduating in six years, compared to 38%, 40%, and 49% of Native American, African American, and Hispanic students, respectively (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010).

In the 2013 College Board College Completion Agenda report, Hughes reports that in 2008 the United States placed 12th of 36 nations in terms of the percentage of 25- to 34-year-olds with an associate degree or higher. Data for 2009 showed that the United States fell even further—to 16th in degree completion—while most of the other countries in the study had made gains. Data for 2012 showed the U.S. standing had improved, to 14th place, with an increase in the number of associate degrees awarded in the United States (Hughes, 2013). An increase of almost 100,000 associate degrees awarded between 2010 and 2011 demonstrated the attractiveness of earning this sub-baccalaureate degree (Hughes, 2013). These statistics on the lag in degree attainment and postsecondary persistence are important to this research, because one of the goals of the Dual Enrollment Program partnership is to increase the number of Hispanics and underrepresented students who enter and finish university degree programs.

**Hispanic Students’ Achievement Gap**

The gap between Hispanic and White students’ degree attainment has widened over the past three decades with Hispanic students continually lagging behind (González & Ballysingh, 2012). Understanding why this gap is widening is important because this
phenomenon contrasts with data indicating that Hispanic students are enrolling in college at a higher rate and may arguably be better prepared for college than they were 15 years ago (González & Ballysingh, 2012). Most Hispanic students enter college with intentions of completing their degree program, according to Cerna et al., 2009. Therefore, investigating the aspirations, goals, and attributes of those Hispanic students who persist in college might assist with identifying characteristics that can influence Hispanic students’ success in college (Cerna et al., 2009).

**Postsecondary Student Persistence**

Colleges and universities often focus on institutional retention rates and graduation rates as critical campus planning tools (ACE, 2003). However, these two measurements do not reflect a student’s entire collegiate experience or explain why some students persist and others drop out (American Council on Education, 2003; Dolan, 2008; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Otero et al., 2007; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). Persistence is defined as a “student’s continuation behavior leading to a desired goal related to student goal achievement” (TGSLC, 1999, p. 5). Many students’ transition to college means not only an academic shift, but also a social and cultural shift. Institutional fit and campus integration are believed to be integral elements in the persistence of underrepresented minority students (Achieve, 2013; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Swail et al., 2003). Lack of diversity in the student population, curricula, staff, and faculty diminish the quality and nature of minority students’ experiences and have an adverse impact on the persistence and successful degree completion of minority students (Reyes & Nora, 2012; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011; Swail et al., 2003).

According to Tinto’s (1975) student integration model, Hispanic student attrition rates
rise when students do not assimilate into the social and academic norms of the dominant

culture. Tinto’s (1993) model of institutional departure revolves around the concept that
to persist, students need to engage in formal (academic performance) and informal
(faculty/staff interactions) academic systems as well as formal (extracurricular activities)
and informal (peer-group interactions) social systems. Persistence measures should
examine relevant student characteristic data that reflect the personal, academic, and
economic realities of contemporary higher education students (American Council on

**Academic Influences on Persistence**

Academic factors can have an impact on Hispanic student persistence in college.
Bordes-Edgar et al.’s (2011) follow-up study involved 71 of the original 112 Hispanic
student participants at a southwestern university who were questioned about persistence
during their freshman year. Of those 71 students, 21 were still enrolled, 25 had
graduated, 25 had dropped out, and five had academically withdrawn during the 4.5 years
since the original study. Entrance exam scores were not reported as a factor which
influenced the college grades or enrollment status of these Hispanic college students
(Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011). Conversely, GPA was reported as the most powerful
predicador of positive persistence because those students who had graduated from college
had higher college and high school GPAs (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011). In other words,
the Hispanic college students who demonstrated strong academic achievement and
determination to stay enrolled while in high school demonstrated the same drive and
performed better academically than Hispanic college students who dropped out (Bordes-
Edgar et al., 2011). Freshman students’ academic self-efficacy and value of education
were found to be predictive of persistence decisions (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011).

Academic self-efficacy, an individual’s perceived capability to achieve academic goals, is “one of the major cognitive factors influencing the academic success of underrepresented students, particularly during the first year of college” (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010 p. 3). Another academic support strategy that is used to assist Hispanic students in feeling culturally connected, while creating a student-centered learning environment, is culturally responsive teaching, which will be discussed next (Reyes & Nora, 2012).

**Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Culturally responsive teaching can be used as a successful instructional technique for assisting in retaining and graduating Hispanic students, specifically those at majority-White colleges and universities (Reyes & Nora, 2012). Tierney’s (1999) and Rendon’s (1994) theories of cultural identity indicate that expecting students from a non-majority culture to assimilate into the dominant culture can cause students to feel alienated and intimidated by the college environment. For nontraditional students, assimilation can be tantamount to committing cultural suicide because it requires the student to cut ties with his or her culture (Tierney, 1999). In contrast, culturally responsive teaching promotes inclusion of precollege cultures in a diverse student body.

Culturally responsive teaching can be validating, comprehensive, multidimensional, empowering, and transforming because it allows professors to place themselves in the role of the learner and model positive learning behaviors for students (Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011). This form of pedagogy seeks to eliminate the resocialization of minority students into the White-dominated culture and validates the students’ psychological and physical presence on a college campus. Sandoval-Lucero et
al. (2011) pointed out that Hispanic students who have frequent interactions with faculty and perceive faculty to be student-centered are more likely to persist throughout college. Some institutions that center pedagogical instruction and advising on a *la familia* (the family) model have been successful at emulating the encouragement and support that Hispanic students receive from family and friends (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011). The model of *la familia* is focused on a system of “support and encouragement, including supportive friends who help navigate the system, personalized advising, relationships with family and staff” (Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011, p. 301). In addition to academic factors as influences on persistence, there are also various nonacademic factors that can influence minority student persistence in college, the next topic of discussion (Dolan, 2008; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Swail et al., 2003).

**Nonacademic Influences on Persistence**

A variety of pre-collegiate and collegiate nonacademic factors can influence minority student persistence (Dolan, 2008; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Swail et al., 2003). These factors include: (a) students and parents being informed early in high school about the college application process; (b) familial, community, and peer support; (c) self-efficacy; and (d) social, human, economic, and cultural capital (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Gullatt & Jan, 2002; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010).

**Early Access to the College Application Process**

In 2002, Gullatt and Jan researched a mid-Atlantic-based college access program whose mission included providing low-income minority students with information on the college application process, the financial aid application process, and college entrance exams. An analysis of qualitative data collected from focus groups conducted with
participants and their families, school personnel, and program staff indicated that students who received counseling on the college application process, financial aid, and college entrance exams “were considerably more likely than non-participants to attend college and complete their freshman year” (Gullatt & Jan, 2002, p. 18). In addition to students and families being informed in high school about the college application process, having support systems in place can have an impact on student persistence (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). The absence of support structures (e.g., family, peer, faculty, and staff mentors) while in college can be difficult for even the most intelligent and driven student, making these support systems even more important for underrepresented students (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010).

Familial and Community Support

Familial and community support has a positive influence on the persistence of first generation students, especially first-generation Hispanics (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Some first-generation students’ perceptions of family support can influence their ability to cope with the emotional and academic rigors of college (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Bordes-Edgar et al. (2011) reported that social support from friends on campus was also a powerful predictor of the persistence decisions of freshmen. Being able to identify with fellow students can maximize a student’s sense of belonging and create a feeling of inclusion, ultimately minimizing barriers to student success (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). As E. Smith and Blacknall (2010) explained, “college persistence relies heavily on students’ perceptions that they are academically and socially integrated into campus life” (p. 2).
In 2007, Otero et al. conducted a quantitative study to identify the academic and demographic variables of first-year persistence for Hispanic college students. Otero et al. recognized that underrepresented minority students and socioeconomically disadvantaged students have traditionally had low persistence and graduation rates. The authors surveyed 311 Hispanic first-year students at a predominantly Hispanic college in the southwestern United States to better understand the factors that influence first-year persistence. Of the 311 students surveyed, 134 students completed the survey. The study found faculty support and positive affirmation were equally important to the persistence of students. Support from a counselor was reported as having a positive impact on Hispanic student first-year persistence, and social integration to the campus also contributed to their first-year persistence (Otero et al., 2007). Feelings of isolation can lead to anxiety and stress for students; building relationships with faculty and staff mentors can help students to feel more included and positively influence their self-efficacy (E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010).

Self-efficacy

Support systems are not the only ingredient important to student success. Additional factors such as a student’s self-belief in his or her ability to accomplish an outcome or goal, which is defined as self-efficacy, and the individual’s own values on educational attainment are also important influences in student persistence (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Underrepresented minority students must have a realistic appraisal of their strengths and weaknesses, a grasp of study skills and time management, and the ability to make sound academic-related decisions in college (Dolan, 2008; Koirala et al., 2010; Swail et al., 2003). Disproportionately higher numbers of
first-generation, low-income, and minority students are likely to not graduate, even if they remain in school beyond their first year in college (Koirala et al., 2010). In addition to self-efficacy, social, cultural, human, and economic capital have assisted in understanding different aspects of a student’s college experience (Cerna et al., 2009).

**Social, Human, Economic, and Cultural Capital**

Examining the precollege aspirations, values, and relationships of Hispanic students provides insight into their outlook on entering college and their resilience toward eventually earning a degree (Cerna et al., 2009). Cerna et al. (2009) studied the precollege attributes and values of Hispanic degree completers to understand which forms of capital contribute to students’ enrollment in college and degree attainment. Cerna et al. (2009) and others (Reyes & Nora, 2012; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010) report that social, human, economic, and cultural capital contribute to Hispanic students’ degree attainment. Cerna et al. (2009) defined social capital as “the relationships that students have with the individuals that provide them with access to information on enrollment into college and retention resources” (p. 131). Human and economic capital were defined as “the student’s achievements and aspirations based on performance measures” and “a student’s financial situation and the student’s attitude toward college cost and their financial aspirations for career attainment,” respectively (Cerna et al., 2009, p. 132). Cultural capital was defined by Cerna et al. (2009) as the “aspirations, cultural values, and perceptions associated with college choice when the students begin college” (p. 132).

To increase Hispanic students’ degree attainment, college administrators, and higher education policy makers need to consider ways to improve the social and cultural capital of students instead of their narrow focus on student deficiencies (Cerna et al.,
2009). By incorporating informational or academic models that focus on social and cultural capital, postsecondary institutions have an opportunity to address Hispanic students’ perceptions about the college-going experience early in the students’ academic career (Cerna et al. 2009). Decreasing the college and career-readiness gap of high school students through better academic preparation for the postsecondary level curricula is an objective of the Dual Enrollment Program.

**P–20 Accountability and Collegiate Success**

P–20 accountability is the premise of the Dual Enrollment Program partnership, which provides the College Preparatory Academy students with an academically rigorous university experience to transition into a university environment while students are still in high school. This same objective is echoed by state higher education boards, state departments of education, education policy agencies, school districts, and institutions of higher education, which is discussed in the next section (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2010; Callan et al., 2006; Kurlaender et al., 2012; Nelson, 2013; Shulock et al., 2010).

**College and Career-Readiness**

The college and career-readiness gap has been defined as the divergence between the knowledge and skills of high school graduates and what college students really need to know to succeed in college, career, and life (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2010; Callan et al., 2006; Kurlaender et al., 2012; Nelson, 2013). Major demographic shifts in the U.S. population, combined with persistence gaps in degree attainment by underrepresented minority groups, could decrease the portion of the U.S. workforce with college-level skills and create a consequential decline in per capita personal income (Kirst, Shulock, Spence, Usdan, & Walsh, 2009).
In response to the No Child Left Behind Act (2002), many states began administering high school exit exams or other high-stakes tests. These exams measure proficiency at the eighth grade to 10th grade level (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2005). However, a college-preparatory curriculum does not ensure that students have the reading, writing, and math skills needed for competency in at the college level (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2010; Callan et al., 2006; Kurlaender et al., 2012; Nelson, 2013). To address this inadequacy, the Common Core State Standards initiative is the latest instrument intended to reform contemporary P–20 education.

**Common Core State Standards.** The Common Core State Standards initiative is a state-led effort aimed at making college and career-readiness for high school graduates an explicit nationwide goal by aligning the P–12 curriculum of participating states with postsecondary-level curriculum (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2010; Callan et al., 2006; Kurlaender et al., 2012; Nelson, 2013). As of 2012, the District of Columbia and 45 states have adopted Common Core State Standards for student learning outcomes. The remaining states in the nation developed their own unique common standards. All 50 states and the District of Columbia have math and English language/literacy standards that reflect the skills and knowledge demanded of high school graduates by employers and colleges (Nelson, 2013). The District of Columbia and 23 states also require all high school students to complete a common college and career-readiness curriculum that includes four years of grade-level English and mathematics minimally through the Algebra II level (ACT, 2010).
Common Core State Standards impact the P–20 student curriculum, the instructional methodology for P–12 instructors, and the curriculum in teacher preparation programs. A critical strategic component of the agenda to improve college completion and attainment is to increase the number of students who graduate from high school and enroll in higher education prepared to undertake college-level coursework (Achieve, 2013; Callan et al., 2009; Shulock et al., 2010). The Common Core State Standards initiative implements national education policy that is geared toward identifying the P-20 academic knowledge and skills needed for students to be prepared for college-level coursework (Callen et al., 2009). The Common Core State Standards policy institutionalizes associated performance standards in curriculum, assessment programs, and examinations administered to students entering college to measure college preparedness.

**College readiness through state policy.** P–20 college readiness involves a variety of dimensions including data systems, pedagogy, educational finance, and dual enrollment (Shulock et al., 2010). In recent years, Congress has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in state data systems. In 2009, “$245 million in federal funds were set aside specifically for state data systems” (Aldeman, 2010, p. 1). Despite this cash infusion, most high school accountability measurements concentrate primarily on high school graduation rates and student scores on basic skills tests, not on college or career-readiness.

The U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in partnership with the Southern Regional Educational Board developed the “Taking Responsibility for College Readiness Checklist” for governors, legislatures, P–
12 boards, postsecondary governing boards, and postsecondary coordinating boards (Shulock et al., 2010). These organizations work with governors, education officials, and legislators because state policy can be used to enhance college readiness. Together these groups’ recommendations for P–12 boards included adopting (a) as a subset of content standards and in full partnership with postsecondary education, specific college readiness standards for reading, writing, and mathematics that set forth skills, knowledge, and performance levels that students need to succeed in entry level postsecondary courses; (b) assessments that measure the acquisition of the specific skills and knowledge set forth in the adopted readiness standards; and (c) changes to teacher readiness standards (Shulock et al., 2010). These same groups recommend postsecondary governing boards officially adopt college readiness standards (Shulock et al., 2010). The recommendations for postsecondary coordinating boards included (a) monitoring the use of placement instruments and benchmarks across two-year and less selective four-year institutions, and working toward consistent use of placement regimens that reflect the college readiness standards of that state; and (b) developing accountability metrics for monitoring changes in the number of college-ready students (Shulock et al., 2010).

