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LINKING STUDY BEHAVIORS AND STUDENT CULTURE TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS AMONG HISPANIC STUDENTS

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Hispanic students are less likely to persist at community colleges than white students. The study reported in this article suggests that students with appropriate study behaviors are more likely to persist. The study investigated the study behaviors of Spanish-speaking Hispanic students at one Hispanic-serving community college using the Inventario de Comportamiento de Estudio and at two Mexican universities. Community college students' response patterns were more like those of Mexican public university students and unlike Mexican private university students. This suggests that student culture, rather than institutional culture, determines students' study behaviors.

In 1999, 704,500 Hispanic students were enrolled in two-year colleges in the United States, yet only 7.3% (51,541) of these students were awarded associate degrees (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2001). This low percentage of degree holders may indicate that a high level of student attrition exists at these institutions. Fry (2002) states that the Hispanic college dropout rate merits considerable attention, especially in the light of the fact that about 40% of Latino 18- to 24-year old college students attend community colleges compared to about 25% of white and black students of the same age group. Fry examined National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) data on Hispanic full-time and part-time two-year college students three years after their initial enrollments who had declared that associate degree attainment was their educational goal. Fry found that only 20.8% of Hispanic full-time students had attained degrees within three years

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while 32.7% were no longer enrolled. The findings for part-time students were even more discouraging. A mere 4.4% of part-time students had obtained associate degrees three years after their initial enrollment and 54.7% of them were no longer enrolled in college. Clearly, given data such as these, strategies must be devised to increase the rate of Hispanic students' success in community colleges.

AN APPROACH TO LOWERING ATTRITION RATES

In 1975, Tinto presented a theoretical model of the process by which college students make decisions about whether to remain in institutions of higher education. He revised his model twice, in 1987 and 1993. Within the original form of this model and its subsequent revisions is the notion that students' entry characteristics influence the level of their initial commitment to the institution. Subsequently, students' social and academic integration into the institution alters their levels of institutional commitment. According to Tinto, those who develop higher levels of institutional commitment are more likely to remain at the college or university than are those who fail to develop high levels of institutional commitment. Tinto's model suggests, therefore, that academic integration should have a positive influence on students' goal commitment to graduation. Braxton, Sullivan, and Johnson (1997), however, found only weak evidence of this phenomenon in their study.

In light of Braxton et al.'s (1997) finding, Braxton and Lien (2000) suggested that academic integration operates in a manner different than that posited by Tinto. They theorized that academic integration might lead in some other way to student persistence in higher education. Braxton and Lien examined this notion by reviewing the literature relating to this idea and found strong support among multi-institutional studies, but they also found considerably weaker support in single-institutional studies. The authors noted that results from single institutions may be most important here since they directly address Tinto's assertion that his theoretical model deals with the process of student withdrawal within a particular institution of higher education rather than describing a more generalizable process. Braxton and Lien summarized their findings by suggesting that, as an alternative to abandoning the use of academic integration as a construct in studies of students dropping out from college, the construct should be redefined by the use of alternative operational definitions. One strategy they suggested for accomplishing this redefinition was to extend Durkheim's (1897/1951) notion of normative integration (integration through similarity in beliefs and values) to the academic

communities of higher education. This notion suggests that a student leaves an institution when his or her academic beliefs and values are inconsistent with those of the institution. Tinto (1975) did not allow for the effects of intellectual and emotional isolation in considering levels of academic integration. Instead, he suggested that academic integration is a function of student achievement, since achievement reflects students' success in meeting the expectations of the institution.

We believe that Braxton and Lien (2000) are mistaken when they maintain that Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993), and researchers who have tested hypotheses based on his theory have erred in how they operationally define academic integration. Braxton and Lien ignored the degree of match between the "prevailing academic attitudes, values, and beliefs at various levels of the academic system" (p. 24) and the attitudes, values, and beliefs of students. They failed to take into account that interaction is a two-way phenomenon. The values of the institution are not cast in concrete. As students' levels of institutional commitment are influenced by institutional values, so do the values and other characteristics of students affect the values and practices of the institution.

