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## A Phenomenological Study: The Associate Degree Pathway Experiences of Twelfth Grade Hispanic Male Students in an Early College High School Program

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Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Phenomenological Study: The Associate Degree Pathway Experiences of 12th Grade Hispanic  
Male Students in an Early College High School Program

Hector R. Esquivel

Concordia University–Portland

College of Education

Dissertation Proposal submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Educational Leadership

Mark Jimenez, Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

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Concordia University–Portland

2019

## **Abstract**

Many Hispanic male students, who are often the first in their family to attend college, face distinctive challenges while attempting to obtain a higher education degree. The purpose of this study was to explore how a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in the rural Southwestern United States experience an Early College High School (ECHS) program while attempting to earn an associate degree. A transcendental phenomenological research design was employed to document the experiences of seven 12th grade Hispanic male students who were enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of this study site's ECHS. Purposive sampling was utilized to identify study participants who were in 12th grade, Hispanic, male, and at one point had been enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of ECHS. Data was collected from the participants by utilizing an interview protocol in the spring of 2018. The data analysis for this study was accomplished by following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method, which helped generate eight themes. The themes were: (a) poor time management skills; (b) limited prior rigorous academic experiences; (c) extracurricular activity participation; (d) institutional agents present in the students' lives; (e) parental support; (f) limited social and cultural capital; (g) positive experience about ECHS; and (h) lack of work ethic. This study was significant because the information provided by the participants may have the potential to influence ECHS programs by recommending programming that improves a Hispanic male student's chances of postsecondary success.

*Keywords:* associate degree, college readiness, cultural capital, Early College High School (ECHS), Hispanic male students, institutional agents, social capital, transcendental phenomenology, socioeconomic status (SES), zone of proximal development

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife, April Rose Esquivel, who throughout this doctoral journey has instilled in me the importance of not giving up on my life-long goal of obtaining a doctoral degree. I thank you for your support, patience, and understanding these past few years. You have served as mother and father to our children during this process so that I could pursue this dream.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my children Amelie, Berezi, and Anahi who have been my inspiration throughout this journey. You have inspired me to be a contributor in the field of educational research so that you may grow up in a better tomorrow full of educational opportunities.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank God for giving me the wisdom and strength to fulfill this life-long goal of obtaining my doctoral degree. You have provided me with the necessary talent and work ethic to accomplish this. I thank you for watching over me during the many long nights I spent working on this project.

I would like to thank my Faculty Chair, Dr. Mark Jimenez, for his guidance and patience during this process. Your welcoming student-centered approach helped me remain calm during many of the early dark days of this journey. I always appreciated our one-to-one phone conferences as you always reaffirmed me that I was on the right track.

I would like to thank my good friend and colleague James Diaz. You and I began this journey together before we enrolled in doctoral school as school administrators who had a unique vision for the future of education. I appreciate your advice, motivation, and in rare cases your sense of humor.

Finally, I would like to thank the participants of this study who served as purpose to conduct my study. I want you to know that because of your willingness to provide a voice about this study's problem statement that Hispanic males have the lowest level of higher educational attainment, you may potentially rewrite the history of many future Hispanic male students who enroll in the Early College High School Associate Degree Program.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In the United States, graduating from high school, enrolling in college, and obtaining a higher educational degree is a commonly accepted way to increase upward social mobility (Barnes & Slate, 2014). Hispanic male students, the target population in this study, possess some of the lowest higher education completion rates in the United States when compared to other similar male student groups (Saenz, Ponjuan, & Segovia, 2015). This fact suggests that Hispanic males face specific educational challenges. Saenz, Ponjuan, and Segovia (2015) noted that there is a lack of proactive effort in the United States to address the distinctive needs of Hispanic male students in the educational system, which influences the future economic and social prosperity of the growing Hispanic population in the country. Employers require that workers possess education beyond the high school level and Hispanic male students often struggle to obtain traditional entry-level jobs without a higher educational degree (Morgan, Sinatra, & Eschenauer, 2014; Saenz et al., 2015).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. Obtaining 12th grade Hispanic male student perspectives clarified areas of focus to expand support systems and services that are essential for Hispanic male students to be successful in the Associate Degree Pathway of this study site's ECHS program. Asking the students directly about their experiences in the Associate Degree Pathway provided critical data to improve understanding of why 12th grade Hispanic males' completion rates are markedly lower than other student groups in the ECHS program. Chapter 1 includes an introduction to a typical background of Hispanics in the United States and their path to obtain higher education, a statement of the problem, purpose of study,

and a conceptual framework that delineates factors associated with Hispanic students' successful completion of higher education goals. The chapter also includes the rationale for the relevance and significance of this study, research questions, definition of terms, nature of study, assumptions, delimitations, and limitations.

### **Introduction to the Problem**

In 2014, Hispanic males represented 21% of the traditional college age population (i.e., 18 to 24-year-olds) in the United States in comparison to Anglo-Americans who represented 55%, African Americans (15%), and Asians (5%) (Excelencia in Education, 2016). Despite Hispanic males having the second largest traditional college age group in 2014, only 17% of Hispanic males earned at least an associate degree, compared to 62% of Anglo-Americans (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). Since 2006, 20% of Hispanics earned an associate degree or higher; 62% of Asians, 45% of Whites, and 30% of African Americans earned the same degree (Quintanilla & Santiago, 2017).

Hispanic males' low percentages of higher educational attainment reflect the fact that 12.9% drop out after the first year of enrollment at community colleges and 35.2% permanently leave college by the second year of enrollment (NCES, 2015). By the third year of enrollment, 41% of Hispanic males either drop out of college or are no longer enrolled (NCES, 2015). There is a growing gender gap among Hispanic males' and females' higher education completion rates (Saenz et al., 2015). Since 2008, more than 60% of all postsecondary degrees that Hispanics earned were earned by female students (Locke, Stedrak, & Eadens, 2014). The dismal higher education completion rates of Hispanic males are well-documented as indicated by the aforementioned completion rates data. Therefore, the low higher education success rates of

Hispanic males demonstrate the need for additional research regarding factors that affect higher educational completion rates for this demographic.

### **Background, Context, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem**

The grouping and collective labeling of various separate Latino groups within the term *Hispanic* evolved in the 1970s as a method to assign an overarching label of political and economic orientation (Fergus, 2016). Hispanics lived in the United States for hundreds of years but there was no organized method to count them as a separate group in the census until the late 20th century (Cohn, 2010). Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic minority group in the United States; the Hispanic population may become the majority by the year 2050 (Chavira, Cooper, & Vasquez-Salgado, 2016; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013), and by 2050 Hispanic students are expected account for 25% of all students in public schools (Locke et al., 2014).

The path to higher education for Hispanic students began in the middle of the 20th century. Dominguez (2015) explained that although a large population of Hispanics resided in the southwest part of the United States in 1958, only 6% of first-year college students were Hispanic. Since the passage of the Higher Education Act of 1965, Hispanics fought to equalize access and opportunity to higher education; however, Hispanics in the United States often received a low-quality educational experience compared to their White peers or other ethnic groups and have the lowest rates of educational attainment (Cerna, Perez, & Saenz, 2009; Dolan, 2009; Gonzalez, 2015; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013).

The lack of higher educational attainment for Hispanic students led educational leaders, policy makers, and business leaders to focus on initiatives that address this concern. One initiative was the Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI) established in 2002 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to provide funding for the development of ECHS programs. The

objective of an ECHS is to provide first-generation college students of color and low socioeconomic status (SES) the opportunity to obtain an associate degree while enrolled in high school via a systemic college-focused program (Muñoz, Fischetti, & Prather, 2014; Schaefer & Rivera, 2016). ECHS programs create an atmosphere in which every student believes that the expectation is that they will go to college (Berger et al., 2013; Castillo, Conoley, Cepeda, Ivy, & Archuleta, 2010; Edmunds et al., 2016; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010).

The idea of ECHS is not a recent phenomenon. In the 1930s and 1940s, Leonard Koos, an influential scholar at the Universities of Minnesota and Chicago, promoted the 6-4-4 plan of public education that was in place in the Pasadena and Compton school districts in California and in Kansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Mississippi (Kisker, 2006). According to Kisker (2006), the idea for this plan came from G. Stanley Hall, a late 19th-century psychologist who believed that the gap between Grades 12 and 13 was artificial. Another early college pioneer was Robert M. Hutchins, president of the University of Chicago in the 1930s, who argued that this curricular arrangement would expose all students, not just the university bound, to a liberal education and provide the skills to participate in society (Kisker, 2006). Early advocates of integrating high school and community colleges believed that combining Grades 11 through 14 would produce greater curricular and administrative unity (Kisker, 2006).

In 1938, the Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association and American Association of School Administrators wrote that the first two years of college work commonly offered in American institutions of higher education (IHEs) were more related to the secondary school than to higher education offered in the last two years of college (Kisker, 2006). Additionally, many early advocates believed that eliminating course duplication would allow students to earn a college degree in fewer years and would provide them with more time to enroll



in additional courses to enrich their education. This plan would allow students to obtain a liberal arts education before proceeding to graduate or professional schools. Kisker (2006) mentioned that Koos (1946) argued that combining Grades 11 through 14 would also provide savings in capital construction, housing, maintenance, and operation.

In the early 1970s, educators in the Bronx section of New York City created the Middle College High School (MCHS) at LaGuardia Community College for disadvantaged 9th through 12th graders who might benefit from a nontraditional setting to learn with and from community college students (Kisker, 2006). According to Kisker (2006), Janet Lieberman and Joseph Shenker, founders of MCHS, believed that this model would increase the aspirations and abilities of students who might not otherwise attend college or who were at risk of dropping out of high school. The MCHS model is the earliest model to most closely align with the Bill and Melinda Gate's ECHSI for students from traditionally underrepresented groups in postsecondary institutions (e.g., racial and ethnic minority students, low-income students, first-generation college students, and English language learners) (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011).

ECHS programs facilitate dual credit (DC) enrollment via established course sequences or pathways. Early colleges partner with institutes of higher learning to offer students an opportunity to earn an associate degree or up to two years of college credits during high school at no cost to the students. The primary reasoning is the belief that engaging underrepresented students in a demanding high school curriculum fosters motivation for earning college credits and increases their access to postsecondary education after high school. According to American Institutes for Research and SRI International (2009), ECHS programs operate under the following four core principles of the ECHSI:

1. Early college high schools are committed to serving students underrepresented in

higher education.

2. Early college high schools are created and sustained by a local education agency, a higher education institution, and the community, all of whom are jointly accountable for student success.
3. Early college high schools and their higher education partners and community jointly develop an integrated academic program so all students earn one to two years of transferable college credit leading to college completion.
4. Early college high schools engage all students in a comprehensive support system that develops academic and social skills as well as the behaviors and conditions necessary for college completion.

Early college high school leaders and their higher education and community partners work with intermediaries to create conditions and advocate for supportive policies that advance the early college movement (p. 4).