The Dual Enrollment Program emphasizes a shift in viewing high school students as only needing to engage in secondary-level curriculum. Instead, the Dual Enrollment Program recognizes the importance of college access programs as providers of early exposure to college-level curriculum. The program not only exposes students to the curriculum but prepares them for it.
**College Access Programs**

**Launch pads to success.** A priority of college access programs, state agencies, and high schools is shifting the focus of high school administrators and policymakers from concentrating only on high school dropout rates to ensuring that low-income and minority students do not think of high school as a final destination, but as a launch pad to collegiate and career success (Achieve, 2013; ACT, 2010; Callan et al., 2006; Kurlaender et al., 2012; Nelson, 2013, Schramm & Sawaga, 2008; Shulock et al., 2010). Fundamental shifts that high schools and policy makers can implement to enhance the college-going culture process include (a) counting college enrollments as a measure of high school success, (b) realizing that college guidance should be for all students, (c) incorporating a guidance counselor plus teacher model, and (d) viewing students as drivers of school cultures, not just recipients (Schramm & Sawaga, 2008).

College Summit, a prominent nationwide college access company, has recommended that high schools and policy makers consider (a) making college enrollment, persistence, and completion rates for individual high schools publicly available; (b) making college proficiency rates a key success measure of high schools; and (c) encouraging high schools to invest in building a college-going culture (Schramm & Sawaga, 2008; Shulock et al., 2010).

In 2009, the American Youth Policy Forum published a compendium of findings from an evaluation of 23 college access programs, the missions of which were to prepare middle school and high school students for college and career-readiness (Hooker & Brand, 2009). The compendium of findings noted that, overall, students who participated in a college access program were more likely to be engaged in school, take advanced
courses, enroll in college, apply for financial aid, graduate from college, and become employed (Hooker & Brand, 2009). This report included a chart compiled by Hooker and Brand (2009) that reflected the outcomes identified across the college access programs in the study. A re-creation of the data compiled by Hooker and Brand (see Table 1) shows the program outcomes and resulting impact of these community-based organizations on high school students through various college access initiatives.

Table 1
Impact of Community-Based Organizations on Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Secondary school</td>
<td>Increased numbers of students completing a rigorous college prep curriculum, taking advanced coursework, and taking SAT, ACT, AP, and IB examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for colleges and careers</td>
<td>Increased self-efficacy, increased interest and engagement in school, and students more likely feel supported by their teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary</td>
<td>Positive impact on college grades and credit accumulation, and college enrollment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal resource development</td>
<td>Increased college aspirations and knowledge, increased number of students planning to attend college immediately after high school, and higher rates of completed financial aid applications</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Adapted from Success at Every Step: How 23 Programs Support Youth on the Path to College and Beyond, by S. Hooker and B. Brand, 2009, p. 69. Copyright 2009 by American Youth Policy Forum.

As indicated in Table 1, the American Youth Policy Forum study reported that involvement in community-based pre-collegiate programs increased the numbers of high school students taking advanced coursework and taking SAT and ACT examinations. The compendium also reported that students who participated in these programs had increased
self-efficacy and engagement in school, increased college aspirations and enrollment, and believed that the programs made a positive impact on their grades and credit accumulation. This information is relevant to the proposed research because outcomes of the American Youth Policy Forum study provide evidence that, for some students, community-based organizations have a positive impact in the areas of self-efficacy and increased college aspiration and knowledge.

**Hispanic student participation in college access programs.** College access programs that connect research-based, student-focused interventions with evaluation designs allow those programs to determine effectiveness (Gullatt & Jan, 2002). College access programs are important because they provide the academic and/or informational resources to help prepare students and their families for the college admissions process and requirements and for the collegiate environment (Gullatt & Jan, 2002; Michaels, 2007; Shulock et al., 2010). Many of these programs have strategic priorities that focus on minority college degree attainment, and many monitor students during their college career.

Saunders and Serna (2004) conducted a study on the long-term impact of Hispanic student participation in college access/intervention programs. The researchers documented the experiences of 10 first-generation college students (enrolled in four-year institutions) as they transitioned from high school to college. The study examined the students’ ability to grasp and maintain college-going identities and assess when social and/or academic support was needed (related to financial, personal, and academic issues) while in college. Saunders and Serna found that students who succeeded in creating new networks in college were more comfortable in seeking out assistance, if they needed
academic or other types of advising, and they also had higher GPAs than did those students who did not have these new networks (and relied upon their old network for friends). Saunders and Serna also pointed out that more longitudinal studies were needed to understand how the relationship between Hispanic students’ participation in a college access program makes its impact on their actual success in college.

**Summary**

A review of literature indicates (a) the postsecondary achievement gap continues to exist and (b) persistence rates continue to be lower for underrepresented minority students than for non-minorities, with Hispanics lagging in degree attainment and time to graduation rates when compared to all ethnic groups (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Carter, 2006; Dolan, 2008; González & Ballysingh, 2012; Haycock, 2001; Koirala et al., 2010; Otero et al., 2007; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010; Swail et al., 2003). Several researchers have concluded that academic factors such as high school GPA and culturally responsive teaching as well as nonacademic factors such as self-efficacy, economic capital, social capital, cultural capital, and human capital have an impact on Hispanic and other underrepresented minority student collegiate success and persistence (Bordes-Edgar et al., 2011; Cerna et al., 2009; Dolan, 2008; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011; Reyes & Nora, 2012; Sandoval-Lucero et al., 2011; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Additionally, minimizing the degree attainment gap in the United States has become a priority policy initiative for the federal government, higher education institutions, and many prominent educational organizations (Achieve, 2013; Callan et al., 2006; Hughes, 2013; U.S. Department of Education, 2012a; National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, 2005; E. Smith & Blacknall, 2010). The literature in
this chapter also highlights the role that college access programs play in exposing students and their families to postsecondary-level curricula and college readiness. The literature reviewed indicates that pre-collegiate academic preparedness can have an influence on students’ desire to enroll in college and increase students’ self-efficacy (Hooker & Brand, 2009). This information is germane because this study explores how involvement in a dual enrollment program and other internal and external factors contribute to Hispanic students’ experiences, beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic college students and what influence the dual enrollment program and other factors have had on their persistence at East Bay Area University. Qualitative data were collected as a basis for answering the main research question: How have the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University?

The sub-questions are:

1. What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment?

2. From their perspective, what internal and external factors (i.e., past and current attitudes, family, peer, educational, and life experiences) contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college?

3. From their perspective, in what ways has the Dual Enrollment Program contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college?

4. What were their experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program and how did they prepare them for the academic and nonacademic aspects of college?

The research methods that were used to assist in answering these questions are outlined in this chapter. This chapter also includes information on the qualitative research design structure: a phenomenological approach with a constructivist perspective.
Details are provided on (a) the qualitative research design, (b) the theoretical framework, (c) the phenomenological perspective, (d) the role of the researcher, (e) the data collection site, (f) selection of the research sample, (g) methods of data collection, (h) data analysis, (i) strategies for validating findings, (j) ethical considerations, and (k) limitations of the study.

**Qualitative Research Design**

This study used a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach and a constructive worldview perspective. Qualitative research is “an inquiry approach that is useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2008, p. 645). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research has its origins in the humanities, anthropology, and sociology. Qualitative research is used to explore and understand the meaning that individuals or groups give to a human or social problem (Creswell, 2014). The qualitative research process involves emerging questions and procedures used to collect data along with data analysis building from particulars to themes (Creswell, 2014). Specifically, a phenomenological qualitative approach will be used in this study. Phenomenology is founded in psychology and philosophy and is centered on the lived experiences of the participants pertaining to a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A phenomenological approach is appropriate for this study because the viewpoints and personal experiences of the students who participated in the Dual Enrollment Program are used to understand what has influenced their persistence in college.

Qualitative data were collected from interviews with Hispanic college students who participated in the Dual Enrollment Program and are enrolled at East Bay Area
University. The interview questions were general in nature, which allows for analysis of the interviewees’ personal reflections on their lived experiences and the influence that the Dual Enrollment Program and other factors have had on their entry into and persistence while in college.

**Theoretical Framework**

Philosophical assumptions as well as distinct methods and procedures are important components of research (Creswell, 2014). Philosophical worldviews, which refer to “a basic set of beliefs that guide actions”, serve as the foundation for the research design and outline the specific procedures or methods used by a researcher (Guba, 1990, p. 17). Philosophical worldviews are also referred to as paradigms, epistemologies, ontologies, or broadly conceived research notions (Creswell, 2014). The philosophical worldview used is dependent upon the nature of the research and the perspective that a researcher brings to the study.

This study utilizes a constructivist perspective. Constructivism’s goal is to rely as much as possible on the participants’ experiences and personal views on the research topic (Creswell, 2014). Understanding, multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction, and theory generation are the major components of the constructivist perspective (Creswell, 2014). The constructivist perspective has been articulated as “a philosophical position between the more positivist stance of Glaser and Strauss and Corbin and postmodern researchers” (Creswell, 2008, p. 439). Constructivism has its developmental roots in the works of Berger and Luekmann (1967). The constructivist design focuses on the meaning of interactions or situations ascribed by the participants in a study. Creswell (2008) pointed out that there is an emphasis placed
on the value of the assumptions, beliefs, feelings, and views of the participants who have experienced a common phenomenon or experience. “Phenomena are the building blocks of human science and the basis for knowledge” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

In a constructivist context it is the role of a researcher to interpret the meanings that others have of the world. The constructivist researcher also recognizes that his or her own background shapes the interpretation of data. Therefore, by using this form of research I have acknowledged that the way I interpret data is based upon my own cultural, personal, and historical experiences (Creswell, 2014). Constructivist research addresses the process of interaction among individuals while focusing on the context in which people live and work in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the study participants (Creswell, 2014). Crotty (1998) explained the following about the constructivist worldview: (a) human beings construct meanings according to the world that they are experiencing and interpreting, (b) humans make sense of their world and engage in it based upon their social and historical perspectives, and (c) the generation of meaning is based upon community interactions.

A constructivist approach is ideal for this study because interviews with East Bay Area University students centered on their beliefs, perceptions, and points of view. Instead of starting with a theory related to influences on student persistence, I used open ended interview questions and developed a pattern of meaning based upon the data collected.

**Phenomenological Perspective**

A phenomenological approach was used to collect qualitative data in this study. Phenomenology is appropriate when researching people’s subjective experiences and
how they understand and interpret the world (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Phenomenology is a methodological perspective aimed at generating knowledge about how people experience a variety of dimensions, including “how experiences are lived in time, space, and vis-à-vis our relationship to others, as well as a bodily experience” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p.19). Husserl (1965) wrote that phenomenology “is the science of science since it alone investigates that which all other sciences simply take for granted or ignore, the very essence of their own objects” (p. 23). In phenomenological research, perception is regarded as the primary source of knowledge and is a source that cannot be doubted (Moustakas, 1994). These concepts are important because the perspectives and experiences of the Dual Enrollment program participants served as the primary data source in this research.

Students participating in the research have the shared experiences of attending the College Preparatory Academy, participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, and attending East Bay Area University. Their academic strengths, family backgrounds, support systems, and financial backgrounds differed, making their individual experiences unique. Although there are current theories, such as those offered by Rendon (1994) and Tierney (1999), pertaining to Hispanic student collegiate persistence and degree attainment, research has not been conducted exploring the influence that dual enrollment programs have had on Hispanic student persistence at East Bay Area University.

Phenomenological research has a basis in the first-person reports of life experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl (1970) explained that what is inwardly experienced should be taken as pure experiences. It is from these experiences that phenomenology is based. The phenomenological research model includes the following
steps: (a) the *epoche*, (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) imaginative variation, and (d) the synthesis of meanings and essences as outlined by Moustakas (1994).

**Epoche**

*Epoche* is a Greek word meaning to stay away from (Moustakas, 1994). In a phenomenological study the *epoche* step is when a researcher sets aside prejudices, preconceived ideas, and biases (Moustakas, 1994). Schmitt (1968) explains that in the *epoche*, researchers inhibit, invalidate, and disqualify all commitments in reference to previous experiences and knowledge. Husserl (1931) points out that the purpose of the *epoche* is not to doubt everything or deny the reality of things; rather it is important to recognize the meaning of internal reflections and experiences. This requires a researcher to view and interpret data in a transparent manner that is free of prejudice so that the validity of the data is not minimized. In order to do this I must be aware of my own preconceived notions and understand that the views and experiences of the participants also hold their own truth and value.

**Phenomenological Reduction and Bracketing**

The *epoche* step is followed by phenomenological reduction. Phenomenological reduction is the step in which a researcher describes what has been observed along with the relationship between the phenomenon and the participants. The “process involves a prereflective description of things just as they appear and a reduction to what is horizontal and schematic” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91). This is also referred to as transcendental phenomenological reduction because, according to Schmitt (1968), this process “uncovers the ego for which everything has meaning” (p. 30). The aim of phenomenological reduction is to explicate the essential nature of the phenomenon
(Husserl, 1931). The steps involve “perceiving, thinking, remembering, imagining, and judging” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 91) the experiences of the participants to arrive at a pattern or theme. During the phenomenological reduction step, a researcher views a situation from the perspective of the research participant.

An important element of phenomenological reduction is bracketing. Bracketing is when I, as the researcher, put the topic of the research into brackets and everything else is set aside allowing for the research to be rooted only in the research questions and topic being studied (Moustakas, 1994). LeVassuer (2003) expands upon Husserl’s definition of bracketing and explains that “we make progress toward sense and meaning by questioning prior knowledge, thus expanding into new horizons of meaning” (p. 418).

Prior to the start of the research process, I acknowledged the assumptions that I had. My assumptions were set aside during the data collection and analysis processes and instead I focused on the participants’ lived experiences and perceptions. Another important element of phenomenological reduction is horizontalization. Horizontalization removes overlapping or repetitive statements, taken from the qualitative data, leaving textural meaning and themes relevant to the research (Moustakas, 1994).

**Imagination Variation**

Imaginative variation follows the phenomenological reduction step. The aim of imaginative variation is to arrive at structural descriptions or themes of an experience, the underlying factors that caused the lived experience (Moustakas, 1994). Imagination variation illustrates how the phenomenon came to be and what the experience is (Moustakas, 1994). The structural themes developed are derived from the textural descriptions written in the phenomenological reduction phase (Moustakas, 1994).
Imagination variation also includes a reflective phase in which the various possibilities pertaining to the cause of the phenomenon are explored.

**Synthesis of Meanings and Essences**

The final step in the phenomenological research process is the synthesis of meanings and essences. The synthesis of meanings and essences is the integration of the textural and structural descriptions from the phenomenological reduction and imagination variance steps. According to Husserl (1931), essence refers to the element that is common and universal and without it a thing would not be what it is.

It is my role as the researcher to carry out the four steps in the phenomenological research process. This ensures that a comprehensive approach is used to understand the influence that the Dual Enrollment Program and other factors have had on student persistence at East Bay Area University.