This has always been true, to a great extent, in community colleges, which were historically developed to serve the needs of the people in their communities. In fact, the need is great for higher education institutions to responding to student values and needs in the current entrepreneurial situation where the competition for students in general and for particular students exists. Moreover, it has strengthened the response of institutions to address the feelings, attitudes, and needs of their students. Kuh and Love (2000) assert that the culture of an institution is the result of both process and product. It is made up of the values and understandings of the people who comprise the institution while being shaped by the interaction of its members and forces outside of the institution. From this we can conceive the notion of both student and institutional cultures, that interact to influence each other. We can see this interaction most clearly at community colleges.

Community colleges, by definition, draw their student bodies from the geographical areas in which they are located. It is not uncommon for more than one community to exist in a geographic area (for instance, within a county). It is reasonable also to assume that people living in different communities within a small geographical area may have more in common with each other than with people living farther away from them. In light of the above, it is important to explore the question, What is the nature of the community of students who attend community colleges?

Several characteristics are evident immediately. These students are most likely commuter students since community colleges rarely provide residence halls. Next, they tend to be older, an average age 29 years & age, than students who traditionally make up the undergraduate populations of four-year institutions. Community college students are more likely to have full-time jobs during the day, and they are more likely to have children than traditional students at four-year institutions. Community college students are more likely to enroll part-time and be students in need of academic remediation. In areas with large non-English speaking immigrant populations these colleges are more likely to provide English language instruction than four-year institutions in the same area. Community colleges tend to be located in areas that have access to public transportation, in urban areas, and have large parking lots in rural and suburban areas. They also tend to offer a large proportion of their courses in the evening. Their student services, such as bookstores and food services, tend to be open late into the evening. They often provide childcare services. They offer developmental education and English as a second language programs. While four-year institutions occasionally provide some or all of these programs and services, these would usually be at urban institutions with a tradition of serving the local community or as a recent response to the demographic changes in their enrollments. It might also be expected that the academic standards of the institution would reflect the institutional culture. If so, the academic achievement could actually be a measure of normative academic integration.

Rendón, Jalomo, and Nora (2000) critique Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) interactionist theory for focusing only on the negative impact of the student's community outside of the institution of higher education while ignoring the positive functions that occur outside the community. We concur. While Rendón et al. discussed this issue in terms of students' social integration, we maintain that the outside community plays a significant role in academic integration, as well. As an example, we might take the immigrant eastern European Jewish communities of the urban northeastern United States during the first half of the twentieth century. These communities valued the educational enterprise highly, resulting in extremely high rates of attendance and graduation from institutions of higher education both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

In addition, Rendón et al. (2000) criticize Tinto's (1987) revision for assigning the responsibility for school departure to the student, rather than to the institution. "Individuals attend college, become integrated or not, leave or stay, fail or succeed. Absent from the traditional social integrationist views are the distinctions among [students'] cultures"

(p. 144). We believe that the failure of many of the studies reviewed by Braxton et al. (1997) and Braxton and Lien (2000) to find consistent relationships among academic integration and goal commitment to graduation, institutional commitment, or student persistence may be due to the fact that these studies neglected to consider the interaction between the culture of the student and the culture of the institution.

Finally, Stage and Hossler (2000) noted that studies of college persistence use rather passive measures of academic integration such as students' beliefs about their achievement of goals and their perceptions of their academic development. Stage and Hossler suggested that these weak measures might have accounted for the resulting weak relationships between academic integration and persistence reported by Braxton et al. (1997). Since many of the measures used in determining the academic experiences of college and university students are behavioral, Stage and Hossler suggested that measures of overt behaviors would be more appropriate measures of academic integration, especially if those behaviors are related to the academic enterprise. We believe that study behaviors constitute an example of such overt behaviors. The authors seem to agree. Among the research questions that arise out of their study is, "Are student study behaviors positively related to persistence?" (p. 186).