This study used the theoretical perspectives of Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) Theory and Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital to frame my investigation through which I interpreted my findings. Using these theories, the present analysis indicated institutional, familial, and personal factors that influence how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience the Associate Degree Pathway in this study site's ECHS program. The participation of Hispanic male students attempting to obtain a higher educational degree at the high school level provided enhanced comprehension of associate degree completion outcomes related to student experiences.

Vygotsky (1978) defined learning as a social process that plays a significant role in the development of cognition. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning occurs through interaction

with others and an individual's intellectual structure. Vygotsky (1978) described the ZPD as the distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of possible development as determined by problem-solving under the guidance of a more knowledgeable person or in collaboration with more competent peers. Students may have the intellectual ability to learn additional information but lack comprehension of their learning potential. Teachers can help extend the ZPD by creating supportive learning environments and guiding students to learn new concepts by building relationships with them in collaborative classroom settings (Vygotsky, 1978).

Bourdieu (1986) defined social capital as the assimilated and potential resources a person can access through a series of networks and relationships. Social capital facilitates opportunities to be associated and hold authority in such networks to obtain valuable resources. These social networks are attainable through participation in institutional structures. Bourdieu (1986) explained that those who are of limited socioeconomic means have limited social capital. According to Bourdieu (1977), *class habitus* is when children internalize external factors such as parents' ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving, depending on their position in society. Class habitus reflects the status people have in society that leads to specific lifestyles and interests among social classes. Habitus is a set of attitudes and values, such as a positive view of education that the dominant class holds.

Cultural capital consists of awareness of the prevailing culture in a society and the ability to understand and use *educated language* (Bourdieu, 1986). Parents possess a supply of cultural capital and transmit some of this to their children (Bourdieu, 1986). Transmission of cultural capital occurs when parents actively invest in transmitting cultural capital to their child. Examples of cultural capital transmission include reading to children, taking them to the theatre

or other culturally-relevant events, and exposing them to the college-going culture (Bourdieu, 1986). When parents are unable to teach educated language, they may not transmit as much cultural capital to their children.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The present study included an exploration of the problem of low completion rates of Hispanic students in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program. The continuous higher educational achievement gap between Hispanic males, Hispanic females, and other minority groups may compromise this group's ability to contribute to the trained workforce (Saenz et al., 2015). The stagnation of Hispanic males' higher educational completion rates signals the importance of research to help educators understand how Hispanic male students experience attempts to obtain a post-secondary degree. The problem is Hispanic male students have the lowest rate of higher education completion in the United States (Saenz et al., 2015).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. Study participants shared how they experience the Associate Degree Pathway while enrolled in an ECHS program. Study participants responded to open-ended questions in interviews.

The research questions for this study include the following:

Research question 1: How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) program describe their educational experience?

Research question 2: How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in a rural Southwestern

United States Early College High School (ECHS) describe the Associate Degree Pathway?

### **Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study**

A transcendental phenomenological research design was ideal for exploring how 12th grade Hispanic males experience an ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree. My rationale for selecting a transcendental phenomenology approach was that it includes an exploration of a phenomenon with an open mind to attain new knowledge from the essence of experience (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenological researchers examine their experiences with the phenomenon first to avoid judgments and biases later in the research (Moustakas, 1994). Transcendental phenomenology has roots in the philosophical perspectives of German mathematician Edmund Husserl (1970), who noted that the researcher's goal should be to find the essence or main idea of an experience and suspend all judgments about what is real about the experience until more certain. Husserl (1970) identified this suspension of judgment as *epoche* (i.e., the researcher bracketing personal experiences of a phenomenon and relying on universal structures to understand the experience).

Past research suggests that college preparatory programs at the high school level increase minority students' chances of completing a higher educational degree (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Chapa, Kupczynski, Mundy, & Gibson, 2016; Edmund et al., 2016). ECHS programs developed in response to calls to decrease the number of first-generation and underrepresented students of color who drop out or marginally graduate from high school (Muñoz et al., 2014). The design of ECHS bridges the gap between high school and college for disadvantaged students by providing an opportunity to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and associate degree (Haxton et al., 2016). ECHS programs increase graduation rates in high schools and in four-year post-secondary institutions (Berger et al., 2013).

This study may be significant for educational leaders wishing to implement or enhance an ECHS program. Educational leaders may benefit from new knowledge regarding the dynamics that contribute or serve as barriers to successful completion of an associate degree in the ECHS program. This study explored students' experiences in the Associate Degree Pathway of a Southwestern United States ECHS program for the purpose of contributing to research that addresses the problem of Hispanic male students' low rates of higher educational attainment in the United States.

This study may also be significant because current qualitative studies about Hispanic male students' experiences of higher educational attainment primarily include populations at the community college or university level (Dominguez, 2015; Glenn, 2011; Wormack & López, 2013) rather than the high school or ECHS level. Quantitative studies about factors that influence Hispanic males' higher educational degree attainment provided specific group analysis data on student achievement over time (Cooper, 2012; Saenz et al., 2015; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Strayhorn, 2010; Uribe, 2010; Vargas & Miller, 2011). Kaniuka and Vickers (2010) noted the need for research addressing experiences that impact Hispanic male students' pursuits of associate degrees with 60 or more college credits in ECHS programs.

### **Nature of the Study**

Several qualitative methods were potentially applicable to the present study. Creswell (2013) differentiated between five approaches to qualitative inquiry (i.e., narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study). Grounded theory was not appropriate because its focus is to develop a theory and this study seeks to make meaning from experience. This study was an exploration of how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience the Associate Degree Pathway of an ECHS program via semi-structured interviews; therefore, a

transcendental phenomenological design was the best option. The nature of utilizing open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews for a transcendental phenomenological approach requires the use of purposive sampling of students from the study site.

Data collected from the participants' interviews included responses to semi-structured, open-ended questions. I transcribed all data and implemented transcript review for validity purposes. I analyzed data using Moustakas' (1994) data analysis of phenomenological reduction. Moustakas (1994) listed the steps of phenomenological reduction as follows: (a) bracketing; (b) horizontalization; (c) cluster into themes; (d) textual descriptions; (e) structural description; and (f) textual-structural synthesis of the experience. Data analysis revealed an essence of the phenomenon that answered the two research questions and eventually gave meaning to the experiences of 12th grade Hispanic male students attempting to obtain an associate degree.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section includes a list of conceptual terms and definitions that are central to this study.

*Associate degree:* For the purpose of this study, an associate degree is the accumulation of 60 or more college credits a student earned while still enrolled in high school (Muñoz et al., 2014; Schaefer & Rivera, 2016).

*College readiness:* Student success without remediation in credit-bearing general education courses at two- and four-year institutions (Muñoz et al., 2014).

*Cultural capital theory:* Cultural Capital Theory suggests that parents possess a supply of cultural capital and transmit some of this to their children (Bourdieu, 1986). This is not a function of economics alone, but also a process of social stratification (social capital) and cultural knowledge (cultural capital) that cements a person's place in society.

*Early college high schools (ECHS):* Schools that offer first generation college students of color and low SES the opportunity to pursue a high school diploma while earning college credits or an associate degree (Haxton et al., 2016; Saenz & Combs, 2015).

*Economically disadvantaged:* A public school student classified as receiving free or reduced-priced lunch based on their household income (Texas Education Agency [TEA], 2017)

*Hispanics:* The grouping and collective labeling of various separate Latino groups that evolved in the 1970s as a method to assign an overarching label for political and economic orientation (Fergus, 2016).

*Institutional agents:* Individuals who occupy key positions of relatively high importance and authority. Institutional agents in a student's social network directly communicate or negotiate the communication of important social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

*Social capital theory:* Social capital is the assimilated and potential resources a person can access through a series of networks and relationships. Bourdieu's (1986) theory suggests that those who are of limited socioeconomic means have limited social capital.

*Transcendental phenomenology:* Qualitative methodology that emphasizes bracketing presuppositions and developing universal structures of what and how people experience a specific phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenology incorporates textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and the essence of the study (Creswell, 2013).

*Zone of proximal development theory:* The theory of the distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of possible development as determined by problem-solving under the guidance of a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky, 1978).



### **Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

Assumptions are elements of a research study which are the beginning points that a researcher considers when formulating its design (Simon, 2011). This transcendental phenomenological study included an interview protocol with open-ended questions for the participants to describe their experiences in the ECHS program. The assumption was that all participants answered interview questions as truthfully as possible. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity for the participants, all participants received a participant letter (A–J) rather than using their name in the results. I stored data at an off-campus location and destroyed it after the interview sessions were over.

Delimitations are characteristics that limit the scope and identify the boundaries of a research study (Simon, 2011). I delimited the study by including only seven 12th grade Hispanic male students enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program. The seven participants all attempted to obtain an associate degree in the ECHS program. Creswell (2013) recommended that a phenomenological study interview up to 10 participants in a long interview format and that the participants all be in a single location.

Within this study, I did not include Hispanic males in ninth through eleventh grade that enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway at the study site's ECHS. The decision to only include 12th grade Hispanic males in this study was because these students experienced the program for a longer time. I did not explore other ECHS locations in the Southwestern United States due to the researcher being employed at the study site location and the participants being enrolled on site.

The dependence on one main instrument to collect data can be a limitation of a study's research design. In this study, the use of interviews as the key data gathering source made it vital

that all participants experienced the same phenomenon so that the researcher could build a common understanding at the conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2013). The small sample size was also a potential limitation factor of the research design; however, this sample size amplified my ability to become deeply engaged through in-depth interviews with those seven participants.

### **Summary**

As Hispanic males continue to become a larger percentage of the American workforce, the need to equip them with skills and postsecondary credentials to compete for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs become more critical. Hispanic males continue to lag behind the national average in higher educational attainment compared to males from other ethnic groups (Saenz et al., 2015). Past researchers primarily focused on Hispanic males' poor higher educational attainment at university or community college settings. Research regarding Hispanic male students' problems with higher educational achievement before they begin college is necessary to increase their chances of success. Therefore, this study explored how 12th grade Hispanic males experience an ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree. Providing these Hispanic male students with an opportunity to share their lived experiences in the ECHS program may reveal why their higher educational completion rates are proportionally lower than other groups and ways to address this problem.

Data collected from the participants' interviews included responses to semi-structured, open-ended questions. I transcribed all data and implemented transcript review for validity purposes. I analyzed data using Moustakas' (1994) data analysis of phenomenological reduction. Data analysis revealed an essence of the phenomenon that answered the two research questions and gave meaning to the experiences of participants, who were 12th grade Hispanic male students attempting to obtain an associate degree.