**Role of the Researcher**

My professional background in higher education has primarily been in compliance, accreditation, and regulatory affairs. However, I have a profound interest in college preparedness, readiness, and accessibility. My past places of employment have provided insight on the importance of pre-collegiate academic preparedness. During interviews with college students, while I conducted onsite accreditation visits for a national accrediting agency and regulatory preparation visits for a Midwestern higher education corporation, it became evident that proper college preparation can be critical in having a successful postsecondary academic career. For example, many of the students in these work-related interviews spoke about taking remedial classes because they were not properly prepared for certain college courses.
This study is also of interest to me because I, like the majority of students at East Bay Area University, am an underrepresented minority. I, however, unlike the study’s proposed population, attended a single-sex boarding school for high school. My high school did not have a dual enrollment partnership with a local college. But, the high school did have a very strong academic curriculum and an onsite guidance counselor who monitored the college admissions process and academic progress of students.

I recognize that my demographic and socioeconomic background, as well as personal experiences, may be different from those of the interviewees. To counteract the differences between me and the study participants, I used reflexivity in this study. Through reflexivity, researchers recognize how their biases, personal background, and values shape their interpretations during the research study (Creswell, 2014). Reflexivity in qualitative research is practiced to avoid claiming authority over another while recognizing the differences between the researcher and the participants (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). I took into account both my differences and the study’s participants’ differences in all phases of the research to maximize objectivity.

As the researcher, I collected data on the participant’s personal experiences to guide the research. I adhered to socially responsible research when selecting participants and in communicating the intentions of the research to participants. I was socially and ethically responsible in sampling procedures and publishing research data. I was responsible for bringing “values, experiences, and priorities” to the research (Creswell, 2008, p. 439). It was also my role, as the researcher, to apply appropriate sociological concepts to the research (Creswell, 2008). Prior to the start of the research, I obtained permission from the Benedictine University institutional review board and the
institutional review board at East Bay Area University to ensure that the proposed research meets the research guidelines of the respective institutions.

**Data Collection**

**Data Collection Site**

East Bay Area University, located in the Southwest, was chosen as the data collection site for this study. This university also serves as the physical location of the Dual Enrollment Program. The campus’ sizable Hispanic student population, the mission of the institution, and its forward-thinking approach to supporting minority students’ efforts to successfully navigate the collegiate journey makes the university an ideal setting for the proposed research into Hispanic student persistence.

**Selection of Research Sample**

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Purposeful sampling involves intentional or purposeful selection of the study participants. Purposefully selecting the participants helped me, as the researcher, answer the research questions and respond to the research problem (Creswell, 2014). I selected participants based on their availability and willingness to participate (Creswell, 2008). Participants were eligible to participate in this study if they were (a) previous participants of the Dual Enrollment program, (b) currently enrolled at East Bay Area University, and (c) identify as Hispanic. Every effort was made to ensure an equal distribution of male and female participants.

Consent from East Bay Area University’s President was obtained for this study. Once both institutional review boards approved the study, I worked with the administrator of the Dual Enrollment Program to obtain a list of students who met the eligibility criteria for participation in this study. There was a total population size of 15
former Dual Enrollment Program students currently registered at East Bay Area University. I sent an e-mail to the list of students who met the preliminary eligibility criteria and invited them to participate (see Appendix A). Ten out of the 15 students agreed to participate in the study. Those students who agreed to participate were e-mailed a demographic survey to collect preliminary background information on each of the participants (see Appendix B). Each participating student was then e-mailed an informed consent form for his/her signature. The informed consent form includes information on assurances of participants’ anonymity and ethical use of the data (see Appendix C). Lunch was provided during the interview sessions to thank the students for their participation.

**Methods of Data Collection**

Qualitative data were collected through one-on-one, in-depth interviews with study participants. Onsite data collection took place during the Spring 2014 semester following research approval from both universities’ institutional review boards.

Before beginning the interview process, participants were confirmed via a demographic survey to ensure they met the eligibility criteria. Upon confirmation that participants met the eligibility criteria, interviews were scheduled and conducted. Students were interviewed to gather data on their experiences related to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, how the Dual Enrollment program prepared them for the academic and nonacademic aspects of college, and other factors that they believed influenced their academic success and persistence. The interview questions were semi-structured and open-ended (see Appendix D). I worked with each participant to determine a place and time that was convenient for the interview to occur.
Each interview was conducted face-to-face. Prior to the start of the interview, I tried to build rapport with each participant. I created a relaxed and trusting environment so that the participants felt comfortable responding comprehensively and honestly (Moustakas, 1994). One interview was conducted with each research participant. Each interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis. The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed by me, and sent to the participants for their review to confirm accuracy. Member checking, the process of verifying, questioning, and cross checking interview data, was done to assist in ensuring that ethical integrity was maintained in the research process (Creswell, 2008). Additionally, I kept a journal that included reflective notes on my feelings regarding the study. The journal included reflective and observational notes from the interviews to assist in remaining reflexive throughout the study. Memo writing benefited the research process because it allowed for the interviews to be transcribed for later recollection. Participation in this study was voluntary, and participants had the right to choose not to answer individual questions or not complete the interview process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data were collected from interviews with the Dual Enrollment Program participants. The interviews provided relevant data to use to research their experiences and perceptions and the influence of the Dual Enrollment Program and other factors on persistence at East Bay Area University. The interview sessions with students were audio recorded and later transcribed. By reviewing the transcripts, pertinent themes were ascertained and coded. Coding was used in the research to create categories for the data collected. Interview responses were coded according to themes and patterns that emerged from the data analysis. Narrative derived from descriptions and connected
themes were used to explain how the data from the interviews influenced this research study. I used thick descriptions to explain the research findings. Thick descriptions add value to the validity of the research because in-depth details are used to describe the data collection process and the shared experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014). I implemented reflexivity when reporting my findings. In the narrative description of the data collected, I reflected upon how my interpretation of the data was shaped by my personal background, culture, and lived experiences (Creswell, 2014).

The relationship between analysis, interpretation, and writing in qualitative research is that they exist in a continuum (Hesse-Biber & Levy, 2010). Analysis involved assessing the collected data and determining how those data could be used to answer the research questions. The data were used to determine whether participation in the Dual Enrollment Program along with internal and external factors had an influence on participant persistence. Interpretation of the data involved making sense of collected data and deciding whether additional data collection or analysis was needed.

The specific phenomenological method of analysis that was used in this study were the procedures developed by Moustakas (1994) and included the following steps: (a) horizontalization (listing and preliminary grouping), (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) clustering and creating themes, (d) identifying the invariant constituents and their themes, and (e) synthesis of the meanings and essence of the phenomenon. There were five themes that emerged during the course of the research study. Each theme had two subthemes. Details on the themes and subthemes are provided in Chapter 5.
Strategies for Validating Findings

Validity in qualitative research means that a researcher has implemented procedures throughout the research process to check for the accuracy of the research findings (Creswell, 2014). I implemented various procedures to check and make sure that the data were accurate, authentic, and credible from my viewpoint and the viewpoint of the participants. There are a variety of qualitative research validity strategies. However, the strategies that were used in this research were: (a) using member checking to determine accuracy, (b) using thick descriptions to explain the findings, and (c) presenting any biases that I may have during the research process.

It was assumed that the university students participating in this research would provide information that was factual, reflective of their personal experiences, and related to the research study. It is vital that data obtained from qualitative research are trustworthy. Data from the interviews were verified, questioned, and cross-checked through member checking. After the review of the interview transcripts, they were sent to the participants for a review of accuracy. Thick descriptions were used to add value to the trustworthiness of the research because they provide explicit details regarding the data collection process and the shared experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Ethically responsible research and protection of the interests of the research subjects were made a priority in this study. Prior to the start of the research process, I submitted a review form to the institutional review boards at Benedictine University and East Bay Area University. Members of the institutional review boards reviewed the
proposal to ensure the necessary ethical guidelines for conducting research on human subjects were being followed.

Prior to beginning the research, I provided participants with an informed consent form for their review and signature. The informed consent form contained information on the purpose of this study, participant anonymity, how the data were to be used, data storage, and explained that participation in this study has little to no risk. Data collected from the interviews conducted in this study were used exclusively for the purpose of this research. Pseudonyms were assigned to the participants, college preparatory academy, college access program, and university site. When the project was complete, all transcripts and audio recording were placed in a secure file in a locked cabinet. Copies of the audio recordings will be stored for at least seven years in a locked cabinet and destroyed when they are no longer needed.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are influences on the methodology that the researcher cannot control (Creswell, 2008). My demographic, socioeconomic background and personal experiences that differed from those of the participants also served as limitations. However, through reflexivity I was able to identify my biases while taking into account my differences and the study participants’ differences. Additionally, this study was limited to only Hispanic Dual Enrollment Program participants attending East Bay Area University and no other institutions. Persistence at other colleges/universities was not studied, nor were other ethnicities. The timeframe of the study also served as a limitation. Participants’ responses were captured during the Spring 2014 semester of their college career. Therefore, the
participants’ responses are reflective of their opinion at that time of the interview versus other points in their college career.

Summary

This study uses a qualitative research method to obtain data. A qualitative phenomenological research approach with a constructivist perspective was used for qualitative data collection. As the researcher, it was my role to be ethically and socially responsible in my considerations and research practices. The data collection site and purposeful selection of the research sample were very important elements in helping me understand the how and why of the phenomenon being studied. The data collection and data analysis processes influenced the strategies for validating the findings. Identifying the research limitations was important because they discuss the restrictions of the methodology. The results of this study have assisted in describing how participation in a dual enrollment program along with internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University.
CHAPTER 4

PROFILES OF PARTICIPANTS

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to explore the influence that dual enrollment and other factors have had on the persistence of Hispanic students currently enrolled at East Bay Area University. Ten of the 15 eligible East Bay Area University students who completed the Dual Enrollment Program (DEP) participated in the study. The interviews took place during the Spring 2014 semester. A profile of each of the ten participants along with demographic information is included in this chapter.

Introduction of the Participants

Purposeful sampling was used in this study. Participants were eligible to participate in this study if they were (a) previous participants of the Dual Enrollment Program, (b) were currently enrolled at East Bay Area University, and (c) identified as Hispanic. Each of the study’s participants met the eligibility criteria. Seven of the interviewees were female and three were male. The students’ ages ranged from 19 to 22 years old. Five of the students were currently in their sophomore year of college, two students were in their junior year of college, and three students were in their senior year of college. Two interviewees participated in the Dual Enrollment Program during their junior year of high school, six interviewees participated in the program during their senior year of high school, and two interviewees participated in the program during both their junior and senior years of high school. The number of college credits that the interviewees received upon completion of the Dual Enrollment Program (DEP) ranged from 3 to 15 credits. All of the participants enrolled in and began college immediately
after completing high school. One of the ten participants enrolled in a local state university before enrolling in East Bay Area University. The other nine participants enrolled directly into East Bay Area University. Nine of the ten participants indicated that they were first-generation college students. One of the participants was unsure of his parents’ education level. All of the interview participants were enrolled at East Bay Area University full time. Table 2 outlines the demographic profile information of the ten participants in this study.

Table 2

**Participant Demographic Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level in College</th>
<th>Level of High School Participation in DEP</th>
<th>College Credits Earned in DEP</th>
<th>First-Generation College Student</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlos</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eduardo</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Felicia</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>Junior &amp; Senior</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lilliana</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore Year</td>
<td>Senior Year</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucas</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Senior Year</td>
<td>Senior Year</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mia</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savannah</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Junior</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selena</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Junior &amp; Senior</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanya</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Pseudonyms are used in the participant profiles to conceal the identity of the former Dual Enrollment Program participants who are currently enrolled at East Bay Area University. The participant profiles included in this chapter provide detailed
demographic information on each of the interviewees, their thoughts about college while in high school, their perspectives on how the Dual Enrollment Program influenced their thoughts about college, how the Dual Enrollment Program influenced their postsecondary academic persistence, and various factors that have positively and negatively impacted their academic success and persistence while enrolled at East Bay Area University.

**Carlos**

Carlos is a 21-year-old Hispanic male. Carlos is double majoring in liberal studies and criminal justice. At the time of the interview Carlos was in his senior year at East Bay Area University. He participated in the Dual Enrollment Program during his junior year in high school. Carlos is not the first person in his family to attend college but he is a first-generation college student. Carlos did not recall applying for the Dual Enrollment Program but was notified of his eligibility to participate in the program. Carlos believed that his high school GPA qualified him to participate in the program. Participating in the program forced Carlos to mature quickly. Because he did not apply for the program he shared that he felt like he was “kind of thrown in” to the program. When recalling his initial thoughts about the program, he stated:

It took me a while to really kind of grasp the idea that these were college courses. So it was kind of a growing, maturing period for me just trying to understand that, you know, these were college courses. . . . They counted for college credit. They can benefit you after you get out of high school.

Carlos took four courses while enrolled in the program. He took a math course, an English course, a drama course, and a psychology course for a total of 12 college credits. Carlos found that the experience motivated him. Participating in the program enhanced his confidence in his academic ability. It also seemed to give him an increased
sense of self-efficacy. After completing the Dual Enrollment Program, he knew that he was equipped with the skills to have a successful college career. He also found the Dual Enrollment Program administrator to be extremely helpful in assisting him with the college application process. Another benefit of participating in the program with his College Preparatory Academy peers was that some of them went on to attend East Bay Area University with him. Carlos elaborated:

It just made that transition a lot better from the Dual Enrollment Program. I mean, I already set foot in East Bay Area University. I already knew most of the faculty or the people that I knew I would need, and so, just having that help and support really just helped. Support from the bursar’s office, the front desk, East Bay Area University library staff, and the student success center. When we were in the Dual Enrollment Program they gave us the tour of the place. We knew where everything was. . . . That just helped a whole lot.

When Carlos thinks about his family in the United States and in Mexico who have not pursued higher education, he is filled with a sense of pride and leadership since he is determined to complete college. Prior to concluding the interview, Carlos stated:

I believe college is for everyone. . . . It doesn’t matter who you are or where you come from. If you really want it, you can take it. You know, I didn’t even know how I got in [to the Dual Enrollment Program], but I got in. Giving that opportunity to someone and having that someone take it, that’s all you need to continue. And that’s what happened in the Dual Enrollment Program for me.

**Eduardo**

Eduardo is a 21-year-old Hispanic male. Eduardo is a math and science major with a concentration in physics. At the time of the interview he was in his junior year at East Bay Area University. Eduardo participated in the Dual Enrollment Program during his senior year in high school. Eduardo took only one course while enrolled in the program. This was an English course for a total of three college credits. He took this course to help him develop his writing skills, improve his note taking skills, and enhance
his analytical reading skills. Eduardo’s academic strengths have always been in the areas of math and science. However, participation in the Dual Enrollment Program helped him a great deal with his writing skills.

Eduardo considers himself to be a procrastinator. Participating in the Dual Enrollment Program motivated him to apply to East Bay Area University. The program also helped to change his beliefs about college. Eduardo thought that college would be too difficult and that the professors would be extremely strict. However, after completing the program and entering college, Eduardo acknowledged that:

The professors are willing to work one-to-one or they’re willing to compromise. They’re willing to extend any assignments. Some of us are working; they would make it easier on us and fit to our schedule.