THE DEFINITION OF CULTURES

We maintain that students attending colleges and universities are affected by two cultures. The first of these, which we refer to as the culture of the student, is composed of the characteristics, values, and beliefs of the communities which they live plus certain characteristics that they share that may cut across racial and ethnic lines. Examples of the former include socioeconomic status, the identification with a common language, and beliefs concerning the value of education, the nature of gender specific roles, and the value and appropriateness of cooperation when learning (concerning this latter belief, see Fullilove & Treisman, 1990). Characteristics across racial and ethnic lines include student ages, their attendance status (full- or part-time), whether or not they have full-time jobs outside of the college or university, their family status (do they have young children to care for or do they live in extended families).

The second culture is the culture of the institution within higher education itself. The culture of the institution also is composed of characteristics, values, and beliefs. These cultural characteristics, values, and beliefs are manifested in the institution in a number of

ways. For instance, they are reflected in admissions policies, the curriculum, class and academic schedules, quality and quantity of student services, beliefs in the value of a diverse student body and faculty, and institutional priorities concerning research and instruction.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE AND STUDY BEHAVIORS

Our work in developing valid and reliable measures of study behaviors brought us to the development of the *Inventario de Comportamiento de Estudio (ICE)* (Bliss & Sandiford, 2003), the Spanish language version of the Study Behavior Inventory (Bliss, Kerstiens & Marvin, 2000). The accumulation of samples of student responses to the ICE, used in the validation of the instrument, allowed us to investigate the effects of both institutional and student cultures on the study behaviors of Spanish-speaking students from varying student and institutional cultures.

Bliss and Mueller (1986, 1987, 1993) and others (Bliss, Vinay & Koeninger, 1996; Villa, 1998) have consistently found moderate to high correlation between measures of students' self-reported use of appropriate study behaviors and their grade point averages (an index of academic integration) among students in the United States (using the English version Study Behavior Inventory) and in Mexico (using the Spanish version, *Inventario de Comportamiento de Estudio*). They also reported finding similar factor structures for the instrument after carrying out factor analyses on students' responses. Three factors were found to underlie the construct of study behaviors in all studies: (1) feelings of academic self-efficacy; (2) management of time for routine and recurring tasks; and (3) management of time for long-term, specific, nonrecurring tasks. A fourth factor, studying as a social activity, was found in the Mexican samples, but this factor contained only two items and accounted for only a very small part of the total variance of responses. What was curious, however, was the fact that while the factor measuring feelings of academic self-efficacy accounted for the most variance of the total scores in the two Mexican samples, the management of time for recurring tasks accounted for the second highest proportion of variance in one of the samples and the management of time for long-term tasks accounted for the second highest proportion of variance in the other.

We believed that these observed differences between the two Mexican samples could be accounted for by either the culture of the students attending these institutions or by the cultures of the institutions. In order to determine which of these explanations was most

likely, responses on the ICE from students at two Mexican universities and at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) were examined. MDCC is one of the largest Hispanic-serving community colleges in the United States.

The Mexican institutions from which the samples were drawn were La Universidad de las Américas (UDLA) ($n = 1,046$), an elite, private comprehensive university in Cholula, Mexico that uses a U.S. structure and curriculum.¹ La Universidad de Puebla (BUAP) ($n = 860$), a public, inexpensive university in Puebla, Mexico that uses a European structure and curriculum.

The ICE scores from Spanish speaking students at MDCC were from a convenience sample of 322 students. The students were identified by their professors as Hispanic students who were Spanish speakers.² MDCC is a leader in the education of Hispanic students and, as noted above, one of the largest HSIs in the U.S. Miami-Dade ranks first among two-year institutions in the awarding of associate degrees in over 150 disciplines. It enrolled 71,616 credit-earning students and approximately the same number of non-credit earning students during the 2000–2001 academic year. Hispanic students make up 65% of the student body at the six-campus college. Sixty-one percent of the 3,211 graduates who earned associate degrees in that year were Hispanic students making MDCC first among community colleges in the number of degrees awarded to Hispanic students in the U.S. (Miami-Dade Community College, 2002).