In Chapter 2, I will include the foundation for investigating the research questions. Chapter 2 includes a thorough examination of current literature to identify factors that influence Hispanic students' experiences in their attempts to complete higher education. The literature review includes online database peer-reviewed articles and seminal books. Chapter 3 includes detailed descriptions of the methodology and design that were used to accomplish the study's purpose. Chapter 4 includes a presentation of the study's results, and Chapter 5 includes discussion, interpretation, and implications of the results.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Hispanic male students experience unique challenges that contribute to low postsecondary completion rates in the United States; Dominguez (2015) identified low socioeconomic status (SES), poor academic preparation, and lack of access to information about college-going culture as catalysts for Hispanic male students' poor postsecondary achievement. Hispanic male students' postsecondary challenges are more profound than any other male ethnic group; in 2014, only 17% received an associate degree compared to 62% of Anglo-Americans (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015).

The low rates of postsecondary success for Hispanic male students led educators, policy makers, and business leaders to focus on developing local, state, and federal initiatives to address the concern. The Early College High School Initiative (ECHSI), established in 2002 by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, provided funding for the development of ECHS programs. The objective of an ECHS is to provide first-generation college students of color and low SES the opportunity to obtain an associate degree while enrolled in high school via a systemic college-focused program (Muñoz et al., 2014; Schaefer & Rivera, 2016).

This chapter includes a review of literature related to the problem of why Hispanic male students' higher educational success rates lag behind other ethnic groups in the United States (Saenz et al., 2015). A conceptual framework, based on Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) Theory and Bourdieu's (1978, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital, included the categorization and explanation of concepts relevant to the study and map relationships among them. Seminal works regarding social and cultural capital and social cognitive learning and development served as the lenses through which I viewed the topic of Hispanic males' experiences in their pursuits of higher educational attainment.

## **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study consists of statements that link abstract concepts to empirical data (Rudestam & Newton, 2007) and indicate the relationship between a specific research proposal and the broader context of theory and prior research. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD applies to this study's focus on Hispanic students' institutional, familial, and personal experiences while attempting to obtain an associate degree. Vygotsky's (1978) view of higher-order thinking and learning as a social process facilitated through collaboration shaped this study's research questions, data collection, and data analysis. Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital applied to this study's exploration of Hispanic students' institutional, familial, and personal higher educational experiences. Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) analysis of social and cultural capital, social relationships, and class habitus also provided necessary support for this study's research questions, data collection, and data analysis.

### **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development**

To better understand the factors that often affect Hispanic male students' successful completion of a higher education, I examined Vygotsky's (1978) Theory of Sociocultural and Human Learning mostly through the lens of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Vygotsky's (1978) Theory of Sociocultural Human Learning is based on an understanding that learning is collaborative and most effective when achieved through authentic and appropriate learning practices. Focusing on the ZPD afforded the opportunity to review literature concerning optimizing learning for the target population in this study so that they may mature academically with the right assistance. For many Hispanic male students, who are first-generation college attendees, the only individuals in their early life that experienced college have been their teachers. For many Hispanic male students, not having access to prior college experiences

during the ZPD may play a role in their uncertainty about what it may take to experience college successfully.

Vygotsky (1978) described the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the distance between actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of possible development as determined through problem solving under the guidance of a more knowledgeable person or in collaboration with more competent peers. The ZPD happens when the social interaction occurs between a student and a more knowledgeable person (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky (1978) argued that students may have the intellectual ability to learn additional information but lack a comprehension of their learning potential. Vygotsky (1978) signaled that each student operates within a range of ability and that educators would best facilitate learning by presenting students with work that challenges without overwhelming them. If work is too easy the student will be bored, while if the work is too difficult the student will not have the intellectual tools necessary to learn anything from attempting the work.

Two elements in Vygotsky's (1978) definition of ZPD are the ideas of possible development of the learner and the part collaboration plays in the process. The idea of a learner's potential development refers to the area outside a learner's current capability and comprehension. This is what the learner is capable of, but yet to accomplish. The task of educators is to provide students suitable learning experiences and support to them to comprehend their potential. This process requires an academic balance of elevated challenge and elevated support in which a long-range perspective of learning is adopted. This means knowing that learning occurs in advance of the development if it is accompanied by purposeful academic supports.

Vygotsky (1978) thought that community was vital in learning environments and that

higher-order thinking was constructed through interaction with a mentor or coach. Although the peers will still be at various stages of development, their relative levels will be closer together due to this collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978). Collaborative activities promote student growth because students of similar ages are likely to be performing within each other's zone of proximal development; therefore, many students can work together and better assist in bringing each other's comprehension up rather than if the students were working independently. As a result, this permits students to co-construct new meaning and cognitive structures from learning experiences. A teacher can create a strong learning environment and guide students to learn the new concepts by building relationships with them and utilizing effective learning environments, such as collaborative classroom settings. A teacher or more experienced peer can provide the learner with scaffolding to support the student's developing understanding of knowledge domains or expansion of complex skills. Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD would suggest that collaborative learning, discourse, modeling and scaffolding are strategies for supporting the intellectual knowledge and skills of learners and facilitating intentional learning.

The learning that occurs within the ZPD depends on what can be accomplished by a student individually compared to the greater improvement of a student through the assistance of social interaction and guidance from a facilitator with more expertise in the area (Vygotsky, 1978). As teachers prepare and teach their lessons, the capacity threshold of students should be known and a scaffolded approach to teaching should be incorporated while increasing social interaction throughout the design of the lesson. Vygotsky's scaffolded and ZPD approach in Early College High School classes would allow many Hispanic male students, who often struggle with the level of rigor in these classes, to take part in interactive classroom environments while building higher-order thinking skills.

## **Bourdieu's Theory of Social and Cultural Capital**

Bourdieu (1977, 1986) explored ways in which society reproduces and how the dominant class retains its position. This is not a function of economics alone, but also a process of social stratification (social capital) and cultural knowledge (cultural capital) that cements a person's place in society. Bourdieu (1977) argued that understanding society is impossible without acknowledging the role of social and cultural capital in all its forms.

**Social capital.** Social capital is defined as the assimilated and potential resources accessed through a series of networks and relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital facilitates the opportunity to be associated and hold authority in networks to obtain valuable capital resources. People may attain access to social networks through participation in institutional structures. Bourdieu (1986) explained that those who are of limited socioeconomic means have limited social capital. The importance of the role that social capital plays in increasing access to economic and cultural capital affects how individuals move through life and make choices. Bourdieu (1986) focused on the benefits that individuals or small groups possess due to their social relationships with others and the way these social relationships enable access to physical and cultural capital.

**Class habitus.** Bourdieu (1977) described class habitus as the physical embodiment of cultural capital (i.e., deeply rooted habits, skills, and dispositions) that people possess due to life experiences. An individual's taste in art, food, and clothing are examples of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). The primary habitus is the internalizing of external (i.e., parental) ways of thinking, feelings, and behaving that reflect their position in society by children. This class habitus denotes the status people have in society, which leads to specific lifestyles and interests among social classes. Habitus is a set of attitudes and values, such as a positive view for education that



the dominant class holds.

A product of class habitus is a family's pattern of behavior that reproduces a person's position in society (Bourdieu, 1977). Class habitus provides the framework for cultural tastes, embodies a personal knowledge scheme, and can shape orientations of the body (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu (1977) stated that class habitus also reflects different class positions in society as distinguished by forms of capital within observable behavior.

**Cultural capital.** Cultural capital consists of awareness of the prevailing culture in a society, especially the ability to understand and use educated language (Bourdieu, 1986). Cultural capital can exist in the embodied state as an accent or dialect, in the objectified state as personal cultural goods, and in the institutionalized state as a college degree or credential. Bourdieu (1986) believed that the most powerful component of the symbolic usefulness of cultural capital is its ability to transmit to others.

Parents possess a supply of cultural capital and transmit some of this to their children (Bourdieu, 1986). Transmission of cultural capital occurs when parents actively invest in transmitting cultural capital to their child. Examples of cultural capital transmission include reading to children, taking them to the theatre or other culturally-relevant events, and exposing them to college-going culture. Through these experiences, a child passively acquires culture capital via objectified exposure in the home (Bourdieu, 1986). Parental transmission of cultural capital to their children implies that children convert embodied cultural capital into educational success or institutionalized cultural capital into socioeconomic upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). However, a child's acquisition of cultural capital also depends on a family's financial resources and on the child's academic ability.

Individuals and families possess resources in the form of economic, social, and cultural

capital that they invest to generate additional resources [i.e., capital conversion] (Bourdieu, 1986). Parents alter their investments in cultural capital based on what they believe to be the educational payoffs of past experiences. As an example, middle-class parents in the United States engage in determined cultural capital development by organizing children's free time activities to cultivate skills and behaviors that promote future socioeconomic success.

Inefficiencies in teaching are the result of the fact that the educational system presupposes the possession of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, students may be unable to understand what a teacher is conveying. Bourdieu (1986) added that education in industrialized nations creates class inequalities because education becomes biased toward valorizing cultural capital that denotes positive qualities to individuals and families that possess it. Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital suggests that educational credentials help produce and legitimize social inequalities for members of lower classes whose access to these credentials is severely limited.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

For this transcendental phenomenological study, I used online databases from the Concordia University Portland library resources site and Google Scholar. Online databases included ERIC (ProQuest), Educational Database (ProQuest), Taylor and Francis, Sage, and JSTOR. These online databases provided peer-reviewed articles from educational journals. I also reviewed hardcopies of seminal works regarding the conceptual framework as part of this literature review. I used the following key terms to conduct an iterative literature search: *early college high school, first-generation college student, economically-disadvantaged student, college readiness, Hispanic male students, social and cultural capital theory, zone of proximal development, Vygotsky, Bourdieu, and transcendental phenomenology.*

Specific research pertaining to why Hispanic male students' rates of higher educational completion remained low was also part of this review. A conceptual framework analysis included work by Vygotsky (1978) and Bourdieu (1977, 1986) that focused the present study on institutional, familial, and personal experiences that affect Hispanic male students' higher educational attainment. This review of literature included research on current systems that support Hispanic male students (e.g., ECHSI, which bridges the gap for higher educational attainment between this demographic group and similar age-group peers).

### **Review of Literature**

A review of literature provides a framework for a study and shows why it is important and timely (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). The authors clarified the relationship between this study and prior research on Hispanic male students' poor higher educational attainment. This literature review includes both sides of the problem: why 12th grade Hispanic males' completion rates in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program are lower than other similar peer male groups in the same program. The authors provided information regarding Hispanic students' institutional, familial, and personal experiences with higher education. These three categories reflect peer-reviewed studies of how Hispanic students experience higher educational attainment and how those findings relate to Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital.

### **Institutional Experiences**

Hispanic students' higher educational attainment experiences reflect the environment that they experienced as a group over time. Gonzalez (2015) reported that institutional experiences at the local, state, and national level exist in the form of policies and practices that placed Hispanic students in less rigorous college preparatory courses. Hispanic students' local institutional

experiences include fewer opportunities for educational outreach, resources, and support because they often attend low socioeconomic schools (Nunez, 2009). Hispanic students' institutional experiences at the state and national level include the rising cost of a college education coupled with the decreasing availability of student financial aid for many low SES Hispanic students (Wormack & López, 2013; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010).