In addition to enhancing his writing skills, Eduardo believed that the Dual Enrollment Program forced him to be more social. Because the classes were so small, Eduardo had to interact with students whom he had not met before or had as classmates in other high school courses. His improved social skills have helped him to engage in classroom discussions with his peers and professors in college.

Eduardo also believes that support from his parents and the academic advisors and professors at East Bay Area University have contributed to his academic persistence.

**Felicia**

Felicia is a 20-year-old Hispanic female. She is a child development major and at the time of the interview she was in her junior year at East Bay Area University. Felicia is a first-generation college student but she is not the first person in her family to attend college.
Felicia participated in the Dual Enrollment Program during her junior and senior years of high school. She took five courses during her Dual Enrollment Program experience, totaling 15 college credits. She took a visual arts course, a psychology course, a trigonometry course, a calculus course, and an English course. Felicia was very candid in her responses. She explained that prior to the Dual Enrollment Program she had not started planning for college because she was focused on her high school course work. She also said that she “wasn’t really looking forward to actually taking college courses”. However, her mother encouraged her to participate in the program.

Prior to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, Felicia thought that college course work would be too challenging for her. She also thought that she would be only a number rather than a name in a classroom. However, the program’s faculty helped to dispel these myths early on. Felicia learned that college course work was not as difficult as she thought and she found East Bay Area faculty to be very attentive to the needs of the Dual Enrollment Program students.

After graduating from high school, Felicia attended a local state university and was able to transfer the credits that she earned from the Dual Enrollment Program. However, she soon transferred to East Bay Area University because she experienced culture shock and felt that the environment at the previous university was not the right fit for her. When reflecting on why she decided to transfer to East Bay Area University, she explained:

It was quite difficult for me to adapt to a totally new culture. I didn’t feel so comfortable expressing myself or expressing my culture because I was in a totally different environment. Here my culture was the majority. At [the state university], it was the minority. So I think that had a great impact because I didn’t feel so confident about myself.
The small student-to-faculty ratio at East Bay Area University, support from her family, and encouragement from her Dual Enrollment Program friends are the factors that have been most meaningful to her academic persistence. When discussing a time where she struggled in college and her academic persistence was in jeopardy, Felicia disclosed:

I fell down but I had a bunch of hands helping me out from the College Preparatory Academy, from East Bay Area University, and at home. And I believe that’s what really motivated me to continue on. Even though I wanted to give up, they still pushed me: ‘Like continue on even if you’re taking one, two classes. You have to continue.’

**Lilliana**

Lilliana is a 19-year-old Hispanic female. Lilliana is a child development major and at the time of the interview she was in her sophomore year at East Bay Area University. At first, Lilliana was very hesitant to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program. She was not sure if she wanted to take on the challenge of college level coursework while still in high school. However, two of her high school teachers encouraged her to participate in the program. They informed her that it would be a beneficial experience and would provide her with the opportunity to gain familiarity with a college classroom while still in high school. Lilliana is both a first-generation college student and the first person in her family to attend college. She informed me that she did not think of college as an option for her. Additionally, coming from a low-income family she knew that affording college was going to be an obstacle. However, Lilliana also recognized how significant it would be for her to be the first person her family to attend and complete college.
Lilliana participated in the Dual Enrollment Program during her senior year in high school. She took a trigonometry course and a psychology course totaling six credits. When discussing her overall experience in the program she stated:

So overall, it was a very great experience. If I could have, I would have started this my junior year. I started in my senior year but the emphasis was basically the academics. So making sure that we passed the course. . . . Certain teachers were there to help us if we needed help. I felt that, at first, I was struggling because I did not understand the syllabus or how to follow up with the professors. It was different. Even though we were at the high school, it was different to be inside a classroom with a professor. I felt a little bit out of place and lost, but little by little I got the hang of it. And when I came here to East Bay Area University I felt ready.

Additionally, prior to starting college, Lilliana thought that the course work would be too challenging for her. But after completing the Dual Enrollment Program, having simultaneously completed high school courses and college courses, she knew that she had the time management skills needed to succeed in college. Lilliana credits her persistence in college to the relationships that she developed with Dual Enrollment Program administrator and the program’s faculty. Throughout her college career, they continuously inquired about her academic progress and her areas of concern. Lilliana also explained that because East Bay Area University has such a small campus that there is a sense of community and that staff and faculty genuinely want students to succeed.

When asked if there was additional information that she wanted to share about her experience or with others, she stated:

Well, probably the struggles that I had as a minority and as a female. It’s very important to not give up. I felt that I wasn’t going to make it to college and then my senior year, I got on it and I applied to different colleges and I got accepted. So I feel that all these struggles that you are put through only make you stronger, and it will only let you see how much you need education in your life. I feel that as a minority from a very ghetto place. . . . that you can only be so much. Like they put a roof over you and you’re not getting out of here. But I feel that having
support systems, having networks, and knowing who to go to can really help you and impact your future. I feel that without the professors, the Dual Enrollment Program, the university, the community that I have built by myself, and all the hard work that people have put into me and I’ve put into myself that I wouldn’t be where I am.

Lucas

Lucas is a 21-year-old Hispanic male. Lucas is a math and science major and at the time of the interview he was in his senior year at East Bay Area University. Lucas is a first-generation college student but he is not the first person in his family to attend college. Pursuing higher education and graduating from college was not a frequent topic of discussion in Lucas’ household. Lucas was encouraged to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program by the program’s administrator. He also had a couple of friends from high school who encouraged him to attend the program. Lucas participated in the program during his senior year in high school. He took an English course and a drama course for a total of six college credits. When recalling his experiences in the program, he emphasized:

My experiences in Dual Enrollment Program classes were very different compared to that of high school. Because half of our high school career, it was pretty much: ‘Sit down and listen. Take notes.’ But the program was very much different. It was: ‘Read through this chapter, come to class, and discuss what you have learned,’ instead of learning what you need to know in a certain curriculum in a class. I felt a lot more freedom to express myself with my peers in the classroom.

Participating in the Dual Enrollment Program also improved Lucas’ writing and note taking skills, which he found helpful throughout his college career. His friends and family have also encouraged him to persist in college. He shared, “I think that I grew up with great people and that ultimately led me to great decisions.” The areas that he most struggled with during his college career were being organized, time management,
managing his personal life, and his social life. Upon graduation, Lucas wants to go into
the field of kinesiology with an emphasis in nutrition. He wants to educate the
community that he grew up in on nutrition and improving their quality of life.

Melissa

Melissa is a 19-year-old Hispanic female. Melissa is a child development major.
At the time of the interview Melissa was in her sophomore year at East Bay Area
University. Melissa immigrated to the United States with her family five years ago. She is
also a first-generation college student and the first person in her family to attend college.
During her senior year in high school, Melissa was motivated to participate in the Dual
Enrollment Program because of the curricula and the opportunity to take college level
course work while still in high school. Melissa explained that she struggled with grammar
and speaking English fluently. The Dual Enrollment Program was a good opportunity for
Melissa. She was able to take an English course to improve her academic writing and
increase her level of confidence when it came to speaking in a classroom. Melissa also
took a Chicano studies course while in the Dual Enrollment Program. Upon completing
the program Melissa earned six college credits.

When discussing her experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program’s English
course, Melissa remarked:

Learning English to talk, to write . . . I was having a lot of problems when I was
writing with my grammar. I would be so scared. . . . So, when I was taking the
class, I was like okay, it’s not that hard.

Due to her limited English proficiency, Melissa lacked confidence in her
academic abilities. However, the faculty teaching in the program helped to motivate and
encourage Melissa. After completing the Dual Enrollment Program and enrolling in East
Bay Area University, Melissa found a similar level of support via the university’s academic advising staff. Melissa expressed that her family and friends have also influenced her persistence in college.

Mia

Mia is a 20-year-old Hispanic female. Mia is majoring in liberal studies. At the time of the interview she was in her senior year at East Bay Area University. Although she is a first-generation college student, she is not the first person in her family to attend college. The ability to earn college credits while still in high school made the Dual Enrollment Program appealing to Mia. She understood the importance of being college and career ready prior to starting her first semester of college. She explained, “I wanted to go ahead and start early on the college and career goals that I wanted to attempt”.

While enrolled in the Dual Enrollment Program Mia took an English course and a Spanish course during her senior year in high school for a total of six college credits. She attributes part of her success in college to the Dual Enrollment Program’s faculty members. They prepared her for the academic rigor of college. Mia found that the level of support from East Bay Area faculty continued once she enrolled in the university. She told me:

There are many professors that helped me along the way to stay here. They helped me in cases of an emergency. They would help me, push me, and nothing would be impossible to finish here.

Support from her classmates and her parents motivated Mia and contributed to her academic persistence. When asked if she had any additional information that she wanted to share, Mia stated:
I think it [the Dual Enrollment Program] is beneficial and all high school students should get into it because it helps you to get a better understanding when you go to college or university. It also gives you the benefit of credits. Some of the credits will transfer and will help you when you get into college.

Savannah

Savannah is a 19-year-old Hispanic female. Savannah is a child development major. When interviewed she was in her sophomore year at East Bay Area University. According to Savannah, the Dual Enrollment Program provided her with an opportunity to get a head start on the college going experience. Savannah is a first-generation college student and is the first person in her family to attend college. Prior to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, Savannah thought that a community college was her only option. However, once she started the program’s coursework during high school, she discovered that attending a four-year university was a viable option for her. Savannah explained that another benefit of participating in the Dual Enrollment Program was that it was early access to college coursework for free. She explained that she comes from a family in which only one of her parents is working. The accessibility of the program was also an appealing aspect for Savannah. East Bay Area University faculty traveled to the College Preparatory Academy high school and conducted the Dual Enrollment Program courses there.

Savannah took three courses during her junior year in high school, for a total of ten credits, while enrolled in the Dual Enrollment Program. She completed a speech course, a drama course, and a psychology course. Savannah explained that participating in the program gave her the confidence that she needed to succeed in college. She learned time management skills, how to interact with peers in college level courses, and
how to interact with college faculty. When reflecting upon how the Dual Enrollment Program prepared her for college, Savannah acknowledged that she felt more confident about herself following the Dual Enrollment Program experience. She expressed that because of the program she had a better awareness of what attending college would be like.

During Savannah’s college career, she has been taught by some of the same professors from the Dual Enrollment Program. She believes that this has given her an advantage over some of her peers because she was already familiar with these professors teaching styles and their expectations. Savannah shared that the aspects of the college experience that were not covered by the Dual Enrollment Program were explained to her by the staff at East Bay Area University. Upon acceptance into East Bay Area University, staff at the university assisted her with course registration and navigation of the financial aid process, which Savannah identified as extremely helpful.

Prior to concluding the interview, Savannah expressed that she would highly recommend high school students to participate in a dual enrollment program if they are given the opportunity. She stated:

If they are offered something like this, to actually do it because they get to know what college is about. If they feel scared, like I was, this program actually helps them know what college is about. It’s just a glimpse of it, you know. I would join again. I would do it all over again.

Selena

Selena is a 20-year-old Hispanic female. Selena is a math and science major and at the time of the interview she was in her senior year at East Bay Area University. Selena participated in the Dual Enrollment Program during her junior and senior years in
high school. She came to the United States only two years before participating in the Dual Enrollment Program. Selena informed me that she was aware that she was at a disadvantage academically because of her limited English language skills. This caused her to be very apprehensive about pursuing higher education. However, she believed that participating in the Dual Enrollment Program would provide her with the college readiness skills that she lacked.

Selena took an ethnic studies course, a drama course, and an English course, for a total of nine college credits, while in the program. She believed that taking the three courses positioned her ahead of some of her classmates who had no transferable college credits. Selena informed me that prior to participating in the program she thought that attending college was only for White people. She also thought that if she attempted to attend college that she would not successfully graduate because it would be too challenging. However, after taking the Dual Enrollment Program courses and starting college Selena’s beliefs changed. She recalled:

After taking these courses, I got a better understanding about college and I know that there are a lot of people that can help you out. You’re not by yourself. There are people that are in the same situation as you and there are people that are better than you, worse than you, but there’s always someone to go to. There are always people that can help you so you’re not by yourself.

Selena also attributes her academic persistence to the faculty and academic advisors at East Bay Area University, who provided her with academic support and remained in constant contact with her during her college career. Motivation and encouragement from her parents and friends also played a prominent role in her academic persistence. Additionally, Selena shared that her motivation and academic persistence is driven by wanting to change how others view Hispanics in our society:
Here in the United States we are considered a minor class and they think that we cannot do it. They believe that because we are not from here . . . we do not have the potential to make it through college. So that’s kind of like a motivation to show them that we can.

**Tanya**

Tanya is a 22-year-old Hispanic female. She is a liberal studies major with a concentration in social sciences. At the time of the interview, she was in her senior year at East Bay Area University. Tanya participated in the Dual Enrollment Program at the College Preparatory Academy during her senior year of high school. While in high school she was highly motivated and determined to attend college. Although Tanya is not the first person in her family to attend college, she is a first-generation college student. The idea of receiving college credits while still in high school compelled Tanya to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program. Tanya expressed that participating in the program was appealing to her because it served as an opportunity to work towards bettering her future. Tanya shared that the program’s administrator was instrumental in helping her understand the value of the program.

Tanya took three East Bay Area University classes during her senior year in high school for a total of nine college credits. Tanya shared that, “the overall experience for me was a really good one”. She stressed that some of her high school classes were not very challenging and that she often got her assignments completed ahead of her classmates. However, Tanya found that her peers in the Dual Enrollment Program shared her passion for learning and that it was easy to engage in classroom discussions with them. The course that she remembered the most was a journalism course. In recollecting her experiences, Tanya informed me:
I was used to sharing in class and having class discussions, but it’s a completely different level when you can advance the level of intellect behind it and the reasoning. It helps you develop your own critical thinking skills and, being at a younger age, I think it not only helps you develop that skill but it sparks an interest in it.

The Dual Enrollment Program courses were extremely intriguing to her and captivated her intellectually. In recalling her overall experience Tanya stated, “Overall, I had a great experience with it and that’s what made my transition from high school to college that much easier”.

As a child, Tanya’s parents instilled in her the importance of attending college. However, because her parents had not attended college, Tanya found the college admissions process daunting. There were numerous documents to complete and her parents did not understand the postsecondary admissions process. The difficulty of this was compounded by the fact that her parents were not fluent in English. As Tanya explained, “My family didn’t know anything about it, as is the case in many Latino households. Especially when your parents don’t understand the educational system, they don’t understand the process or even the language”. The Dual Enrollment Program made navigating the college admissions process easier by providing her with help from the admissions counselors at East Bay Area University.

Upon graduation from the College Preparatory Academy, Tanya had successfully completed nine college credits. Subsequently, East Bay Area University provided Tanya with an institutional scholarship. Being able to afford college was an area that Tanya knew would be a struggle for her family. Tanya has four siblings and her father had been unemployed for the past seven years due to an injury. Tanya told me that her “family lives paycheck to paycheck”. Therefore, the institutional scholarship served as a major
contributor to her ability to persist in college especially because she was not eligible for
state or federal financial aid.