The college is situated in one of the largest Hispanic communities in the United States. Miami-Dade and Broward are the two southernmost mainland counties in Florida and contain the vast majority of the state's Hispanic residents. These counties are each served by independent community colleges, namely, Miami-Dade Community College, an HSI due to its 57.3% Hispanic enrollment, and Broward Community College, which enrolls 16.7% Hispanic students. Table 1 presents data on the Hispanic populations of these counties and the

¹La Universidad de las Américas, an elite Mexican university was used in this study because it represented an institution with an institutional culture similar to that of schools in the United States and it enrolled students whose culture was Hispanic. This was done to contrast it with La Universidad de Puebla, an institution with an institutional culture that was different from that of U.S. institutions, such as MDCC, but whose student culture also was Hispanic.

²The authors acknowledge the small size of this sample and the threat it represents to the external validity of our findings. It represents a convenience subsample of data from a larger study where instructors identified Spanish-speaking students (see Bliss & Sandiford, 2003).

TABLE 1 Selected Population Characteristics of South Florida and the Entire State

| Characteristic | Miami-Dade County | Broward County | State of Florida |
|---|-------------------|----------------|------------------|
| Population | 2,289,683 | 1,668,560 | 16,396,515 |
| Percent Hispanic | 57.3% | 16.7% | 16.8% |
| Percent foreign born | 50.9% | 25.3% | 16.7% |
| Percent living in homes where a language other than English is spoken | 67.9% | 28.8% | 23.1% |

state (U.S. Census Bureau, n. d.). It is clear from the data that the South Florida area in general, and Miami-Dade County in particular, has a large Hispanic population that most likely influences the qualities and directions of the educational institutions these students attend.

In providing a possible explanation for the differences between the two Mexican samples on the second and third factors it may be useful to recall that these factors both describe time management behaviors. They differ in that in the English language SBI and the UDLA ICE scores, the second factor contains behaviors used when preparing for every day, routine academic tasks while the third factor contains items describing behaviors exhibited when students prepare for more long range, single instance tasks. In terms of test taking preparation, behaviors involving preparation for quizzes given during each class might be found in Factor 2, whereas those behaviors involving preparing for midterm and final examinations might be found in Factor 3.

La Universidad de las Américas consciously attempts to duplicate a selective U.S. model university within Mexico. Classes are small, usually having no more than 30 students where students have ample opportunities to interact with the faculty. Professors also provide students with many grade-producing activities throughout the semester. On the other hand, public universities in Mexico have huge student populations. Such is the case for Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México in Mexico City with its 100,000 students. It typically has large classes with hundreds of students that meet in large lecture halls and where there is little interaction between the professor and students. Students listen to lectures and read assigned texts, however, since lectures are primarily taken from the texts, many students do not bother attending lectures. These classes generally have only one grade producing activity, which is a final examination or term paper. This institutional culture is typical of traditional European and Latin American universities.

While the U.S. model as typified by La Universidad de las Américas is gradually being adopted in universities, this movement has been slow to develop. Successful time management strategies in classes where there are almost daily, grade-producing activities are likely to be very different from successful strategies in classes where there is a single grade producing activity. For instance, reviewing notes before each class may not be as important in these larger universities as it is at U.S. model institutions that have frequent tests throughout the semester. Such differences in institutional cultures could account for the movement of items between Factors 2 and 3 in the two Mexican university populations. If this were the appropriate explanation, Hispanic students at Miami-Dade Community College would be expected to have patterns of study behaviors that are similar to those at la Universidad de las Américas since the two colleges have similar institutional cultures.