Salinas and Alarcón (2016) contended that the history of Hispanic students' institutional experiences can be traced to the ratification of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 that ceded Texas and the American Southwest territory to the United States from Mexico. Since the treaty, the rights and privileges of Hispanics remained obscure due to substandard and segregated schools (Salinas & Alarcón, 2016). Institutional discrimination that Hispanic students experience in public schools affected their motivation and persistence to attend college after high school (Witkow, Huynh, & Fuligni, 2015). Throughout history, Hispanic students experienced English-only laws, attacks against bilingual education principles, and general xenophobia against recent Hispanic arrivals (Cerna et al., 2009; Dolan, 2009; Gonzalez, 2015; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; Salinas & Alarcón, 2016; Witkow et al., 2015). In the higher educational realm, Hispanic students' paths to postsecondary attainment evolved only after the middle of the 20th century (Dominguez, 2015).

Hispanic male students' higher educational institutional experiences reflect a dismal record of achievement compared to other similar male groups (Saenz et al., 2015). Despite Hispanic males being the second largest traditional college age group in the United States, there is a significant underrepresentation in college completion rates for this group (Gonzalez, 2015; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; NCES, 2015; Petrini, 2015). According to the NCES (2015), 12.9% of Hispanic males dropped out after the first year of enrollment at community colleges and 35.2%

left college by the second year of enrollment. By the third year, 41% of Hispanic males either dropped out of college or were no longer enrolled (NCES, 2015). There is a growing gender gap among Hispanic males and females in terms of higher education completion rates (Cooper, 2012; Locke et al., 2014; Saenz et al., 2015). Since 2008, more than 60% of all postsecondary degrees awarded to Hispanics were earned by female students (Locke et al., 2014; Saenz et al., 2015). Cooper (2012) observed that this gender gap may begin as early as preschool when Hispanic communities steer Hispanic males toward alternate social and career paths.

Hispanic students' higher educational attainment experiences include minimal home or community outreach to reinforce knowledge of college preparatory courses, financial aid, or standardized test-taking strategies. Moreno and Gaytan (2013) and Petrini (2015) studied the underrepresentation of low socioeconomic status (SES) Hispanic students at a college campus regarding the economic and education influence of SES on these individuals and the United States. Both studies revealed that conditions in Hispanic students' urban communities and the challenges they face require additional outreach and support. For example, Moreno and Gaytan (2013) revealed that many Hispanic students from low-income families do not have support at home that middle-class students have (e.g., educated parents to organize and proofread homework, a computer with Internet access, a tutor to help them master mathematics and science, or a quiet place to work).

Hispanic students' institutional experiences also reflect programs and initiatives that enhanced their opportunities for postsecondary success. Cooper (2012) suggested that the solutions to low Hispanic student success at the postsecondary level lie in partnerships between colleges and K-12 local education agencies, businesses, and community institutions. Hispanic students' experiences in college preparatory programs that partner with institutes of higher

education, like ECHS, influenced their college enrollment and persistence (Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Karp, Calcagno, Hughes, Jeong, & Bailey, 2007; Kallison & Strader, 2012; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011). Sondergeld, Fischer, Samel, and Knaggs (2015) reported that college preparatory programs alleviate social isolation and poverty for many Hispanic students.

Hispanics' institutional experiences in precollege programs (e.g., Advancement Via Individual Determination [AVID], Project Mentoring to Achieve Latino Educational Success [MALES], and Summer Bridge) affect future college success of Hispanic males more than their lack of social and cultural capital. According to Glenn (2011), initiatives that promote college-going culture exist in many public high schools; some, like AVID, offer elective college-prep support programs. AVID is a college-prep academic program that provides a support system to minority and economically-disadvantaged students in the top 25 to 50% ranking based on GPA of their graduating classes that prepares them for university studies (Glenn, 2011). Saenz et al. (2015) revealed the success of a mentoring program called Project MALES. The model is distinct because it focuses only on Hispanic males and best practices for mentoring males of color (Saenz et al., 2015). Another program that improves the success of minority students is the Summer Bridge Program for incoming college students. The Summer Bridge Program provides minority at-risk students with an opportunity to rapidly complete college remediation education, enabling them to enroll in college level courses in the fall of their freshman year (Edgecombe, 2011; Kallison & Strader, 2012). The experience helps them create personal and professional relationships, establish goals and academic commitments, and develop college social and cultural capital (Edgecombe, 2011; Kallison & Strader, 2012).

Literature related to Hispanic students' institutional experiences reflects the theories of

Vygotsky and Bourdieu. Vygotsky (1978) believed that students may have the intellectual ability to learn additional information but lack a comprehension of their learning potential. ZPD is a social process that plays a significant role in the development of cognition (Vygotsky, 1978). The higher educational institutional experiences of Hispanic students suggest their experiences in college preparatory programs (e.g. ECHS) influence their college enrollment and persistence rates (Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Kallison & Strader, 2012; Karp et al., 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011).

Social capital can be defined as the resources associated with a social network (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital facilitates opportunities to be associated and hold authority in such networks to obtain valuable resources. Cultural capital consists of awareness of the prevailing culture in a society, especially the ability to understand and use educated language (Bourdieu, 1986). Hispanics' institutional experiences, according to current literature, reveal that most Hispanic students' parents lack social and cultural capital about the college-going process. The lack of social and cultural capital may be a catalyst for low higher educational achievement, but Hispanic institutional experiences in precollege programs, such as AVID, Project MALES and Summer Bridge, have a greater effect on their future college success than the lack of social and cultural capital.

### **Familial Experiences**

Hispanic students' higher educational familial experiences include limited competency of family, friends, or community members to assist them in the postsecondary process (Gonzalez, 2015). A student's low SES is often the result of low parental education, which leads to a lack of clear role models with an awareness of postsecondary educational knowledge. This leads to a

lower level of higher education expectations for Hispanic students (Gonzalez, 2013).

Bourdieu (1986) viewed social capital as the sum of the actual or potential resources that someone possesses, which may be connected to a network of recognized institutionalized mutual relationships. Those who are of limited socioeconomic means have limited social capital because of their class status and class habitus. Bourdieu (1986) mentioned that cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society, especially the ability to understand and use the language of the educated in society. Jaeger and Breen (2016) contended that Bourdieu's theory explained why inequalities in education and socioeconomic outcomes continue over generations.

Coleman (1988) studied ways in which social capital is productive and makes achievement possible for low SES students. Coleman (1988) suggested that social capital is valuable for a student's development and does not always reside in the family. Social capital can be from an outside source (e.g., community and social relationships) that exists among parents and their community. Stanton-Salazar (2011) viewed social capital in terms of resources and instructional support. Stanton-Salazar (2011) acknowledged the impact of institutional agents that provide social development and educational attainment for students of low SES. The importance of institutional agents (i.e., members of the community, religious entities, and institutions) is the social support they provide to students (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Similarly, Gonzalez (2013) examined the effect of social capital on Hispanic student achievement. Hispanic students comprehend what it takes to be successful in academics and often contact institutional agents to form relationships with them (Gonzalez, 2013). Social scaffolding by institutional agents helps students successfully transition from high school to college (Gonzalez, 2013). According to Cates and Schaeffle (2011), possessing social networks that include people



with many kinds of expertise increases a student's access knowledge, social and cultural capital, and economic resources that lead to college enrollment.

First-generation Hispanic males whose parents did not complete or attend college are one of the most disenfranchised populations in terms of college access (Dominguez, 2015). Chavira et al. (2016) suggested that social capital often reflects parents' education and occupation status, resources, and knowledge of connections about how the college system works. For Hispanic students, their parents' language barrier and low level of education leads to a lack of social capital for their children. Cerna et al. (2009) identified social capital as the contacts a student has with top figures that may provide them access to resources and knowledge pertinent to college enrollment and degree attainment, specifically the relationship with their parents, high school faculty and staff, mentors, and peer groups.

Jaeger and Breen (2016) reported that middle-class parents engage children in conversations and discussions that teach them analysis, reasoning, and argumentation; working-class parents are less inclined to engage in these activities or find them beneficial. Petrini (2015) cited the importance of learners' experiences and interactions for cognitive and academic development in a study of students' academic vocabulary. Observing Vygotsky's ZPD theory, Petrini (2015) focused on students' academic knowledge, ways of thinking, and their correlation to performance. Possessing academic knowledge alters the way individuals think, but this literacy is different from everyday literacy and practices. Consequently, academic knowledge is highly valuable for social groups in the educational community. It transforms individuals' cognitive abilities and provokes individuals to negotiate their cultural and social capital.

Family, friends, and peers provide experiences that often serve as barriers to postsecondary success for Hispanic students. Diminished parental involvement due to limits in

time and language is also a barrier for Hispanic students (Chavira et al., 2016; Dominguez, 2015; Gonzalez, 2013, 2015; Sanchez, Reyes, & Singh, 2006). Yeh (2014) examined the extent to which parental involvement, cultural factors, and intellectual factors predict postsecondary education enrollment for Hispanic, Asian, and European students after controlling for linguistic factors. Yeh (2014) found that post-secondary enrollment for these groups are highest when parents advise their children on items like education and behavior. Negative peer pressure from family, friends, or classmates who do not plan to attend college or choose to engage in gangs, drugs, or early parenting can substitute for this positive influence (Glenn, 2011). Castillo et al. (2010) studied 9th grade Hispanic students who reported that they were especially influenced by male role models in their educational journey. The influence of male role models came in the form of punishment for poor grades, homework assistance, parental self-awareness of their own mistakes, and encouragement about the importance of an education.

In summary, Vygotsky (1978) noted that human learning assumes a specific social nature and a method by which children grow into the scholarly lives around them. Higher level thinking requires external forms of support to assist student development of internal intellectual advances. A teacher or more experienced peer can provide a learner with scaffolding to support their understanding of knowledge domains or expansion of complex skills (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD compensates for Hispanic students' lack of higher educational familial experiences (e.g., reduced competency of family, friends, or community members to assist them to navigate the postsecondary process).

Bourdieu (1977) stated that class habitus is the internalizing of parents' ways of thinking, feelings, and behaving that reflects their position in society. Hispanic student literature related to familial experiences revealed that home or community outreach reinforces knowledge of college

preparatory courses, financial aid, or standardized test-taking strategies (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; Petrini, 2015). Moreno and Gaytan (2013) revealed that many Hispanic students from low-income families lack supports at home that middle-class students possess, such as educated parents to organize and proofread homework.

### **Hispanic Male Students' Personal Experiences**

Hispanic male students' personal experiences of higher educational attainment include their academic preparedness for postsecondary life (Cerna et al., 2009; Edmund et al., 2016; Fry, 2002; Glenn, 2011; Saenz & Combs, 2015). Personal experiences also include a student's confidence and motivation to receive a college degree or an individual's perception of discrimination and acculturation to higher education norms. Gonzalez (2015) noted that knowledge of college readiness and attitudes about college help researchers understand challenges within students' environments that affect motivation.