Tanya shared that participating in the Dual Enrollment Program made the idea of
going to college viable because it gave her a glimpse into what college would be like.
One of the advantages of participating in the program for her was getting exposure to
college curricula and faculty without having to pay college tuition. Another positive
aspect of the program was that it allowed Tanya to be more social and actively engage
with other students who were passionate about learning. Tanya believes that this has
helped her tremendously in her college career. Tanya has served as treasurer on the
student government association and the debate team at East Bay Area University. After
graduating from college, one of her goals is to help other Hispanics understand the
college-going process. Tanya shared:

There’s so much that I’m thankful for to this university . . . because they made it
possible for me and I know that some of that was attributed to my participation in
the Dual Enrollment Program. Because they already knew that I was going to be
working hard towards what I wanted to do.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided demographic information of the ten participants along with
information on their overall Dual Enrollment Program experiences, their beliefs on
pursuing a postsecondary education, the role that the Dual Enrollment Program played in
their academic persistence, and the additional factors that they believe have contributed
to their academic persistence. The information included in the participant profiles was
collected from the individual face-to-face interviews that I conducted with them. The
participants’ profile information provides a holistic portrayal of each individual’s lived
experiences, whereas the themes in Chapter 5 provide an analysis of the commonalities across all the participants’ lives. The data gathered from the in-depth interviews and subsequent participant profiles were used to develop the common themes that will be discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5

THEMATIC ANALYSIS

This chapter explores and analyzes the themes that emerged from the lived experiences revealed by the participants during their interviews. Common themes were ascertained, categories were created and coded, and subthemes were developed using the data collected. The data from this qualitative phenomenological study were used to answer the main research question and its sub-questions and to understand how their participation in the Dual Enrollment Program along with internal and external experiences influenced the participants’ persistence. This chapter uses thick descriptions, direct quotes from the transcript interviews of the participants, and visual representations in the form of tables to present the themes, subthemes, and general research findings.

As outlined by Moustakas (1994), the specific phenomenological method of analysis that was used in this study includes the following steps: (a) horizontalization (listing and preliminary grouping), (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) clustering and creating themes, (d) identifying the invariant constituents and their themes, and (e) synthesis of the meanings and essence of the phenomenon. To begin this process, I read each of the ten participants’ narrative transcripts to ensure that there were no errors made during the transcription process. Then I sent the transcripts to the interviewees to obtain confirmation of the document’s accuracy. After the member checking process was complete, then each transcript was reviewed again in order to complete the participant profiles used in Chapter 4. During the second read of the transcripts, I took notes on the reoccurring themes that emerged based upon the participants’ responses to the interview questions. In order to categorize the themes and create a visual catalog of the
interviewees’ responses, I created a color coded spreadsheet with the responses for each of the interview questions. I mapped the themes that emerged from the interviews to the sub-questions. This in turn allowed for the primary research question to be answered and for the overall essence of the participants’ experiences to be captured.

There are five major themes and ten total subthemes. The themes that emerged, based upon the research question and the sub-questions, are: Theme 1: Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life; Theme 2: College Perceived as a Viable Option; Theme 3: The Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence; Theme 4: The Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence; and Theme 5: Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence.

Theme 1: Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life has two subthemes: (a) the importance of having additional academic preparation for college and (b) being a first-generation college student. Theme 1 and its subthemes explore the factors that motivated the participants to attend college and the factors that contributed to their beliefs about college. These findings respond to research sub-questions 1 and 2. Sub-question 1 asks about the participants’ perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment. Sub-question 2 inquires about the factors that influence the participant’s beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college.

Theme 2: College Perceived as a Viable Option has two subthemes: (a) self-doubt regarding the academic rigors of college and (b) college affordability. The analysis of Theme 2 and its subthemes details the perceptions and beliefs that the participants have about college and how attending the Dual Enrollment Program influenced these perceptions. These findings respond to research sub-question 1.
Theme 3: The Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence has two subthemes: (a) exposure to college level curricula and (b) increased self-confidence. Theme 3 and its two subthemes detail how the Dual Enrollment Program contributed to the participants’ academic preparation for college curricula and increased their self-confidence as scholars. Theme 3 and its two subthemes respond to research sub-questions 3 and 4. Sub-question 3 inquires about how the Dual Enrollment Program influenced the participant’s beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college. Sub-question 4 asks about the participants’ experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program and how the program prepared them for college.

Theme 4: The Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence has two subthemes: (a) relationships with East Bay Area University staff and (b) relationships with East Bay Area University faculty. Theme 4 and its two subthemes respond to research sub-question 2. The analysis of Theme 4 and its subthemes details how university staff and faculty contributed positively to the participants’ academic beliefs about college, academic success, and persistence in college.

Theme 5: Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence has two subthemes: (a) encouragement from family members and (b) positive influence and support from friends. The analysis of Theme 5 and its two subthemes explores the external factors that the participants perceived as positively motivating them during their college career; ultimately contributing to their persistence in college. This themes and subthemes relate to research sub-question 2.
**Theme 1: Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life**

The first question asked of the participants during the interview session was regarding what made them decide to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program while they attended the College Preparatory Academy as high school students. Based upon their responses to this question, their desire to attend college and have a better life for themselves arose as the first prominent theme. From this theme, two subthemes developed: (a) the importance of having additional academic preparation for college and (b) being a first-generation college student. Theme 1 and its two subthemes provided data on the factors that influenced the participants to attend college and have a better life. The participants’ responses about their desire to attend college and have a better life were fairly consistent. Nine of the ten interviewees reported that being first-generation college students also served as a motivating factor to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program. Eight of the ten interviewees indicated that they recognized the importance of having additional academic preparation for college. These findings are illustrated in Table 3. A discussion of each of the subthemes will follow.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being a first-generation college student</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of having additional academic preparation for college</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Being a First-Generation College Student**

One of the major subthemes that emerged from the interviews was that all of the interviewees except for one identified as first-generation college students. The remaining participant, Eduardo, was unsure as to his parents’ educational background. For most of the respondents, their parents and immediate family members had not graduated from
college. Therefore, they recognized the importance of attending and graduating from college since their family members had not. Many of the participants’ parents stressed the importance of attending college so that the participants were equipped with the skills needed to have a better future and quality of life. When speaking about the encouragement provided by her family, Selena stated, “I’m the first one to go to college so they were like: ‘Yeah, you need to do this. You need to be prepared. You need to have a future. You have an opportunity’”.

In speaking about her family’s influence on her participation in the Dual Enrollment Program, Tanya also shared:

Before the Dual Enrollment Program, coming from a family that has very little and hasn’t had any opportunities to further their education, it was always ingrained in me that education is something that you’re doing for yourself. Regardless of who will benefit later on in your life, it’s something that is yours, and it’s one of the few things in life that nobody can take away from you. So I already had that appreciation for education in itself.

For many of the interviewees, their first-generation status not only applied to being a first-generation college student but also a first-generation United States citizen. Some of their families had immigrated to the United States within the last decade and several of the participants, too, were immigrants to this country. Melissa, for example, had been in the United States for only three years when she was introduced to the Dual Enrollment Program. Also, Selena had only been in the United States for two years when she started the Dual Enrollment Program. These participants explained that they decided to participate in the program not only because it provided exposure to college curricula but also because they knew that their parents wanted them to have the type of success in this country that a college education can provide, hopefully allowing the students to have
a better life than their parents. When speaking about first-generation college student status, Carlos candidly expressed:

I’m always going to mention family just because of my mother and father. I don’t think they went higher than maybe a high school education. [It’s] just . . . my older brother and I who were in college. Aside from not only my immediate family but, my family in Mexico or my family who have been here but cousins who really didn’t take advantage of the system. That gave me a sense of pride and that sense of leadership that, you know, we’re the ones. You’re on the frontier taking advantage of it.

I, like many of the participants, am an underrepresented, first-generation college student. Although my racial and ethnic background differs from theirs, as the interviewees shared their respective reasons, beliefs, and stories for participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, I was able to identify with their desire to complete college because their parents wanted them to achieve more academically than they had. As first-generation college students, the participants’ recognized the importance of attending and persisting in college since their parents had not. The participants expressed that their parents motivated them to attend college by reiterating that a college education will provide them with long term financial gains and career advancement opportunities, while positioning them for a successful future. For some of the participants the pride associated with being the first or one of the first individuals in their immediate family to attend college influenced their participation in the Dual Enrollment Program. The concept of being a role model to their family members positively influenced the participants to attend college. The majority of the participants stated that they recognized that participating in the Dual Enrollment Program would give them the additional preparation that they needed to help make the goal of attending and graduating from college possible.
Importance of Having Additional Academic Preparation for College

When explaining what influenced their decision to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program, many of the respondents mentioned the importance of being exposed to college level curricula while still in high school. The interviewees, in various ways, expressed that when presented with this opportunity, they welcomed it. These students believed that they would have an academic advantage over students who did not have a similar opportunity. Some of the interviewees expressed having a high level of academic self-efficacy while in high school. Therefore, they wanted the challenge of college level course work. For example, Tanya explained:

I have always been very school-oriented. So I already had an idea of what I wanted to do, and college was definitely a sure decision that I already made. I think what most appealed for me was the fact that I’d be able to take regular classes and I’d still be able to work towards my future.

Tanya also discussed how participating in the Dual Enrollment Program allowed her to be with peers, many of whom she had met at East Bay University, who also shared in her love for learning.

Having a natural discussion about something with other people that were interested in it, not just because they had to take it, but because they actually found something interesting in the subject during the classes. It was just really interesting and it was a new experience.

Carlos, Eduardo, Felicia, Lilliana, Melissa, Mia, Savannah, and Selena believed that the early exposure to college level curricula would help them to mature and enhance some of the skills in which they were deficient such as English or writing. Carlos was one of the participants who indicated that he believed that participation in the Dual Enrollment Program would help him progress and mature as a student. Carlos shared, “It was kind of a growing, maturing period, for me, just trying to understand that these were
college courses. They counted for college credit. You know, they can benefit you after you get out of high school”.

Eduardo had a very similar experience to Carlos. Eduardo informed me that although he is very skilled in the areas of math and science, in general, he is a procrastinator. The Dual Enrollment Program offered college level English and writing courses. Eduardo believed that participation in the Dual Enrollment Program would help him with his note taking and writing skills. In describing his Dual Enrollment Program experiences, his initial thoughts about participation in the program were confirmed. He stated:

It still helped me develop some of my writing skills that I still needed help on. I got a lot of help from my previous high school. But going into English 45 with my professor . . . he helped us correct any small things or writing skills, and reading skills, like taking notes—all the sort of things that, well, I needed because I’m focused more on math.

Unlike Eduardo, who was a native English speaker and hoped to enhance his technical writing and note taking skills, Selena participated in the Dual Enrollment Program because English was her second language and she hoped to improve her limited English language abilities. Selena remarked:

The main reason why I wanted to be in the Dual Enrollment Program was because I was really scared to go to college. . . . It was my second year here in the United States, so I was really, really scared to go to college, because I didn’t know enough English. So it was like, ‘I need to prepare myself to go to college because that’s the next step in my life.’

The eight participants whose desire to attend college and have a better life prompted them to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program, in order to obtain additional academic college preparation, may have all gone to the same high school but their personal backgrounds varied making their stories unique. Participating in the Dual
Enrollment Program allowed for the eight respondents to gain exposure to the college classroom setting via interactions with college faculty. For the majority of the participants, early exposure to college level curricula increased their self-confidence and gave them the encouragement needed to know that college attendance was a viable option, which is the next major theme to be discussed.

**Theme 2: College Perceived as a Viable Option**

During the interviews another prominent theme that emerged was that the Dual Enrollment Program allowed many of the participants to understand that attending college was actually a viable option for them. All but two of the interviewees, Carlos and Lucas, shared that attending college was something that they thought about frequently during their high school careers. The subthemes that materialized from their responses were (a) self-doubt regarding the academic rigors of college and (b) college affordability. Theme 2 and its two subthemes detail the participants’ beliefs about higher education attainment prior to attending college.

Prior to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, Eduardo, Felicia, Lilliana, Melissa, Selena, and Savannah explained that obstacles like self-doubt and low self-confidence about successfully handling the rigors of the college curricula clouded their vision of believing that they could attend and complete college. Lilliana, Savannah, Tanya, and Selena expressed that being able to afford college was a major concern of theirs and gave them doubt about being able to successfully attend and complete college. Table 4 illustrates the two subthemes that were described as perceived obstacles to a number of the participants prior to enrolling in the Dual Enrollment Program. A discussion of each of the subthemes will follow.
Table 4
*College Perceived as a Viable Option*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self-doubt regarding the academic rigors of college</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College affordability</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Self-Doubt Regarding the Academic Rigors of College**

Six of the participants, all who exhibited high enough academic achievement levels to qualify for the Dual Enrollment Program, expressed that prior to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program they believed that college was hard and going to be too challenging for them. Some had high levels of fear about the rigors of the college curricula. Many of the participants shared that their preconceived notions about the difficulty of college coursework were enhanced by the fact that they were unsure about the teaching styles and expectations of college professors and whether they successfully could handle the rigor of the academic requirements and quantity of coursework that would be required. This was made explicitly clear in the response that Felicia gave me when asked about her thoughts about college before participating in the Dual Enrollment Program:

> Before I participated in the DEP program I felt like college was going to be so much harder. . . . How teachers sometimes just know you by a number rather than a name. That it was just going to be really hard; it was going to be really time consuming.

Felicia attributes her shift in thoughts about college being too difficult directly to her experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program. Felicia reflected:

> I think it really inspired me just because I thought college would be much harder and it kind of gave us a window or an idea of what college would really be like. So I think it was a great opportunity that I had just because you had that
experience right before we started college. Once I went to college I sort of had an idea of what it was going to be.

Lilliana, much like Felicia, shared: “With this program, I was able to understand that college courses are not as difficult and there’s always help. If you want the help, you’ll receive the help. It’s just about going out there and asking.” Lilliana informed me that prior to starting the Dual Enrollment Program that she thought:

College was really hard and I felt like it was impossible because I am first-generation, and nobody in my family knows about college. Until I started going to college, I felt like it was a dream that was out of my reach and that I wasn’t going to be able to make it.

Mia echoed Lilliana and other participants’ sentiment about the Dual Enrollment Program decreasing some of her unwarranted fears about college coursework being too difficult. She affirmed that the Dual Enrollment Program helped her understand that college “was not scary. It was easy”. Mia explained that the program gave her valuable study skills. Upon completion of the program Mia, like many of the other participants, expressed that she had the diligence and level of maturity needed to be successful in college.

Selena had similar concerns and told me:

Before taking these classes I was scared to go to college because I felt like it was going to be something really hard for me. But once I took those three classes, I got knowledge of what college was. And then I thought I can do it.