An alternative explanation for these differences in the factor structure of the results at the two Mexican institutions is that they are due to the culture of the student. Students who attend public universities in Mexico tend to come from working class and lower middle-class homes (some of the large public universities in Mexico City being exceptions to this rule). Almost all the students have full-time jobs and attend part-time. The majority of them attended public elementary and secondary schools. Those attending the elite private institutions, La Universidad de las Américas, are primarily from upper middle-class and upper class homes. For the most part, they live on campus and attend full-time. They are primarily in the same age group as traditionally aged American college students. Virtually all of these students attended private elementary and secondary schools, have traveled extensively in the United States, Latin America, and Europe and are at least moderately proficient in English. Almost all of them drive their own automobiles in a country where the minimum wage is under US\$5 per day. If this were the appropriate explanation, it is the culture of the student that determines patterns of study behaviors. Hispanic students at Miami-Dade Community College would then be expected to have patterns of study behaviors that are similar to those at the large public Mexican university. The current study was an attempt to begin gathering evidence of these alternatives and to make recommendations for practice from the results.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

Factor analysis was used to determine the factor structure of the responses on the ICE. This factor structure was compared to those

obtained from the Mexican elite private university and the Mexican public university to determine if it resembled one of these structures more than the other. The correlation between the students' grade point averages and their scores on the total ICE and its factors also were determined.

The factor structure obtained from the responses of students at MDCC were very similar to those obtained at the large Mexican public university. This comparison supports the notion that study behaviors develop as a function of the culture of the student rather than as a function of the culture of the institution of higher education. The factor accounting for the most variance of the total ICE score were items that probed students' perceptions of their efficacy as students. This was consistent both with the findings from the English language SBI in the U.S. institution and the ICE at both Mexican universities.

Participants at MDCC were asked to indicate the country in which they were born. Those who were born outside of the United States were placed into one of three regional areas: (1) Mexico and Central America, (2) South America, and (3) the Caribbean. There were no significant differences by region found on the total ICE score or on Factors 1 and 3 and a small difference between students coming from the Caribbean and South America on Factor 2, which was so small as to be negligible. This finding is a particularly interesting since Caribbean Spanish-speaking students living in South Florida tend to be of Cuban background and they are more likely than any other group of Hispanics to be full-time students and come from middle class families (Fry, 2002). Although one might expect to find differences between these students and Hispanic students coming from other areas, this was not the case here. This lack of differences cannot simply be accounted for by acculturation into the U.S. since the median of the time participants had lived in the United States was three years, a relatively short period of time.

The correlation between students' grade point averages and the total score and the first three factor scores of the *Inventario de Comportamiento de Estudio* of Miami-Dade students are significant, but somewhat lower than those found in the other populations. This phenomenon could be explained by the limited variability of the GPA values. While these ranged from 0.96 to 4.00, 60% of the GPAs were 3.0 and above with a value of 4.00 the mode of the distribution.

EXPLAINING THE FINDINGS

An interesting phenomenon seems to appear when the factor structure of scores is observed across the three sites noted in this study. The first

three factors are found across all three institutions. What appears to differ is the order of the second and third factors in accounting for proportions of variance within the different sites. At Miami-Dade and the Mexican public university, the factor containing behaviors useful in management of time for long-term academic tasks accounted for the second highest proportion of variance. But, it only accounted for the third highest proportion of the variance at the private, elite Mexican university.

What appeared to be happening was that the students at the Mexican public university and at Miami-Dade were more concerned about long-term study behaviors. They may have perceived the need to manage time over the long term as more important than the need to manage time day-to-day. On the other hand, the private university students found time management as more of a day-to-day phenomenon. A tentative explanation for this difference might be found in the effects of socioeconomic status (SES). The students at the private Mexican university were full-time students whose major occupation was being a college or university student. Since their "jobs" consisted primarily of going to classes and getting good grades on a day-to-day basis, these students may have been more likely to see planning for daily, routine tasks as most important to them. Theoretically, they would most likely, therefore, view academic tasks—whether long-or short-term—as more likely to be related to short-term tasks.