Absence of college readiness is a barrier to student achievement in higher education (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Berger et al., 2013; Chapa, Kupczynski, Mundy, & Gibson, 2016; Conley, 2007; Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Nodine, 2011). College readiness is a student's ability to make inferences, interpret results, solve complex problems, conduct research, and analyze conflicting explanations (Conley, 2007). Muñoz et al. (2014) added that college readiness is success without remediation in credit awarding two- or four-year post-secondary institutions. The four parts of college readiness include cognitive strategies, academic knowledge and skills, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness (Conley, 2007).

Barnes and Slate (2014) examined the college-readiness rates of Black, Hispanic, and White Texas public high school graduates using historical data from the Texas Education Agency's (TEA) Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS). Many first-generation, first-

year college students who lacked college readiness and possess little or no cultural, social, and economic capital struggled to meet academic requirements, economic obligations, and social demands (Barnes & Slate, 2014). However, students of low SES can build a storehouse of cultural, social, economic, and symbolic capital that can transcend cultural reproduction for future generations. O’Sullivan (2013) studied wiki collaboration among Hispanic high school chemistry students to reduce the science achievement gap between this groups and White students. There was significant correlation between collaboration and the ability to overcome the misconception of a stated learning objective. Drawing significantly on Vygotsky’s ZPD, O’Sullivan (2013) found that scaffolding and collaborative learning produced lower levels of cognitive struggle.

To study the effects of college preparatory programs on college readiness, Edmund et al. (2016) and Chapa et al. (2016) inquired whether ECHS programs in North Carolina and Southwestern United States increased the chances of at-risk students being college ready. Both concluded that college preparatory programs were the catalyst for an increase in college- and career-ready students. Similarly, Cates and Schaeffle (2011) evaluated the relationship between elements of a college preparation program and the college readiness of low-income Hispanic students at the completion of six years of participation in the program. Participation included tutoring, mentoring, advising, college visits, summer programs, and educational field trips. Cates and Schaeffle (2011) also explored the relationship between students’ expectations of college and their ranking of program activities; key program basics related to college readiness included advising, college campus visits, and college information available via printed media were important activities for building Hispanic students’ social and cultural capital.

McDonald and Farrell (2012) conducted focus group interviews with 31 disadvantaged

students in an ECHS program to gain insights into their perceptions of college readiness. The three components of college readiness included academic preparedness, social preparedness, and personal preparedness. Interview data produced themes and subthemes that included college readiness and subthemes of academic assessment, autonomy, discipline, responsibility, and time management. Social preparedness produced subthemes of social acclimation and caring relationships. Personal preparedness included subthemes of anonymity, transitional tensions and triumphs, and scholarly self. McDonald and Farrell (2012) concluded that ECHS supports students' acclimation to college-level work and significantly affects their collegiate identity.

Hispanic males perceive being an academic as *acting White* or *not cool* (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Glenn, 2011). Consequently, they often seek employment after high school to offer financial support for their family. Glenn (2011) revealed factors that influenced five Hispanic males' participation in AVID, including: participants' scholarly identity connected to their masculine identity as they balanced their *coolness* with their desires to achieve academic success, participants' personal relationships and collaboration, and the influence of participants' families and communities (Glenn, 2011). Hungerford-Kresser (2008) examined the connections between identity and knowledge for a group of students entering a university who were urban Hispanic students. These students experienced continuous redefinitions of themselves due to contact with White middle- or upper-class students who were not a part of their inner-city community. The students became familiar with the university and became disengaged from family and friends from their inner-city neighborhoods (Hungerford-Kresser, 2008).

In Hispanic culture, males often take on the traditional masculine role. Hispanic males work hard to provide financially for the family, protect the family, and serve as the lead decision maker (Dominguez, 2015). Hispanic males often believe they should put family first and be

strong, brave, hardworking, and family providers (Saenz & Ponjuan, 2009). Wormack and López (2013) observed that high dropout rates in college often reflect inferior K-12 preparation and an absence of a familial college social and cultural capital. Cultural issues are also barriers for Hispanic male students. Hispanic males tend to feel a keen sense of responsibility and choose to take jobs to support their families. Reviewing the traditional role of gender in higher educational attainment is important for this ethnic group because Hispanic males enroll in higher education at considerably lower rates than Hispanic females.

This literature review indicated that SES and level of college readiness are strong predictors of postsecondary success. Other economic factors and family obligations also lead to low college persistence (e.g., family financial obligations or the dependent care of smaller siblings). If these obligations are frequent, the student has less time for school work (Witkow et al., 2015). For example, Crisp and Nora (2010) revealed that financial concerns, family responsibilities, and full-time work commitments were external factors that *pull* Hispanic students away from STEM fields. Additionally, because STEM degrees often take longer to complete than other college majors, the amount of financial aid available to students becomes a factor.

College may become more expensive for Hispanic students of low SES because of the financial burden of paying for college and lost wages during college years. This reduces a Hispanic student's ability to help support their families. Wormack and López (2013) studied Hispanic male student success at Eastern Connecticut State University and found that Hispanic male college students are disproportionately first-generation college students who often do not have the economic and academic advantages of their White peers. These students are more vulnerable to economic conditions and other barriers that impede academic achievement

(Wormack & López, 2013). For example, low-income male students are more likely to work full-time during college, which places Hispanic male students at a disadvantage. Working more than 20 hours per week is detrimental to academic performance (Wormack & López, 2013).

Thus, authors who studied Hispanic students' personal experiences of higher education indicate that college readiness is a significant barrier to student achievement (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Berger et al., 2013; Chapa et al., 2016; Conley, 2007; Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Nodine, 2011). Vygotsky (1978) described higher order thinking and learning, as in college readiness, as a social process that institutional agents can facilitate by extending the ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) believed that students have intellectual ability but lack comprehension of their potential; the ZPD may facilitate students' college readiness by creating strong collaborative learning environments to guide learning new concepts with the assistance of more knowledgeable adults and peers.

Although college readiness is a strong predictor of postsecondary success for Hispanic students, personal cultural factors also lead to low college persistence; for example, Hispanic males traditionally have a sense of responsibility to provide economic assistance at home by working instead of attending college (Crisp & Nora, 2010). Bourdieu's (1977) class habitus theory of the internalizing of parents' way of thinking, feeling, and behaving suggests that class habitus for Hispanic parents depends on their perceived value of a college education, past experiences of discrimination in the school system, or working-class world view.

The next section of this chapter includes details of ways ECHS narrows the gap between Hispanic students and other ethnic groups' higher educational attainment. The peer-reviewed studies in this section reveal the impact of ECHS on Hispanic students. ECHS' impact on Hispanic students changes their institutional, familial, and personal experiences of higher educational attainment while in the program.

## **Early College High School and Systems Support**

The ECHS program developed to decrease the number of first-generation and underrepresented students of color who drop out or marginally graduate from high school (Muñoz et al., 2014). The design of ECHS bridges the gap between high school and college for disadvantaged students by facilitating an opportunity to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and college associate degree. The ECHS program increases graduation rates in high school and at post-secondary institutions.

Several ECHS researchers observed that the academic performance of students enrolled in an ECHS improved (Berger et al., 2013; Chapa et al., 2016; Edgecombe, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Karp et al., 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Nodine, 2011; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011). Saenz and Combs (2015) researched prior experiences, perceived challenges, and support systems of 12th graders attending an ECHS in a qualitative phenomenological study. According to Saenz and Combs (2015), understanding the experiences of 12th graders can provide valuable information for high school and college administrators in an ECHS setting. Saenz and Combs (2015) revealed that the opportunity for students to receive an associate degree in a traditional high school would have been impossible without the positive learning environment created in an ECHS. The students reported that parents tended to support positive learning environments and that social and academic support was readily available for the students. Nodine (2011) examined two Texas ECHS programs in El Paso and Corpus Christi and revealed that ECHS provides students with critical knowledge and skills to transform their lives by helping them better prepare for the rigors of college, which may translate to a career with a better life.

Other ECHS researchers cited the importance of social and emotional learning.



Thompson and Ongaga (2011) explored the importance of small learning communities in developing an all-inclusive ECHS model. Thompson and Ongaga (2011) offered insight into student/teacher relationships and perceived challenges at one ECHS. Findings revealed that ECHS programs revolve around the themes of caring relationships and teacher constraints. Caring relationships between students, teachers, and administrators facilitate the intellectual and social development of the students (Thompson & Ongaga, 2011). Compared to traditional high school students, students attending ECHS achieved significantly better state assessment scores. Satisfactory performance on state assessments suggests that students are *at grade level* and on track to be college-ready. The positive impact of ECHS was the opportunity to enroll in and finish college, which mitigated the achievement gaps between advantaged and low SES students (Berger et al., 2013; Chapa et al., 2014; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010).

### **Review of Methodological Issues**

Past scholarly literature relates to Hispanic students' experiences of their pursuits of higher educational attainment. The reviewed articles include institutional, familial, and personal experiences that affected students' abilities to receive a higher education degree. Scholarly literature about programs and initiatives that address the problem of low Hispanic male higher educational attainment were crucial to the present research (Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Kallison & Strader, 2012; Karp et al., 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011).

### **Methodological Approaches Overview**

This review included a total of 57 studies regarding this study's topic. Qualitative methodological approaches (e.g., case studies, interviews, and surveys) are effective and have many benefits for studying the experiences of Hispanic students in higher educational

attainment. However, a qualitative phenomenological approach was determined to be best for this study because it revealed the common meaning for several individuals based on their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The use of a phenomenological approach for this study supported the use of semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions to elicit a complete account of participants' experience of the study phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

**Strengths.** Quantitative studies that have collected college readiness data over time have provided valuable background information about possible barriers Hispanic males may face when seeking postsecondary success (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Berger et al., 2013; Chapa et al., 2016; Conley, 2007; Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Nodine, 2011). Longitudinal quantitative data is important for this study because it provides a benchmark for the effectiveness of precollege programs that assist Hispanic male students (Cooper, 2012; Strayhorn, 2010; Saenz, 2015; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Uribe, 2010; Vargas & Miller, 2011). Similarly, mixed-methods data detailed the effectiveness of the ECHS program by providing comparisons between student achievement in traditional high schools versus ECHS (Chapa et al., 2014; Gonzalez, 2015; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Muñoz et al., 2014; Strayhorn, 2010). Qualitative research methods provided better understandings through the analysis of first-hand experience, honest reporting, and quotes of actual conversation (Creswell, 2007).