The subtheme of having self-doubts and being apprehensive and scared about the rigor of college level coursework prior to their participation in the Dual Enrollment program was described by more than half of the interviewees. Another subtheme that emerged as a concern of almost half of the participants was college affordability, which will be discussed next.
College Affordability

The ability to pay for college was a very real concern that some of the participants shared. Almost half of the interview participants expressed that they came from families that were financially stressed and they indicated that without financial assistance college would not be a viable option. Four students candidly spoke about the influence that finances have had on their ability to attend college.

Tanya, for instance, described her family’s financial situation as living paycheck-to-paycheck. After completing the Dual Enrollment Program, Tanya received an institutional scholarship to East Bay Area University. She shared the following story with me during the interview:

Coming from a situation where my family lives paycheck-to-paycheck and my dad suffered a very hard injury practically wiping him out from any workforce for the past six/seven years, it’s kind of hard to contemplate a college education in that manner. So, that’s why there’s so much that I’m thankful for to this university. Not just because I genuinely want to learn but because they made it possible for me, and I know that some of that was attributed to my participation in the DEP. Because they already knew that I was going to be working hard towards what I wanted to do.

Melissa recalled that her participation in the Dual Enrollment Program made it very easy for her to work with East Bay Area University staff on potential college financing options. Melissa responded: “They assisted me with more information about college, how to apply to college and also financial aid. They also helped me to apply for financial aid”. Knowing that financial assistance was a possibility thus removed some of the additional stress that these first-generation college students faced.

In summary, six of the ten participants explicitly stated that participation in the Dual Enrollment Program, while in high school, caused them to positively change their
beliefs about college. The Dual Enrollment Program faculty provided the support and motivation that the students needed in order to know that they could succeed academically in college, ultimately, allowing the students to know that they are able to handle the rigors of college. The program also afforded the participants the opportunity to engage in college level discourse with their peers. Participation in the program also gave students direct and early access to financial aid staff at East Bay Area University who informed them of financial aid options. Having a better understanding of financial aid opportunities allayed some of the students’ fears about the academic rigor of college and being able to afford college.

**Theme 3: Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence**

As the interview progressed, it became apparent from the participants’ responses that their participation in the Dual Enrollment Program positively influenced their beliefs about college, motivated the students to attend college, influenced their academic success in college, and assisted their persistence in college. In this regard, participants mentioned that the program (a) increased their knowledge about college level student support services available to them and the role that support services teams have in assisting students, (b) equipped them with a peer group of former DEP students to support and motivate them throughout college, and (c) allowed many of them to have the same professors in college. Two main subthemes emerged related to the role the Dual Enrollment Program had on their postsecondary persistence. The first subtheme, described by seven participants, was that their persistence was positively impacted by having exposure to college level curricula. The second subtheme, reported by six participants, was that the increased self-confidence that they experienced, as a result of
participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, positively motivated and influenced their beliefs about being able to academically succeed in college. These findings are illustrated in Table 5 and will be discussed in the next two subsections.

Table 5
*Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Exposure to College Level Curricula</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Self-Confidence</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exposure to College Level Curricula**

When discussing their beliefs and experiences about the Dual Enrollment Program, Carlos, Eduardo, Felicia, Lilliana, Lucas, Mia, and Selena remarked that the early exposure to college level curricula influenced their academic success and persistence in high school and college. Many of the participants attributed their academic persistence to an increased sense of academic self-efficacy, enhanced comprehension skills, and a better understanding of how to engage in scholarly discourse with faculty and students as a direct result of their involvement in the program.

Lilliana recalled that when she participated in the Dual Enrollment Program, initially she was struggling because she did not understand the syllabus or how to properly communicate with professors if she had questions about the coursework. She explained: “It was different. Even though we were at the high school, it was different to be inside a classroom with a professor.” However, learning how to navigate the classroom environment and engage with faculty gave her the skills that she needed to persist because she understood early in her college career that faculty are there to help.
Lilliana affirmed: “When I came here to East Bay Area University I felt ready. I knew what to expect in the classroom”.

Eduardo also valued his early exposure to college level curricula. He shared that the experience was so positive that it increased his desire to pursue higher education. Eduardo stated:

I kind of got a little piece of what college feels like. Even though it wasn’t the whole cake, I think I got enough information to reel me in. I wanted to go to college because of my experience here at East Bay Area University and I just wanted more. I wanted to learn more. I wanted to express myself a little better and gain the right skills. I knew that I wanted to go to college once I was in the DEP because of my experience there.

For some of the students, the rigor of the Dual Enrollment Program coursework taught them that if one needs additional help in college, it is the responsibility of the student to seek help. For example, when reflecting on his experiences while in the Dual Enrollment Program, Carlos recalled:

I did take a course and I really wasn’t into it and so I started falling behind. And after that, that’s when I realized, you know, this isn’t high school anymore. These teachers are not going to always be on your case.

This was a valuable learning lesson for Carlos. He shared the following about how this lesson influenced his self-confidence and persistence:

Since I’ve transitioned from the DEP to the university, I think I’ve been a lot more open and confident just speaking to faculty. Just because I already had that kind of experience in the DEP and it just made it a lot easier. Not only that, but because it was here on campus, I already knew the faculty here. And so I just came in and it was like I had just seen them the day after.

Participation in the Dual Enrollment Program provided many of the participants with the early exposure to college curricula that they needed to feel better prepared for college and to know that they could handle the academic rigors of college. Additionally,
more than half of the participants believed that participating in the Dual Enrollment Program gave them the increased self-confidence needed to be successful and persist in college, the next subtheme to be discussed.

**Increased Self-Confidence**

Many of the interviewees informed me that participating in the Dual Enrollment Program helped to improve the interpersonal and communication skills they needed to engage in classroom discussions. For instance, Selena, one of the students who immigrated to the United States during the last decade, had limited English language skills when she participated in the program and was extremely nervous about attending college in the United States. She acknowledged that she experienced an increased sense of self-confidence as a result of participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, which she believes has allowed her to remain academically successfully at East Bay Area University. Selena expressed her increased confidence and motivation in this manner:

> I think that when you are a senior in high school you are scared to go to college. But, once you get knowledge of what college is, you start to feel motivated to go to college. And I think that going through the DEP program gives you more confidence to go to college because you know that you can do it.

Savannah’s responses, although she was not a recent immigrant, aligned with those of Selena. Savannah expressed it this way:

> After the program, when coming into college, I felt more confident about myself because I said that I already had this experience. So I knew what I was getting myself into instead of not having that experience and I would’ve been scared. But I’m confident about myself, so it actually helped me be confident about myself and trust myself.

Four of the respondents who believed that the Dual Enrollment Program helped to increase their self-confidence specifically stated that it stemmed from the program
pushing them to become more social and assertive in their interactions with classmates and professors. Carlos, Savannah, Selena, and Tanya shared that prior to participating in the program they were introverted and not extremely social. However, after participating in the program, they noticed that their exchanges with faculty and other students came naturally and that they were more willing to engage in discourse inside and outside of the classroom. Their willingness to be more gregarious and increased participation in classroom discussions and interactions with faculty and peers has assisted them in their postsecondary pursuits and in life. When explaining how the Dual Enrollment Program increased his self-confidence and interpersonal skills, Eduardo acknowledged, “I’m able to be more comfortable around other people. So it’s just easier on me. I mean I still do get nervous a lot but not as much as I used to before”.

Although each research participant had a unique experience as part of the Dual Enrollment Program, the participants’ responses clearly show that the early exposure to college level curricula and an increased sense of self-confidence have positively impacted their postsecondary persistence and their personal growth and development.

**Theme 4: Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence**

Every participant who I interviewed indicated that his/her attendance at East Bay University impacted his/her academic persistence. All ten of the respondents cited examples of how East Bay Area University played a critical role in their development as young adults and as college students. All of the participants mentioned that the university provided a nurturing environment, which revolved around the concept of the university’s students, staff, and faculty being like a family. This concept was clear and evident in each of the interviews. During the interviews, Carlos, Eduardo, Felicia,
Lilliana, Lucas, Selena, Savannah, and Tanya all cited that the relationships that they had with East Bay Area staff positively impacted their postsecondary persistence. Lilliana, Lucas, Mia, Savannah, Selena, and Tanya stated that the relationships that they developed with East Bay Area University faculty positively influenced their postsecondary persistence. The data captured in Theme 4 and its two subthemes detail how staff and faculty contributed positively to the participants’ academic success, academic and nonacademic experiences, and persistence in college. These findings are illustrated in Table 6 and will be discussed next.

Table 6
Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with East Bay Area University Staff</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships with East Bay Area University Faculty</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationships with East Bay Area University Staff

The influential role that support from East Bay Area University staff have provided was identified by seven participants as having a profound impact on their postsecondary persistence. The respondents recognized that student support from areas such as the bursar’s office, financial aid, academic advising, and the library assisted with their persistence in college.

When responding to the role that East Bay Area University staff played in her academic persistence, Lilliana acknowledged:

The tutoring services I receive here would be one of them because if I do not understand a certain essay topic or I do not understand a certain assignment, there’s always somebody, a tutor, who is willing to help me out with that.
Carlos also shared Lilliana’s experience that staff at East Bay University impacted his academic persistence. When describing the role that East Bay Area University staff members have played in his success and persistence, Carlos relayed:

The people that come in mind are mainly the academic advisors, just because we have multiple academic advisors, but there’s one in particular that has helped me throughout my entire time here. She’s been a great deal of help. As well as the library staff just because I worked there and so I kind of knew what it was about, always helpful, resourceful, you know, and so they’re always willing to help.

Most of the participants found that the student support staffs were accessible and easy to approach with questions or concerns that they had. However, some of the participants remarked that because the primary focus of the Dual Enrollment Program is on academic preparedness, they would have liked more information about the full array of student support services available to them while still in high school. These same students also stated that once admitted East Bay Area University student support staff provided the additional information they needed to take full advantage of the services available to them.

Additionally, the dedication to student excellence exhibited by the university staff fostered a sense of community for many of the students. Tanya explicitly mentioned that the support and concern for her academic and personal well being created a sense of community which motivated her throughout her academic career. Tanya acknowledged:

They [the staff] really do make you feel like you’re a part of a community, a tight knit community. They’ll ask about your day. They’ll ask: ‘How are you doing? How is your family? How are things going?’ And they’ll remember. They’ll remember if I tell them one comment about something going on. They’ll remember the next time they see me and they’ll ask about it.
Felicia’s experiences have been similar to Tanya’s. She stated that during challenging moments during her academic career, the sense of community at East Bay Area helped her to persist. She shared:

I feel like the community that I gained at the College Preparatory Academy and the community that I gained at East Bay Area University are the ones that kept pushing us. They still keep pushing and they still keep telling us it is okay.

In addition to identifying the personal attention, guidance, and encouragement from East Bay Area University staff as positive influences on their persistence, the majority of interviewees also perceived the relationships with university faculty to be extremely influential.

**Relationships with East Bay Area University Faculty**

When asked about the most beneficial aspect of the Dual Enrollment Program, Lilliana shared that East Bay Area University faculty members that she had in high school along with the DEP director have continued to mentor her throughout her college career. She stated:

One of the things is the connection I had with my professors. To this day, I still talk to my math professor, and she’s always checking up on me, asking me how it is and to not give up. And also with the DEP’s director, he’s always asking me if I need help with anything or what’s my plan for next year. So it’s really about the connections that you keep with those professors and with the people that helped you in the Dual Enrollment Program.

Another example of how support from East Bay Area faculty influenced her academic success and persistence came from Lilliana. When discussing her relationship with East Bay Area University faculty, Lilliana mentioned, “The professor knows you by your name. So that’s a good thing because you don’t feel intimidated as if you were in a 300 student classroom.”
All of the participants indicated that the experiences they have had with East Bay Area University staff and faculty motivated them and provided them with the guidance needed to persist. However, East Bay Area University staff and faculty were not the only influences mentioned by the participants. The interviewees also attributed their postsecondary persistence to factors external to the university, which will be discussed under the next major theme.

**Theme 5: Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence**

The interview participants also noted that support from friends and family played a significant role in their college persistence including (a) encouragement from family members and (b) the positive influence and support from friends. Eight of the participants acknowledged that encouragement and support from family members positively motivated them and influenced their beliefs about college and their postsecondary persistence. Six of the participants indicated that support from their friends and peers was a contributing factor in their academic success and postsecondary persistence. The analysis of Theme 5 and its two subthemes explores the external factors that the participants perceived as positively influencing their academic success and motivated them to persistence in college. These findings are depicted in Table 7.

**Table 7**  
*Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ Responses</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encouragement for family members</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support from friends</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Encouragement from Family Members

Nine of the participants reported being a first-generation college student in their participant demographic survey. During the interviews Eduardo, Mia, Melissa, Lilliana, Lucas, Savannah, Selena, and Tanya all stated that the goal of completing college was not only a goal for them but was also championed by their families. These participants expressed that they received continuous motivation and support from their families during their time in college. When asked if her family members influenced her postsecondary persistence Lilliana responded:

Yes, a lot, and one of them is my mom. She always does. She only went up to the fifth grade in Mexico so I feel that she’s very proud of the person that I’m becoming and that she is always motivating me to pursue my dreams. I feel that with her support there, it motivates me. I know that I can go home and cry if I’m so stressed out and she’ll be there to support me.

Lilliana’s responses also reflected a common response that was conveyed by other participants, which was that even if their families had limited financial resources or limited abilities to assist them with academic decisions, they did what they could to contribute to the student’s postsecondary success. Lilliana, for example, relayed the following about her support from her parents:

It doesn’t matter if they are struggling, they’ll help me. If it’s just giving me money for gas to get to class. If that’s all, as much as they can do, they’ll do it. They, of course, don’t know anything about college and it’s hard for them to help me out if they don’t know what I’m doing, but they’re always there to listen to me and support whatever decisions I make.

Mia’s family also did the best that they could with the resources that they had to assist her to stay enrolled in college. Mia recalled, “My parents were always pushing me to finish it [college] and they’ve been helping me out on the way . . . providing me with all the utensils and books that are necessary”.
In addition to receiving direct support from family members, Selena, Savannah, and Tanya felt that they had an obligation to remain in college because their academic pursuits made them role models. Selena informed me that one of the main factors that has motivated her to remain in college is that she believes that the high academic goals she has set for herself motivates her sibling and nieces to attend and graduate from college. She shared, “I want them to go to college too. So I want to be the role model for them”. Savannah also had a very similar motivation for continuing her academic pursuits. Savannah, too, wants to be a role model for her family members and show them that graduating from college is an attainable goal. She explained:

Some of my cousins didn’t go to college, so I don’t want to be like that. And plus, I have a brother, he’s 16, so I want him to see that we can actually go to college. I don’t want him to see me as a bad role model. I want him to see me as a good role model. So that’s why I’m still in college. For me and for others like my cousins and my brothers that are wanting or didn’t get the chance to go to college, they can see that at least one of us [went to college].

For the majority of the interviewees, family members encouraged them to be the first person in their nuclear family to graduate from college. The concept of serving as a role model to their family members and showing them that degree attainment is possible served as additional encouragement to graduate. Many of the interviewees also mentioned that support from their friends and peers also impacted their academic success, beliefs about remaining in college, and postsecondary persistence.