In contrast, students at Mexican public institution and at Miami-Dade Community College tended to come from middle and working class homes and attended college and university on a part-time basis while supporting themselves and their families with full-time employment. Many may have balanced their academic pursuits with concerns about their own families. And work than it was to involve academic pursuits. When these students planned, they planned their activities for the entire semester and may have center this planning on employment and family demands. These students were more likely to relate theoretically ambiguous tasks to long-term planning behaviors.

THE ICE AND THE NEEDS OF HISPANIC COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

The ICE revealed factors that make up the primary structure of study behaviors of a group of Hispanic community college students. These factors consisted of an enabling factor that deals with the perception these students had of themselves as successful learners in higher education and two sets of behaviors dealing with time management. The order of the two time management factors suggested that the

culture (including SES) of students (including SES) may have affected their study behaviors in terms of how they planned. The emphasis on long-range planning over planning for the short run on the part of Hispanic community college students may not be appropriate in U.S. institutions that provide numerous, regular grade producing activities in which students must be ready to demonstrate their academic achievement regularly.

Following are a set of institutional needs that this study suggested are important for Hispanic-serving community colleges that desire to raise the academic performance of their students.

The Need for Screening

Community colleges, particularly those enrolling large numbers of Hispanic students, need to set up English and Spanish screening programs to assess the study behaviors of entering students. They can use the results to place students having difficulties in these areas into courses or programs where they can develop appropriate study behaviors. This screening is especially important for part-time students.

The Need for Strong Counseling Components

An old adage tells us that we can lead a horse to water, but we can't make it drink. Likewise, we can effectively teach study skills to students, but we cannot make them apply these skills in the course of their academic careers. Between knowing how to study (possessing study skills) and actually *using* these skills in preparing for academic tasks (exhibiting study behaviors) is a connecting phenomenon that relies on students' feelings about the usefulness of these skills and attitudes toward their academic endeavors and themselves. This phenomenon may determine whether students who learn study skills will manifest them as study behaviors. The first factor of the ICE also deals with these feelings and attitudes. Community colleges need to provide assistance for Hispanic students who score low on this factor.

Long-Term Time Management

The ICE Factor 2 score measures the behaviors students engage in when they plan for academic tasks over long periods of time. This is particularly important for part-time students for whom academic work must often compete with demands from family and work. The data suggest that Hispanic community college students who exhibit appropriate behaviors in this type of time management will have higher academic averages, therefore will most likely persist in their

studies. Community colleges should provide support activities for Hispanic students that teach them to how to carry out effective time management behaviors for long-term goals.

Time Management in Preparing for Routine, Recurring Academic Tasks

Factor 3 of the ICE measures behaviors involved in preparing for everyday academic tasks. For part-time students this may be problematic in light of their competing family and work obligations. Nonetheless, there is a positive relationship between students' use of appropriate time management behaviors in this area and their levels of academic success. Community colleges enrolling Hispanic students should provide opportunities for these students to develop appropriate short-term time management behaviors.

SUMMARY

Miami-Dade Community College is situated in a county where 57% of residents identified as Hispanic in the 2000 United States Census. Approximately two-thirds of the students who enroll in Miami-Dade are Hispanic students. Many of these students tend to be part-timers, are older than traditional college age students, and often come from working class families. These students also are more likely to have to balance their studies with their obligations to family and the workplace.

Using the *Inventario de Comportamiento de Estudio*, the patterns of study behaviors of a group of Hispanic students at MDCC was examined and compared with patterns obtained from two Mexican universities. This comparison resulted in the conclusion that suggests that study behavior patterns of Miami-Dade Hispanic students were likely a function of the culture of the student, particularly socioeconomic status, rather than a function of the culture of the institutions they attended. Their levels and patterns of study behaviors were likely to be different from students from middle class families and who more often attend college full-time. Community college faculty and administrators must be aware of the distinctive characteristics of Hispanic students in order to prepare appropriate study skills activities that assist them to be more academically successful and to persist in their studies.

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