**Weaknesses.** Past researchers produced very few reliable qualitative studies concerning Hispanic males and their barriers and challenges to higher educational attainment (Dominguez, 2015; Glenn, 2011; Wormack & López, 2013). Most studies about Hispanic males were quantitative and provided specific group analysis data on student achievement over a period (Cooper, 2012; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Saenz et al., 2015; Strayhorn, 2010). Past quantitative studies presented student achievement data as the sole indicator of Hispanic achievement without

considerations for other external factors.

### **Synthesis of Research Findings**

The literature review provided reliable findings regarding higher educational experiences of Hispanic male students in postsecondary institutions. The low rate of Hispanic male higher educational attainment continues to constitute an inequity due to transformations in the United States 21st century workforce, which increasingly requires higher education. The available research about the stated problem suggested the importance of Hispanic students' institutional, familial, and personal experiences. Hispanic students' institutional or systemic experiences with higher educational attainment reflect the background or environment they experienced over time (Cerna et al., 2009; Dolan, 2009; Gonzalez, 2015; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; Salinas & Alarcón, 2016; Witkow et al., 2015). Institutional experiences exist at the local, state, and national level in the form of policies and practices that often placed Hispanic students in less rigorous college preparatory courses (Gonzalez, 2015; Nunez, 2009).

Other student experiences include the rising cost of college education and decreasing availability of student financial aid for many low SES Hispanic students (Wormack & López, 2013; Zarate & Burciaga, 2010). Gonzalez (2015) noted that institutional experiences of higher educational attainment include challenges that Hispanic communities face due to inferior levels of educational outreach in communities and often impoverished, dangerous schools in urban areas (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; Petrini, 2015). However, institutional experiences also include programs and initiatives that enhance Hispanic students' opportunities for postsecondary success (Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Kallison & Strader, 2012; Karp et al., 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011). The programs or initiatives included in this literature reviewed were ECHS, AVID, Project

MALES, and Summer Bridge.

Hispanic students' familial experiences yielded findings indicating that when social and cultural capital is not readily available in a student's home, the acquisition of social and cultural capital to navigate a college culture may be available through other forms. For example, students may acquire social and cultural capital through interactions with institutional agents (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Chavira et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011) or collaboration with peers (Hungerford-Kresser, 2008; Jaeger & Breen, 2016; Petrini, 2015; Strayhorn, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Hispanic students' familial experiences often reflected a diminished level of parental involvement due to limits of time and language (Chavira et al., 2016; Dominguez, 2015; Gonzalez, 2013, 2015; Sanchez et al., 2006; Yeh, 2014).

Hispanic students' personal experiences of higher educational attainment included college readiness (Cerna et al., 2009; Edmund et al., 2016; Fry, 2002; Glenn, 2011; Saenz & Combs, 2015). College readiness is success without remediation in credit-granting two- and four-year educational institutions (Conley, 2007; Muñoz et al., 2014). Findings from Hispanic students' personal experience of postsecondary completion revealed that first-generation Hispanic students face the most obstacles when obtaining a higher education due academic unpreparedness resulting from family and financial obligations (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Cerna et al., 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Witkow et al., 2015; Wormack & López, 2013). However, pre-college programs that teach the basics of college readiness build social and cultural capital in Hispanic students (Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Kallison & Strader, 2012; Karp et al., 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011).

Hispanic students are more likely to seek full-time employment due to financial concerns

and family obligations (Crisp & Nora, 2010; Wormack & López, 2013). The lack of time to complete homework or available computers with internet access at home are challenges to higher educational attainment for Hispanic students (Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). The family unit is the main support system for which Hispanic students feel they need to achieve a college education (Castillo et al., 2010; Glenn, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006; Yeh, 2014). As such, support from peers through collaboration was an important support system for Hispanic students (Bourdieu, 1986; O'Sullivan, 2013; Vygotsky, 1978). Support networks via K-12 partnerships with institutes of higher education were also beneficial (Berger et al., 2013; Chapa et al., 2014; Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Kallison & Strader, 2012; Kaniuka & Vickers, 2010; Nodine, 2011; Thompson & Ongaga, 2011; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Saenz & Ponjuan, 2011).

### **Summary**

Past researchers indicated that Hispanic experiences of higher educational attainment may be negatively influenced by a lack of knowledgeable familial support (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Chavira et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011) or collaboration with peers (Hungerford-Kresser, 2008; Jaeger & Breen, 2016; Petrini, 2015; Strayhorn, 2010; Vygotsky, 1978). Familial experiences included the reduced competency of family, friends, or community members to assist students in navigating the postsecondary process. Students possess little to no access to social and cultural capital about the college-going process in the home or in the immediate community. Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital suggests that limited social and cultural capital reduces a student's chances of postsecondary success. However, authors whose studies were discussed within this literature review revealed that Hispanic students build the necessary social and cultural capital if they connect to the right institutional agents in programs like ECHS and AVID.

Personal experience with higher educational attainment was another research category that emerged from the literature review. Hispanic students' lower level of college readiness was a factor in their success. Hispanic male students' external financial and familial responsibilities compete with their pursuit of higher educational attainment. In many instances, Hispanic students worked full-time or more than 20 hours a week, making it increasingly difficult to keep up with their studies (Wormack & López, 2013).

Institutional experiences with higher educational attainment at the local, state, and national level in the form of policies and practices often lead to Hispanic students enrolling in less rigorous college preparatory courses (Gonzalez, 2015). Other institutional experiences included the rising cost of a college education coupled with the decreasing availability of student financial aid for many low SES Hispanic students. Studies in this review of literature indicated that pre-college programs build college readiness (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011). These programs mediate Hispanic familial, personal, and institutional challenges. However, Hispanic males often fail to take advantage of pre-college programs (Glenn, 2011).

A significant gap in the literature exists related to Hispanic male students struggling to obtain an associate degree in an ECHS program. Currently, most ECHS research includes Hispanics as a homogeneous group. The next chapter includes the methodological details of this transcendental phenomenological study to explore how Hispanic 12th grade males experience an ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

Hispanic male students' postsecondary completion rates are less than other male student population groups across the United States (Saenz, Ponjuan, & Segovia, 2015). Hispanic male students who enroll in higher education lack the persistence to remain in college; 35.2% leave without a degree after their second year of college (Vasquez, Urias, & Wood, 2015). Poor higher educational attainment by Hispanic males may affect the future economic prosperity of this group; yet, there is a lack of proactive efforts to address the unique needs of Hispanic male students in U.S. higher educational systems (Saenz et al., 2015). This chapter includes a review of the methodology of the study, a comprehensive description of purpose of the study, research questions, research design, research population and sampling method, instrumentation and data collection, data analysis procedures, limitations of the research design, validation, ethical issues, and summary.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. Study participants shared responses to open-ended interview questions regarding how they experienced the Associate Degree Pathway while enrolled at a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program. This study explored factors that affected Hispanic male students' successful completion of the associate degree. The findings may inform future initiatives, strategies, or programs to help Hispanic male students obtain an associate degree.

## **Study Participants**

The ECHS program in this study serves students in a rural community in the Southwestern United States. Student demographics reflect a student population that is primarily of Hispanic origin and is economically disadvantaged. Study participants were 17 or 18-year-old high school seniors. All participants were Hispanic males who were the first in their family to attend college. Most participants were also involved in some form of extracurricular activity (i.e., band, athletics, career and technical education).

## **Research Questions**

This study utilized the following research questions to guide the process of exploring Hispanic male students' lived experiences while attempting to obtain an associate degree in an ECHS program.

RQ1. How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) program describe their educational experience?

RQ2. How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) describe the Associate Degree Pathway?

Sub-questions appeared in the interview protocol (see Appendix A). The sub-questions also addressed whether the students' lived experiences in the ECHS program's Associate Degree Pathway influenced their ability to complete an associate degree. Creswell (2013) noted that sub-questions may be issue-related and topical-related.

## **Research Design**

This study had a transcendental phenomenological research design. Transcendental phenomenology has roots in the philosophical perspectives of German mathematician Edmund



Husserl, whose research developed after World War I to explain how human experiences of the world form a basis for knowledge and meaning. Husserl (1970) noted that researchers must find the essence, or main idea, of the experience and suspend all judgments on what is real about those experiences until they form a more certain basis. Husserl (1970) identified this suspension as *epoche*, the researcher's bracketing of personal experiences of a phenomenon and relying on universal structures to obtain understanding.

A transcendental phenomenological approach emphasizes bracketing presuppositions and developing universal structures about how people experience a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological study incorporates textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and the essence of the study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Creswell (2013) explained that textual descriptions are analyses of participants' experiences; structural descriptions evolve according to how participants experienced a phenomenon. For this study, I focused on students' experiences in the ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree by utilizing a true transcendental approach within a phenomenological design. This required that I bracket out my suppositions and record them by writing them down as I became aware of my preconceived ideas of the phenomenon. I retained these notes and added to them during data collection and analysis. I remained open to new ideas during the data collection phase of this study (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenological approach was ideal because addressing the problem of Hispanic males' low higher educational achievement requires knowledge of how they experienced an ECHS program.

Through the implementation of transcendental phenomenology, I identified factors that affected the success of 12th grade Hispanic male students in the ECHS Associate Degree Pathway. The research questions for this study focused on the lived experiences of participants

in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program. Data from the semi-structured in-depth interviews were consistent with a phenomenological approach. Interviews with the seven participants in this study revealed a variety of themes regarding factors that impact Associate Degree Pathway success. I utilized a phenomenological reduction method of data analysis for textual-structural synthesis to capture the essence of the phenomenon.

### **Role of Researcher**

I am the high school principal of the study site; however, I am not the director of the ECHS program. My connection with the ECHS program is primarily to oversee state designation, compliance, and funding. This created the potential for personal biases about the study's topic. However, to minimize biases and potential conflicts of interests due to my current position, I bracketed out all preconceptions of the phenomenon and documented them by writing them down. I retained these notes and added to them during data collection and analysis. Moustakas (1994) noted that researchers must reflect on the meaning of experience first and then focus on interviewees to purposefully establish validity between the interviewer and the participant. My role as the researcher included acting as an observer, active listener, sole data collector, and sole analyzer of data. Collected and analyzed data was verified by each study participant through transcript review.

I selected the first seven participants from a list of 12 eligible candidates the ECHS director purposively selected. The participants were in 12th grade, Hispanic, male, and enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway at some point in high school. I scheduled interviews with the students after they returned a signed consent form. Each interview took place after school in the study site's ECHS conference room. Data from the individual interviews included formal

responses to semi-structured, open-ended questions. I transcribed all data and implemented transcript review for validity purposes.