**Positive Influence and Support from Friends**

Carlos, Lilliana, Lucas, Mia, Selena, and Tanya identified support from their peers and friends as having a positive influence on their postsecondary success. As first-generation college students, having friends from high school who attended the Dual
Enrollment Program or who they met in college allowed them to discuss academic issues that they could not talk about with their parents. When recalling the impact that support from her peers had on her, Felicia affirmed:

Most of the students that were in the DEP program were close friends of mine. Specifically, there is a group of students that were my best friends . . . we push each other along. Although all of us go to different universities, we’re still in touch. We still keep pushing each other. So I think it really has influenced [me] a lot.

Similarly, Selena shared that she and two of her best friends, who attend different universities, keep each other motivated. They all graduated from high school and enrolled in college at the same time. They have frequent communications with each other and keep each other on “the same track to finish school,” according to Selena.

Tanya’s expressed that, much like with her family, her academic pursuits make her a role model for some of her friends. Tanya shared that one of her very close friends was unable to remain enrolled in college because she and her family were not able to pay for her education. Tanya’s friend has consistently reminded her to stay in school and take advantage of the opportunity that she has to finish college. Tanya openly disclosed:

My closest friend, she wasn’t able to pay for her education in any way and her family was unable to help. So she’ll take interest in what I’m doing and she’ll tell me: ‘You have an opportunity that not many people have. Take advantage of it. You’re very smart. I know you’re going to do really, really good.’ So it’s those little comments that give you that confidence. And you’re like: ‘You know what? If they’re saying it, it must be for a reason.’ So you kind of believe it a little and it keeps you going.

When listening to the participants, it was evident that support and encouragement from their family members and friends played a profound role in their postsecondary success. Following the interviews, it also was apparent that East Bay Area University faculty and staff have motivated the participants’ and influenced their beliefs about
college which positively impacted the participants’ academic success. The interviews also revealed that the nurturing and cultivation that came from their family members and close friends also had a tremendous influence on the participants’ beliefs about college and their academic success in college.

**Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, the participants believed that a variety of factors influenced their beliefs about college, motivated them to persist while in college, and positively contributed to their academic success. The overall essence of their postsecondary experiences can be described in these major themes: (a) their desire to attend college and have a better life, (b) their increased self-confidence after participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, (c) support from East Bay Area University staff, (d) support from East Bay Area University faculty, (e) encouragement from family members, and (f) positive influence and support received from friends. Despite the fact that some of the students were recent immigrants, were apprehensive about the rigors of college, had uneasiness about how to financially afford college, and were unsure about how to navigate the college going process as first-generation college students, they have defied the odds that were stacked against them.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological research study was to explore how the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic students at East Bay Area University, from the perspectives of the students themselves. Recent research has shown that there has been an increase in the number of Hispanics enrolling in college in the United States; however, a disproportionate number of Hispanics do not complete college compared to other ethnic minorities and Whites (Bordes-Edgar, Arredondo, Kurpius, & Rund, 2011; Otero et al., 2007; Pappamihiel & Moreno, 2011). Hispanics have been disproportionally impacted by the degree attainment gap. This study provides insight into the lived experiences, perceptions, and various factors that have contributed to the academic success and persistence of a small group of Hispanic students who have worked to defy the odds against them. This chapter includes a summary of the research study and the discussion of findings. The implications and recommendations for the use of the findings by other educational providers, the opportunity for future study, and my final reflections on this research study are also included.

Summary of the Study

This phenomenological research utilized a constructivist perspective to study the perceptions, beliefs, and experiences of current East Bay Area University students who completed the Dual Enrollment Program during their junior and/or senior years of high school. Previous research on the influence that college access programs have on
underrepresented minority student populations has shown that mentors, personal attention, the emphasis on college being a long-term investment, and financial aid counseling offered by these types of programs have assisted in the students’ preparation for college (Dolan, 2008; Gullatt & Jan, 2002; Michaels, 2007; Schramm & Sawaga, 2008). However, this research study is unique because it serves as the first formal research study that focuses on the experiences and perceptions of Hispanic students who were enrolled in the Dual Enrollment Program partnership between the College Preparatory Academy and East Bay Area University while in high school and follows their continued academic success and persistence while enrolled at East Bay Area University.

In-depth, one-on-one interviews were conducted to better understand the perceptions and lived experiences of a small group of Hispanic students at East Bay Area University. Ten students volunteered to serve as participants. The main research question that this study sought to answer is: How have the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small group of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University? The sub-questions were:

1. What are their perceptions and beliefs about higher education attainment?
2. From their perspective, what internal and external factors (i.e., past and current attitudes, family, peer, educational, and life experiences) contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college?
3. From their perspective, in what ways has the Dual Enrollment Program contributed positively to their beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence in college?

4. What were their experiences in the Dual Enrollment Program and how did they prepare them for the academic and nonacademic aspects of college?

The literature pertinent to this study discussed in Chapter 2 focused on: (a) the postsecondary achievement gap, including the achievement gap of Hispanic students; (b) postsecondary student persistence; (c) academic influences on persistence; (d) nonacademic influences on persistence; and (e) P-20 accountability and collegiate success. Moustakas’ (1994) data analysis procedures for phenomenological research which includes: (a) horizontalization, (b) phenomenological reduction, (c) clustering and creating themes, (d) identifying the invariant constituents and their themes, and (e) synthesis of the meanings and essence of the phenomenon were used. The five main themes, which captured the overall essence of the participants’ experiences, were: (a) Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life; (b) College Perceived as a Viable Option; (c) The Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence; (d) The Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence; and (e) Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence.

**Discussion of Findings**

**Desire to Attend College and Have a Better Life**

The participants almost unanimously reported that their desire to attend college and have a better life was the main motivation for participating in the Dual Enrollment Program because they understood that they could receive additional academic preparation
prior to entering college. All but one of the students identified as a first-generation college student. Being a first-generation college student was also a motivational factor that encouraged the study’s participants to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program. The interviewees indicated that as first-generation college students they knew they likely would receive only limited information and guidance from their parents regarding applying for college. Therefore, by participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, as high school juniors and seniors, they would receive guidance on the college admissions and financial aid processes through direct access to and involvement with staff at East Bay Area University. Their perceptions align with recent studies on pre-collegiate support needed by first-generation and underrepresented students. For example, parents of low-income and first-generation students are less likely to be knowledgeable of how to prepare their children for college and know how to access information that will help their children select and apply to college (MacAllum, Glover, Riggs & Queen, 2007). The College Board (2010), too, reported that first-generation and low-income students are more likely to apply to college with little, if any, guidance from their parents. Underrepresented minority students and low-income students have fewer resources to help them understand and make informed decisions about the college application process compared to their White and higher socioeconomic counterparts (National College Access Network, 2011). Many of the participants expressed that they relied heavily on the support provided by the Dual Enrollment Program because their parents had not attended college and were only able to provide limited support, if any, in the college application and selection process. This makes the role of concurrent enrollment
programs like the Dual Enrollment Program even more critical in preparing underrepresented, first generation, minority, and low-income students for college.

Each of the former Dual Enrollment Program students indicated that they were aware that participation in the program would allow them to obtain transferable college credits which would ultimately be beneficial to their future postsecondary pursuits. Many of the participants also participated in the Dual Enrollment Program because they had a desire to attend college, obtain the academic skills needed to obtain a career, and have a better quality of life. Additionally, through exposure to college level curricula many of the participants hoped not only to improve their analytical and comprehension skills but also to enhance other academic areas in which they had deficiencies. Increasing their confidence and gaining a better understanding of how to interact with faculty were also motivations to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program.

**College Perceived as a Viable Option**

All but two of the ten interviewees indicated that prior to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program they frequently thought about college during their high school careers. However, perceiving college attendance as a reality was challenging for some of the students because of academic self-efficacy issues and financial challenges. When explaining their perceptions of college prior to participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, many of the respondents expressed that self-doubt and college affordability were two of the main reasons why they viewed college as an inaccessible reality.

Six of the participants expressed that they had serious concerns about their ability to successfully handle the academic rigors of college. Although the former Dual Enrollment Program students had a high enough grade point average to qualify them to
participate in the program, many of them felt that they would not be as academically successful in college as they were in high school. However, participation in the Dual Enrollment Program positively changed the students’ perceptions of college and their ability to succeed in college. Seven of the ten participants explained that the program’s faculty provided them with the instructional support needed to boost their confidence and reassure them about their academic abilities. Some of the participants did not think that attending college was an option. They feared that it would be too challenging or that once they were enrolled in college they would not graduate because college would be too difficult. However, through academic support from professors and staff of the Dual Enrollment Program, eight of the ten participants experienced an increase in their self-confidence regarding their academic abilities. The support from the Dual Enrollment Program was important because often low-income and first-generation students fail to receive the type of encouragement and support needed to be successful in college (National College Access Network, 2011). This can cause underrepresented minority students to underestimate their academic abilities ultimately impacting their college selection choices (National College Access Network, 2011). However, because the Dual Enrollment Program has a focus on motivating Hispanic and other underrepresented students to enroll in and complete college, the participants were able to gain an increased sense of academic self-efficacy and view a college education as obtainable.

In addition to self-doubt regarding the academic rigors of college, almost half of the interview participants expressed that economic capital, being able to afford college, was a major concern of theirs. Some of the participants come from families that have extreme financial limitations and thought that they would not be able to attend college
because of this. Often incomplete or inaccurate information regarding the financial aid process leads students and their parents to make college application decisions based upon misconceptions (National College Access Network, 2011). However, as participants in the Dual Enrollment Program, these students were able to get financial aid information from student support staff at East Bay Area University, which allowed them and their families to make more informed choices regarding college financing options.

**Role of the Dual Enrollment Program in Postsecondary Persistence**

The participants in this research study had their own perceptions about attending college before participating in the Dual Enrollment Program. When asked if participation in the program influenced their postsecondary persistence, each student responded in the affirmative. The students expressed that early exposure to college level course work and increased self-confidence, as a result of participating in the Dual Enrollment Program, positively contributed to their postsecondary persistence.

These finding are very important because often first-generation Hispanic students have lower academic self-efficacy, a number of perceived barriers, and less positive college-going expectations than their counterparts who are continuing college students (Reyes & Nora, 2012). According to seven of the ten participants, early exposure to college level curricula gave them a better understanding of how to navigate the college classroom environment and faculty expectations, and how to be more attentive students both inside and outside the classroom. Six of the ten students acknowledged that the increased self-confidence that resulted from participation in the Dual Enrollment Program gave them the motivation that they needed to be more vocal in the classroom, more assertive when interacting with faculty, and more social with other students. In addition
to participation in the Dual Enrollment Program, the participants also recognized that East Bay Area University’s faculty and staff provided them with the support needed to increase their sense of academic self-efficacy and motivate them to persist despite obstacles they faced prior to and during college.

**Role of East Bay Area University in Postsecondary Persistence**

The participants attributed much of their academic success and fortitude to persist in college to the relationships that they had with staff and faculty at East Bay Area University. Eight of the interviewees cited that the relationships they had with East Bay Area University staff members positively impacted their academic persistence and gave them the necessary student support needed to persist during their college career. In addition, six of the ten interviewees stated that the relationships they had developed with East Bay Area University faculty positively influenced their academic success and postsecondary persistence. Terenzini et al.’s (1994) theory of validation explains that early validation from peers, family, staff and faculty members is beneficial in helping college students, especially first generation and nontraditional students, transition to college. In addition to promoting a successful transition to college, early validation can affirm to students that they belong in college and can be successful in college (Terenzini et al., 1994). The absence of formal social support systems coupled with low self-efficacy can be a challenge for any student. However, for underrepresented minorities, these factors can be especially detrimental to their postsecondary success (Smith & Blacknall, 2010). University faculty and staff play critically important roles when it comes to assisting underrepresented minority and low-income students feel included versus isolated at college (Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Schlossberg’s (1989) mattering theory also
can shed light on this topic; it focuses on an individual’s beliefs about mattering to others and the idea that mattering can be a motivational factor. Mattering involves receiving attention from others and feeling important and appreciated by them (Schlossberg, 1989). The majority of the study’s participants expressed that the support and attention they received from East Bay Area University faculty and staff made them feel like they mattered and positively influenced their college experiences and persistence.

For many of the participants, the personal attention and consistent academic support from East Bay Area University faculty provided them with the academic support needed to persist. The accessibility of East Bay Area University student support staff, in addition to their genuine willingness to provide students with assistance, furthered the students’ ability to persist. The academic advising, library, financial aid, and bursar office staff were specifically mentioned as groups that provided essential information that the students needed to be more informed about the college process.

Some of participants shared that the faculty and staff at East Bay Area University created a sense of community which the participants needed in order to have an increased sense of belonging and acclimation to the college-going process. In addition to East Bay Area University faculty and staff positively impacting their postsecondary persistence, the research findings also indicated that family and friends’ encouragement and support motivated the participants and contributed to the participants’ self-confidence and persistence in college.

**Positive Influence of Family and Friends on Postsecondary Persistence**

Support and encouragement from family and friends were two major factors that the interview participants reported as influencing their persistence in college. Social
capital, the relationships with family and friends, was pivotal in assisting the students to remain on their pathway to college graduation. Often first-generation college students rely heavily on siblings, relatives, high school contacts, and peers for support and when they make decisions related to college (Reyes & Nora, 2012). Eight of the ten participants acknowledged that encouragement and support from family members positively influenced their postsecondary persistence. Moreover, six of the participants indicated that support from their friends and peers were contributing factors in their postsecondary persistence.

These findings are consistent with other research on underrepresented minority and first-generation student persistence. Underrepresented students with higher levels of family support and interactions have traditionally had higher academic self-efficacy (Smith & Blacknall, 2010). Additionally, strong peer networks have been shown to strengthen social and academic development for underrepresented minority students and first-generation students (Dennis, Chuateco, & Phinney, 2005).

**Implications and Recommendations for Educators**

The findings of this study report that the persistence of a small group of former Dual Enrollment Program students, who are currently enrolled at East Bay Area University, has been positively influenced by a variety of internal and external factors. Participation in the Dual Enrollment Program, relationships with East Bay Area University faculty and staff, and support from family and friends were identified as the primary factors that the participants believed positively influenced their postsecondary success. The ten participants all participated in the Dual Enrollment Program partnership offered by the College Preparatory Academy and East Bay Area University during their
junior and/or senior years of high school. The students shared the common experiences of (a) a Hispanic ethnic background, (b) enrollment in the College Preparatory Academy, (c) participation in the Dual Enrollment Program while in high school, and (d) enrollment at East Bay Area University. Nine of the ten of the participants also identified themselves as first-generation college students. Despite these commonalities, the participants’ backgrounds differed in that some students recently immigrated to the United States, several had limited English language proficiency, and the academic areas in which the participants excelled varied. Because of these differences and varying levels of academic and student support needed, the personalized attention and commitment to the students’ academic success provided by the Dual Enrollment Program faculty and staff was paramount to their success and persistence.