### **Research Population and Sampling Method**

This transcendental phenomenological study was focused on interviewing Hispanic male students enrolled in the 12th grade at a rural Southwestern United States ECHS until data saturation occurred. The nature of utilizing in-depth interviews in a transcendental phenomenological approach required the use of purposive sampling of students from the study site. The procedure for selecting participants was as follows:

1. The site's ECHS director provided a list of 12 purposively selected candidates who were in 12th grade, Hispanic, male, and in the Associate Degree Pathway of the study site's ECHS program at one point in high school.
2. I met with all purposively selected candidates after school at the study site's ECHS conference room and explained the purpose of the research study, interview process, and how their participation could lead to changes by educational leaders that could improve the Associate Degree Pathway in the future.
3. I distributed a consent form (Appendix B) at the initial meeting for all students to review with their parents and provided a deadline of one week from the initial meeting to return the signed consent form to me if they chose to voluntarily participate. The consent to participate forms outlined the purpose and structure of the study, risks, and benefits and included a signature page for participants (18 years or older) or their parents (under 18 years of age).

4. Participants also learned that the first seven students to return the signed parental consent would participate in the study; the remaining four would be alternates. Of the purposively selected participants, seven returned their informed consent by the established one-week deadline from the initial meeting.
5. I informed these seven participants in person of the date, time, and location for their interviews.

### **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Rudestam and Newton (2007) explained that the instrument of choice for qualitative research is the human observer. Qualitative researchers use traditional instrumentation, such as in-depth interviews. There is much flexibility in the structure of interviews, but phenomenological researchers typically prepare interview questions beforehand and adjust them during the interview process (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Rubin and Rubin (2005) suggested that a qualitative interview consist of conversations that a researcher gently guides in an extended discussion. I elicited details about the research topic by following up on answers from participant during the interview process. For example, I followed up open-ended questions with probes such as *tell me more* and *please explain* to build upon the students' responses.

I used an interview protocol to log information participants shared. Creswell (2013) explained that interview protocols enable the researcher to organize thoughts based on headings, beginning and concluding the interview, and thanking the participant. The questions in the interview protocol focused on how participants experienced the ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree to elicit participants' lived experiences in the ECHS. The data collection steps were as follows:

1. I conducted seven one-on-one semi-structured interviews using prepared open-ended questions in the interview protocol.
2. At the beginning of each interview, I reviewed the consent to participate form so that participants could ask any question they had before the interview began.
3. All interviews occurred in the ECHS conference room at the study site. The conference room provided a safe, secure environment for the participant to express their experiences about the Associate Degree Pathway in ECHS.
4. I recorded interviews with an iPhone digital recorder.
5. I transcribed all data utilizing the iPhone Voice Recorder Transcribe Application.
6. To establish the integrity of data collection, I engaged all participants in transcript review for validity purposes one week after each interview. All participants were given a copy of their transcribed interview responses in person. None of the participants made any changes to their transcript.
7. I kept all data secure on my iPhone and in a safe at my private residence. Transcripts were destroyed when data analysis was complete.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Data analysis in qualitative research includes organizing and preparing the data by reducing it into themes through a process of coding and then representing it in figures, tables, or a discussion (Creswell, 2013). I used Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method of data analysis (see Appendix G). Phenomenological reduction included the following steps:

1. Bracketing by writing down my preconceived ideas of the phenomenon as I became aware of them. I retained these notes and added to them during data collection and analysis. Before and after each interview, I reflected on the

preconceived ideas I had noted and attempted to set them aside; I also wrote down any additional ideas or biases as I became aware of them through reflection. I used this procedure of reflecting on and adding to noted biases and preconceptions during data analysis and while writing the presentation of results.

2. Horizontalization by examining complete transcripts of interviews to code significant statements. The process of horizontalization also occurred by reading significant statements numerous times and eliminating statements that overlap to present a better description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).
3. Clustering data into themes when all significant statements from the interviews emerged (Creswell, 2013).
4. Reducing the data to manageable themes led to engaging in provisional coding of significant statements (Saldaña, 2013).
5. Using textual descriptions to describe the individual experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).
6. Creating structural descriptions of how individuals experienced the phenomenon (i.e., their collective experience in the Associate Degree Pathway) (Creswell, 2013).
7. Finally writing a textual-structural synthesis that involved the *how* and *what* of the study. I used collected data, personal reflection, observation, and intuition to develop a full composite description of the essence of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

## **Limitations of the Research Design**

A key limitation in phenomenological research is the reliance on a sole instrument to collect data. The reliance on one instrument to collect data is a limitation of this study's research design. The use of interviews as the primary data gathering source made it essential that the participants all experienced the same phenomenon in question so that I could build a common understanding at the conclusion of the study (Creswell, 2013). The interview protocol collected data regarding barriers and challenges that participants experienced while attempting to obtain an associate degree in the ECHS program. A small sample size of seven was also a limitation of the research design; however, this allowed me to become immersed in the study through in-depth interviews with a small number of participants.

A further limitation of the study was my reliance on the truthfulness and accuracy of participants' responses. To encourage participant honesty, I assured participants that their identities would remain confidential, and I interviewed them in private locations to further ensure confidentiality. After the interviews, I asked participants to member-check their transcripts to verify accuracy. However, the reliance on a single data source makes the study's results vulnerable to deliberate or inadvertent misrepresentation on the part of participants.

Generalizability is not a goal of qualitative research, so the transferability of the results in this study may be limited by the small sample size and focus on a well-defined population in a single location. To allow future researchers to assess transferability, I have included descriptions of the participants, and I have included rich descriptions of the study results in Chapter 4.

## **Validation**

Rudestam and Newton (2007) argued that the trustworthiness of a research design is the standard for how others evaluate the study. Consequently, the validity or trustworthiness and

reliability of a study's research process ensure credibility of the study. Validity and reliability of this phenomenological study relied on constructs that Lincoln (1995) presented. These constructs included internal and external validity, dependability, confirmability, and ethical procedures.

**Internal validity.** Internal validity is the extent to which the researcher's findings would be reproduced by the same researcher in the same research context at a different time (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). In this study, I established internal validity by conducting in-depth interviews with seven students who had first-hand knowledge of the study's topic and experienced the same phenomenon as one another. To establish the integrity of data collection, I conducted transcript reviews after transcribing the digitally recorded data by providing participants with copies of transcribed data to review. This enabled participants to amend or update their responses. Finally, I achieved data saturation via horizontalization or looking for repetition of answers from participants to identify emergent themes. The interview protocol, my identification of themes via data saturation, and transcript reviews enabled triangulation of collected data.

**External validity.** Rudestam and Newton (2007) defined external validity as how well the researcher thinks a study's findings extend to the general population. This requires thick descriptions from a somewhat small number of study participants. The descriptions of the participants or setting of the study must be sufficiently detailed to allow for transferability to be assessed by future researchers (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Thick descriptions of Participants A to J appear in Appendix F.

**Dependability.** Dependability assures that the research study conclusions are reliable and replicable. Therefore, I documented every phase of this study in detail to allow an outside researcher to repeat the study and reach comparable outcomes. Researchers must comprehend



the methods of the study to highlight their efficiency. I used a transcendental phenomenological research approach to ensure the dependability of the study's procedure. A step-by-step explanation of Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological reduction confirms the accuracy of this data analysis approach (see Appendix G). I promoted dependability by utilizing a protocol for in-depth interviews, digitally recording the interviews, and carefully transcribing the recordings.

**Confirmability and conflict of interest assessment.** Confirmability is whether the research findings are representative of the experiences and ideas of the participants, rather than of any biases of the researcher's. This process establishes whether the researcher has bias during the study stemming from the assumption that qualitative research allows the research to bring a unique perspective to the study (Moustakas, 1994). As a high school principal who attended schools with low SES demographics, I have always been motivated to help build social and cultural capital for economically-disadvantaged students to enhance their opportunities for success in higher education. This created a threat of personal bias because of my influence as a campus instructional leader and vested personal motivation to assist economically-disadvantaged students achieve higher educational attainment.

To minimize biases and potential conflicts of interests due to my current position and personal motivation, I bracketed out all biases before, during, and after data collection to ensure the highest reliability of the research. To practice bracketing, I reflected on and attempted to become mindful of my perceptions, ideas, and biases related to how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience an ECHS program while attempting to earn an associate degree. As I became aware of my preconceived ideas of the phenomenon, I wrote them down, and I retained these notes and added to them during data collection and analysis. Before and after each interview, I reflected on the preconceived ideas I had noted and attempted to set them aside; I

also wrote down any additional ideas or biases as I became aware of them through reflection. I used this procedure of reflecting on and adding to noted biases and preconceptions during data analysis and while writing the presentation of results.

**Ethical issues.** At the most basic level, any ethical researcher must protect the research participants. I upheld all ethical standards as set forth by the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioural Research, 1979). The Belmont Report outlined three ethical principles for the use of human subjects in research: (a) respect for persons; (b) beneficence; and (c) justice. The present study followed these ethical principles by providing all participants with an explanation of the purpose, benefits, and risks of the research. I also provided participants with the scope and limitations of confidentiality and require their informed consent to participate in the study (Patton, 2015). Each participant signed an informed consent document as outlined by Concordia University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements prior to interviews (see Appendix B).

I selected participants who were students at the study site and could provide a personal perspective of their experiences trying to obtain an associate degree in the ECHS program. Participation in the study was completely voluntary and each participant could withdraw at any time. I did not coerce participants participate and none fell under my direct supervision. I provided an explanation of study to each participant along with an in-depth description of the steps and assurances for confidentiality.

Ensuring participants do not feel forced into participating and ensuring confidentiality are the most ethically significant aspects of this study because of my position as principal at the study site. Therefore, it is vital to the reliability of this study that I eliminate or reduce all conflicts of interests. I accomplished this by identifying participants from a third-party source

and maintaining confidentiality of their names. Additionally, I stored all printed or written documents away from the research site in a secured location that was only be accessible by me. Finally, I consulted my dissertation committee members throughout the data collection and analysis process to maximize the effectiveness of this research study.

### **Expected Findings**

This study explored the problem of low 12th grade Hispanic males' completion rates in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS Associate Degree Pathway compared to peer groups in the same program. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. I expected findings to confirm factors that impact Hispanic male student success in their quest for higher educational attainment as revealed in Chapter 2. The literature review about the stated problem included a synthesis of past findings regarding institutional, familial, and personal factors that Hispanic students experience while attempting to receive a higher education. However, I expected findings for this study to yield distinct factors that the participants experienced due to their enrollment at the high school rather than college level. Through the use of bracketing, I attempted to minimize the influence of my expectations on the results of the study.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 included the methodological components of this phenomenological study. I used a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience the ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program. A total of seven 12th grade Hispanic male students participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews. I used different approaches to

validity and reliability to assure that this study was credible (e.g., transcript review, thick description, and data saturation). This chapter also included a complete description of the research design, data collection instruments and protocols, data analysis procedures, participant selection method, trustworthiness, and ethical issues.