This study revealed that each student, although they met the academic requirements to participate in the Dual Enrollment program while in high school, had to overcome various obstacles that discouraged them from believing that they could go on to college. The Dual Enrollment Program’s faculty and staff provided the participants academic encouragement and college readiness information which prepared them for college and decreased their concerns about attending college. This data highlights the importance that college preparation (both academic and student support) at the high school level can play in increasing students’ academic and personal self-confidence prior to entering college. The participants believed that the experiences that they had in the Dual Enrollment Program, specifically early exposure to college level curricula and development of an increased sense of academic self-efficacy, positively impacted their beliefs about college, self-esteem, and postsecondary persistence. The participants also
believed that their relationships with East Bay Area University faculty and staff and their relationships with family members and friends benefited their postsecondary persistence and their aspirations to attend college.

As a result of this study’s findings and my interpretation of the existing research, I am making the following recommendations for educators at the secondary and postsecondary levels. I recommend that college access program administrators become aware of, conduct assessment, and then target the specific academic and student support needs of each student so that faculty and student support staff can best prepare them for college. I make this recommendation because, as seen in this study, each of Dual Enrollment Program participants experiences was unique. Despite, sharing some common factors (i.e. ethnicity and attending the same high school) the academic strengths, English language proficiency, socio-economic backgrounds, and motivations to attend college varied for the study’s participants. This is why it is important for college access program staff to take the time to get to know each participant and assess the level of individual academic, social, and financial support that the participant may need so that they are not only successful in the college access program but also adequately prepared for college.

The participants of the study, almost unanimously, indicated that student support services played a valuable role in their preparation for college and assisted in their college persistence. Therefore, I recommend that college access programs and high schools provide information to students and their families on the support services that are available to them as they prepare for college and throughout their college career. Adequate academic preparation for college and an understanding of the student support staff services that are available (e.g. academic advising, financial aid process) are
necessary for the postsecondary success of all students but especially underrepresented, first-generation, low-income, and ethnic minority students. I recommend that college access program administrators and college staff members provide educational sessions on the various support services, on campus or elsewhere, so that students can take advantage of them throughout their college career. Inviting students’ parents or guardians to these information sessions will also be beneficial so that they are better equipped to assist their children with making informed decisions about their academic careers. It would also be beneficial to have these information sessions offered in Spanish or have staff on site during the sessions that are bilingual in English and Spanish. This is important for parents or guardians with limited English language abilities. It is also important that the academic progress of students who participate in college access programs be tracked and monitored during their college careers so that the program’s administrators can identify the program’s strengths or areas that need improvement.

**Opportunities for Future Research**

The influence that the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors have had on the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of Hispanic students at East Bay Area University has not been studied before. Therefore, I recommend the following opportunities for future research in this area.

1. *Conduct research using former Dual Enrollment Program participants who previously attended, withdrew, or graduated from East Bay Area University.*

There are no known previous studies on the influence that the Dual Enrollment Program has had on its participants. Research could be conducted using students who previously attended East Bay Area University in order to obtain additional information on
the influence that the Dual Enrollment Program has had on its participants. A study on the factors that impacted the persistence of Dual Enrollment Program participants who withdrew from East Bay Area University as well as those who graduated from East Bay University could be conducted.

Conducting additional studies on this program and the influences that it has had will benefit the program. These additional studies will enhance the limited body of literature on the influence that participation in dual enrollment programs has had on the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and postsecondary persistence of Hispanic college students. Conducting studies, using these participant groups, would allow for the Dual Enrollment Program’s administrator to analyze these contrasting student experiences. The program administrator can use the study’s findings to determine which of the program’s policies and procedures need revision. The program administrator would be able to enhance the college preparation strategies currently used. Interviewing the suggested participant groups would allow the program’s administrator to know which academic techniques and student support techniques were beneficial to the previous Dual Enrollment Program participants. The program’s administrator would also be able to obtain feedback on how to improve the program’s current services. The program administrator could work with East Bay Area University administrators on intervention strategies to better assist former Dual Enrollment Program participants to successfully persist.

2. Conduct research using former Dual Enrollment Program participants currently enrolled, withdrawn, or who graduated from other colleges/universities.
This research study only focused on a small group of Dual Enrollment Program participants currently attending East Bay Area University. In order to gain a more holistic picture of the factors that impacted the academic success and persistence of the program’s participants, both qualitative and quantitative research could be conducted that interviews and surveys Dual Enrollment Program participants at colleges other than East Bay Area University. Former Dual Enrollment Program participants who withdrew or graduated from other colleges and universities could also be interviewed/surveyed to understand what positively or negatively influenced their post-secondary experiences and college persistence. This would allow for data to be analyzed on the academic success and persistence trends of a larger group of students.

3. Conduct research comparing the Dual Enrollment Program to other local college access programs and dual enrollment programs.

Conducting comparative research studies on how the Dual Enrollment Program’s services compare to other local college access programs and dual enrollment programs could benefit the programs administrators. Conducting research on these programs will provide insight on the services and best practices that the organizations use to prepare students for college. I also recommend, as a part of this research, that each program administrator evaluate the effectiveness of their program’s services and the program’s success in meeting its strategic goals. The administrators can analyze the findings of the comparative research, compare the findings to their program’s current practices, and use the data to make strategic improvements to their program.

4. Research the implications of implementing additional dual enrollment programs targeted at Hispanic and/or underrepresented students.
This study is the first of its kind because it focuses exclusively on the Dual Enrollment Program participants currently enrolled at East Bay Area University. The majority of the respondents expressed that participating in the program positively influenced their beliefs, motivations, and perceptions about college. Although some studies have been conducted on the influence that participation in college access programs has on underrepresented students, research focusing explicitly on Hispanic students is limited. Increasing research on the influence of dual enrollment programs on these demographic groups will allow high school and college administrators to make informed decisions when it comes to establishing new dual enrollment program partnerships on their campuses, implementing college access initiatives for underrepresented students, and when improving already existing dual enrollment programs.

**Final Reflections**

High school college access programs are commonly implemented as a form of early intervention. The programs are student-focused and have models that often emphasize academic enrichment and/or informational outreach. College access programs are particularly important for underrepresented minority, low-income, and first-generation college students because they provide academic and informational resources that these student groups are disproportionately unexposed to when compared to students who are not underrepresented (Michaels, 2007). The research process was a very educational and enlightening experience for me. My goal for conducting this study was to understand how the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of a small
group of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University were influenced by the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors.

As I researched this study, I learned that participants attributed their postsecondary success to (a) their early exposure to college level curricula via the Dual Enrollment Program, (b) their increased self-confidence after participating in Dual Enrollment Program, (c) support from East Bay Area University faculty, (d) support from East Bay Area University staff, (e) encouragement from family members, and (f) support from friends. These findings are supported by much of the current research. The literature reviewed reports that early intervention while in high school, personal attention, an emphasis on college as a long-term investment, and mentorship from faculty or staff mentors are beneficial to underrepresented students persistence. Although the findings of this study are limited only to the former Dual Enrollment Program participants who were enrolled at East Bay Area University during the Spring semester of 2014, it is my hope that the data can be used to enhance not only the Dual Enrollment Program but other concurrent enrollment programs and college access initiatives.

The opportunity to meet and interview the former Dual Enrollment Program participants was a life changing experience. Prior to conducting this research, I had an appreciation for the work that college access programs and academic institutions have in preparing students for college. However, after meeting with the participants and reflecting upon their lived experiences, I better understand the importance of introducing postsecondary level curricula to Hispanic high school students. I also better understand the importance of providing informational resources on the college admissions process and financial aid options to the students and their families so that informed decisions
about college attendance can be made. The value of having faculty and staff support systems along with motivation from family and friends were also instrumental in the participants’ success.

Currently, I serve as a retention committee member for a local college access company that provides support services to high school students on the college selection and admissions process. However, as a result of this study, I am committed to increasing my volunteer and professional work in this field. I am committed to using this data to educate college access program administrators, secondary and postsecondary level administrators, and student support personnel on the factors that influence underrepresented minority students beliefs about college attendance and the factors that influence their persistence in college. It was my honor and privilege to meet with such intelligent and focused students. Their time and efforts in serving as participants in this study have been truly appreciated.

As the researcher, my hope is that the lived experiences of these dynamic students, who graciously agreed to participate in this study, inspires the Dual Enrollment Program’s administrators and East Bay Area University administrators to use this data to enhance the Dual Enrollment Program’s effectiveness and to increase dialogue on how pre-collegiate preparation and internal and external factors influence the perceptions, beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of Hispanic college students.
REFERENCES


Early University Program. (n.d.). Report on the Early University Program at the National Hispanic University to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation.


Sandoval-Lucero, E., Maes, J. B., & Chopra, R. V. (2011). Examining the retention of nontraditional Latino(a) students in a career-based learning community. *Journal*
http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1538192703262515


*New Directions for Student Services, 48.*

culture improves graduation rates in low-income high schools* [White paper].
Retrieved from

Shulock, N. B., Callan, P. M., Finney, J. E., Kirst, M. W., Spence, D. S., & Usdan, M. D.
(2010). *Beyond the rhetoric: Improving college readiness through coherent state
policy* [Policy brief]. Retrieved from
http://www.highereducation.org/reports/college_readiness/index.shtml

success.* Retrieved from

Smith, T. Y., & Vura, D. (1999, June). *Baccalaureate degree attainment and precollege
academic preparedness of underrepresented minorities.* Paper presented at the


APPENDIX A:

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH
Dear <student>,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting as a part of my dissertation research with Benedictine University located in Lisle, IL. This study is on how the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors have influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University. I am asking that you participate in this study because of your experience with the Dual Enrollment Program. Your participation in this study will provide valuable feedback to other Hispanic students, like you, who have participated in dual enrollments programs while in high school.

Your contribution to this study, if you agree, will be to participate in an interview. There will be complete anonymity and confidentiality regarding your participation and identity in this study. The interview will help me gain data to use in my study. The data obtained from the interview will be utilized exclusively for the purpose of this research. The interview will last for approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Follow-up interviews may be requested depending on the research needs.

If you agree to participate, then I will email a demographic survey to complete and an Informed Consent Form Data Form for you to sign. I will collect this form prior to conducting the interview with you. Lunch will be provided during the interview session to thank you for your participation.

If you have any additional questions regarding this study, please feel to free to contact me, Chimere Jones, now or at any point during this study at chimerejuajones@gmail.com. You also may contact my dissertation director, Dr. Bonnie Copeland, at bonniesc@gmail.com.

Chimere J. Jones
Doctoral Student
Benedictine University
APPENDIX B:

PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

1. In what year(s) and grade in high school did you participate in the Early University Program?
   Calendar Year(s): __________
   Academic Year(s): Junior______
   Senior______

2. How many college credits had you earned at the time you graduated from high school? ________

3. What is your current college status?
   Freshman ______
   Sophomore ______
   Junior______
   Senior______

4. What is your ethnicity?
   Hispanic/Latino/a______
   Non-Hispanic/Latino/a_____

5. What is your race?
   African American or Black______
   White______
   Asian _____
   Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander ______
   Native American or Alaskan Native ______
   Multi-racial/ethnic______
   Other: ______

6. What is your gender?
   Male ______
   Female______

7. What is your age? __________

8. What is your major? __________________________________________________________

9. Are you the first person in your family to attend college? _____ Yes ______ No
10. What is the educational level of your parents?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mother</th>
<th>Father</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Development Certificate (GED) ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates Degree ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School Diploma ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Education Development Certificate (GED) ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some College ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associates Degree ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s Degree ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate Degree ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None of the above ___</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C:

INFORMED CONSENT FORM
INFORMED CONSENT FORM
Dual Enrollment Program Participants: Their Experiences and Persistence as Hispanic Students

Dear Participant,

I, Chimere Jones, am writing to invite you to participate in a study that I am conducting as a part of my dissertation research with Benedictine University located in Lisle, IL. This study is on how the Dual Enrollment Program and other internal and external factors have influenced the beliefs, motivations, academic success, and persistence of Hispanic college students at East Bay Area University. I am asking that you participate in this study because of your experience with the Dual Enrollment Program.

Your contribution to this study, if you agree, will be via data collected from a demographic survey and an interview lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. You will be asked to respond to a series of questions pertaining to the research purposes. Follow-up interviews may be requested depending on the research needs. The interview transcript will be presented to you for verification of accuracy. There will be complete anonymity regarding your participation and identity in this study. The interview will be given a secure code and a pseudonym will be assigned to your name to keep all the information fully confidential. Your real name will only be known by me as the researcher. This interview will help me gain data to use in my study. The data obtained from the interview will be utilized exclusively for the purpose of this research. The interview session will be audio taped and later transcribed by me, the researcher.

When the project is complete, all transcripts and audio tapes will be placed in a secure file at the home residence of Chimere Jones in a locked cabinet. Records of the audio tapes will be stored for seven years and destroyed when they are no longer needed. Your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose not to answer any particular question or withdraw from the interview at any time without consequences. There is essentially no risk associated with choosing to participate in this research project.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Boards of Benedictine University and East Bay Area University. The Chair of the Benedictine University IRB is Dr. Alandra Weller-Clarke who can be reached at aclarke@ben.edu or at (630) 829-6295.

If you have any additional questions regarding this study please feel free to contact me, Chimere Jones, now or at any point during this study at chimerejuajones@gmail.com. You may also contact my dissertation director, Dr. Bonnie Copeland, at bonniesc@gmail.com.

You will be given a copy of your signed consent form. Please acknowledge with your signatures below your consent to participate in this study and to record your interview. Thank you.
Sincerely,
Chimere J. Jones

I consent to participate in this study

Name: ____________________________
Signature: ________________________
Date: ____________________________

I give my permission to record this interview

Name: ____________________________
Signature: ________________________
Date: ____________________________
APPENDIX D:

PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What made you decide to participate in the Dual Enrollment Program while enrolled at College Preparatory Academy?

2. Tell me about your overall experiences as a Dual Enrollment Program participant. What was the emphasis of the program and what courses did you take?

3. How did the program influence your aspirations to attend college?

4. What were your thoughts and beliefs about college before participating in the Dual Enrollment Program?

5. How did your thoughts and beliefs change after participating in the program and entering college?

6. Did the Dual Enrollment Program prepare you academically for college? If so how?

7. Did the Dual Enrollment Program prepare you for the nonacademic experiences of college? If so how?

8. What aspects of the Dual Enrollment Program did you consider most beneficial to your persistence in college?

9. What aspects of the Dual Enrollment Program did you consider least beneficial to your persistence in college?

10. Which nonacademic factor(s) have contributed positively to your academic success and persistence in college?

11. Which nonacademic factor(s) have contributed negatively to your academic success and persistence in college?

12. Which academic factor(s) have contributed positively to your academic success and persistence in college?

13. Which academic factor(s) have contributed negatively to your academic success and persistence in college?

14. Have the staff and faculty at the university played a role in your college persistence? If so, what role and in what ways have they assisted you?

15. Have family members, friends, or peers played a role in your college persistence? If so, please elaborate on this?

16. What other factors, unrelated to the Dual Enrollment Program, do you consider the most helpful or meaningful to your persistence in college?
17. Is there any additional information that you would like to share that I have not asked?