I used three measures to triangulate data in this study: (a) in-depth student interviews; (b) transcript review; and (c) data saturation. I coded and categorized data based on the theoretical framework and according to themes that emerged during the analysis. The use of interview data produced a thick description and comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. To recruit the target sample size of seven students, purposeful sampling of participants who closely matched the eligibility criteria of the study was essential (Rudestam & Newton, 2007). Study site students voluntarily participated in this study and were not directly under my supervision to ensure credibility of the study.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

Hispanic people are the fastest growing ethnic minority in the United States; however, this population expansion does not manifest in higher educational enrollment and attainment (Chavira et al., 2016; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013). Employers increasingly require that workers possess education past the high school level; Hispanic students often struggle to obtain traditional entry-level jobs without a higher education degree (Saenz, Ponjuan, Segovia, & Del, 2015). The growing population of Hispanics and low, higher educational attainment raised the question for educational leaders and policy makers of how they can improve the successful participation of Hispanics in the United States economy through higher educational achievement (Saenz et al., 2015). Quintanilla and Santiago (2017) reported that higher educational attainment of Hispanic males is low compared to the number of Hispanic males enrolled in higher education. Since 2006, 20% of Hispanics earned an associate degree or higher; 62% of Asians, 45% of Whites, and 30% of African Americans earned the same degree (Quintanilla & Santiago, 2017).

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. I selected a transcendental phenomenological approach because it requires the researcher to obtain new knowledge from the essence of the participants' experiences (Husserl, 1970). Moustakas (1994) explained that in transcendental phenomenology, the researcher may examine their experiences with the phenomenon first to avoid judgments and biases later in the research.

In the review of literature, I found no authors who solely focused on Hispanic males' lack of higher educational degree attainment while enrolled in an ECHS program, indicating that a

gap exists in the literature. Current qualitative studies of Hispanic male students' experiences with higher educational attainment primarily occurred at the community college or university level (Dominguez, 2015; Quintanilla & Santiago, 2017)), not the high school or ECHS level. Within this dissertation, I explored the collective experiences of Hispanic male students enrolled in an ECHS program while attempting to obtain associate degrees. This chapter includes a description of the phenomenon of Hispanic males' low rates of higher educational attainment utilizing participants' voices to describe the essence of their experiences.

Creswell (2013) recommended that a phenomenological researcher interview up to 10 participants in a long interview format and that the participants' locations be the same. For this study, the use of interviews as the key data gathering source was vital; all participants experienced the same phenomenon allowing me to build a common understanding of the phenomenon. I employed two research questions to describe the lived experiences of Hispanic male 12th grade students enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of an ECHS program. The conceptual frameworks of Vygotsky (1978) and Bourdieu (1977, 1986) supported my development of the research questions. Using these theories, I explored institutional, familial, and personal factors that influence how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience the Associate Degree Pathway in this study site's ECHS program. I used the theories to develop provisional codes during data analysis.

### **Research Questions**

This study utilized the following research questions to guide the process of exploring Hispanic male students' higher educational experiences.

RQ1. How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) program describe their educational experience?

RQ2. How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) describe the Associate Degree Pathway?

Within this chapter, I include descriptions of the study sample, research methodology, analysis, and summary of findings. I also include details of data analysis from its provisional coding to the clustering of themes. Chapter 4 concludes with a presentation of textual and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences and textual-structural synthesis of the participants' experiences.

### **Description of the Sample**

Utilizing purposive sampling, the study site's ECHS director identified a total of 12 students who met the inclusion criteria for the study. The criteria for the sample required that participants meet the following requirements: (a) Hispanic; (b) male; (c) current 12th grade student; and (d) currently or previously enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of an ECHS program. These requirements ensured that participant data would align with the phenomenon under study. After the site's ECHS director had identified Hispanic males who met the inclusion criteria for the study, I invited them to attend an information session where I disclosed details about the nature of the study. The Hispanic males who met the inclusion criteria for the study learned about the purpose of the research study, interview process, and how their participation could lead to educational leader changes that could potentially improve the Associate Degree Pathway in the future. All participants who met the inclusion criteria were still in high school; therefore, I communicated to them that a signed informed consent from their parents was

necessary to participate in the study (see Appendix B). Participants also learned that the first seven students to return the signed parental consent form would be selected via a random process to participate in the study; the remaining four would be alternates. Of the identified participants, seven returned their informed consent by the established one-week deadline from the initial meeting. I informed these seven participants in person of the date, time, and location for their interviews. I interviewed each participant using an interview protocol (Appendix A) and assigned them lettered pseudonyms (i.e., Participant A through J). In the following section, I provide an overview of the participants' characterizations and attributes.

All of the study participants were 17 or 18-year-old, 12th grade high school students. The participants were Hispanic males and all but two came from a dual-parent household. All participants had also earned some form of college credit during their enrollment in the Associate Degree Pathway. Most participants were also involved in some form of extracurricular activity (i.e., band, athletics, career and technical education). Participant characteristics are presented in Appendix G.

### **Research Methodology and Analysis**

I implemented a transcendental phenomenological research design to explore how 12th grade Hispanic males experienced an ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS. Phenomenology has roots in the philosophical perspectives of German mathematician Edmund, who explained that human experiences in the world offer a basis for knowledge and meaningful perspective (Husserl, 1970). My goal was to find the essence (i.e., main idea) of an experience and suspend all judgments of what is real about those experiences until they become more certain (Husserl,



1970). This suspension is *epoche*, the researcher bracketing personal experiences about a phenomenon and relying on universal structures to obtain an understanding (Husserl, 1970).

A transcendental phenomenological approach emphasizes bracketing presuppositions and developing universal structures about what and how people experience a phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). A transcendental phenomenology centers on textual descriptions, structural descriptions and an essence of the study (Creswell, 2013). Researchers use textual descriptions to analyze participants' experiences while structural descriptions evolve according to how the participants experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). For this study, I explored how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience an ECHS program while attempting to earn an associate degree, using a phenomenological design. This required that I bracket my presuppositions by writing them down as I became aware of them and retaining the notes to add to data collection and analysis. This allowed me to consider new ideas and consciousnesses during the data collection phase (Moustakas, 1994). Through the implementation of transcendental phenomenology, via semi-structured interviews for data collection and phenomenological reduction for data analysis, I identified different factors that influenced the success of 12th grade Hispanic male students in the ECHS Associate Degree Pathway. The research questions for this study focused on the lived experiences of participants. By interviewing the participants in this study, a variety of themes regarding factors that impact Associate Degree Pathway success emerged.

I analyzed data using Moustakas' (1994) method of phenomenological reduction, which included bracketing, horizontalization, clustering of themes, textual description, structural description, and textual-structural synthesis. Bracketing was accomplished by writing down preconceived ideas about the phenomenon as I became aware of them. Horizontalization

occurred when I completed the transcription of the interviews in its entirety followed by an examination of the interviews to look for significant statements. The process of horizontalization also occurred when I read the significant statements numerous times and eliminated statements that overlapped. This process allowed me to present a better description of how the participants experienced the phenomenon. I reduced the data to manageable themes via horizontalization (i.e., weighing of all student statements with equal significance) and engaging in provisional coding of significant statements (Saldaña, 2013). The provisional codes were drawn from the conceptual framework of Vygotsky and Bourdieu discussed in Chapter 2. Significant statements were clustered to identify emerging themes. Table 1 below provides a list of provisional codes.

Table 1

*Provisional Codes for Data Analysis*

Research Question	Conceptual Framework	Provisional Code	Abbreviation
RQ 1	Vygotsky (1978)	Poor Time Management Skills	TM
RQ 1	Vygotsky (1978)	Limited Prior Rigorous Academic Experiences	RG
RQ 1	Vygotsky (1978)	Extracurricular Activity Participation	EC
RQ 2	Bourdieu (1986)	Institutional Agents Present in the Students' Lives	IA
RQ 2	Bourdieu (1977)	Parental Support	PS
RQ 2	Bourdieu (1977, 1986)	Limited Social and Cultural Capital	SCC
RQ 2	Bourdieu (1986)	Positive Experience in the ECHS Program	PE
RQ 2	Bourdieu (1977)	Lack of Work Ethic	WE

I wrote a textual description of the phenomenon comprised of the study participants' individual experiences and feelings about the Associate Degree Pathway (i.e., the *what* of the phenomenon). I also wrote the structural description of the collective experiences of the participants (i.e., the *how* of the phenomenon) and the textual-structural synthesis (i.e., the *how* and *what* of the participants' experiences) using interview responses and self-reflection as data sources. Data analysis led to answers to the two research questions and eventually gave meaning to how 12th grade Hispanic male students experience the ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree. Data analysis procedures are listed in Appendix H.

### **Presentation of the Data and Results**

I analyzed data using Moustakas' (1994) data analysis of phenomenological reduction. Moustakas (1994) listed the steps of phenomenological reduction: (a) bracketing; (b) horizontalization; (c) cluster into themes; (d) textual descriptions; (e) structural description; and (f) textual-structural synthesis of the experience. The following sub-sections include discussion and evidence of themes, textual descriptions, structural descriptions, and textual-structural descriptions.

### **Emergent Themes**

Participants' responses to questions in their interviews reflected the following themes: (a) poor time management skills; (b) limited prior rigorous academic experiences; (c) extracurricular activity participation; (d) institutional agents present in the students' lives; (e) parental support; (f) limited social and cultural capital; (g) positive experiences in the ECHS program; and (h) lack of work ethic. These themes emerged from analysis of the participants' responses to the interview protocol (see Appendix A). I transcribed and analyzed data using horizontalization to

ensure that I equally valued all significant statements. Utilizing provisional coding, I clustered significant statements into themes that emerged during analysis.

**Theme: Poor time-management skills.** Many participants reported poor time management skills as the biggest challenge to obtaining an associate degree. Some participants believed that middle school did not prepare them for the level of time commitment required to get an associate degree. The poor time management skills theme emerged from responses to Questions 1 and 2 on the interview protocol. According to Participant A, The biggest [challenge] would be managing my time because I came from middle school where all my classes kind of came natural to me and I never had to actually study. I could in previous years always prioritize other things and not worry about my studies to whereas now I had to actually go home and study.

Participant A acknowledged that classes in the Associate Degree Pathway required that he spend much more time studying at home. The participant realized that academic success in the Associate Degree Pathway required substantially more effort, time, and focus than academic work in middle school; he became acutely aware of his lack of academic skills when he was unable to successfully engage in the required course work. This deficiency in knowledge, rigor, and skill level coupled with a need for elevation of work ethic explained why Participant A was unsuccessful in completing the associate degree.

Participant B stated that “time management ranks as the biggest challenge.” He added that “time management, procrastination, and projects in multiple classes were all challenges.” He emphasized that time management challenges resulted from the work load in the program and his own procrastination. Participant B suggested these reasons were responsible for his unsuccessful attempt to obtain an associate degree. Time management was an underdeveloped skill that

resulted in a lack of academic success and/or decisions to leave the Associate Degree Pathway for most participants.

Participant D reported that the biggest challenges in Associate Degree Pathway “were some of the things like organization and time.” He stated, “I've been afraid a lot because the things you need to know, they don't teach you in middle school.” These comments revealed his lack of organization that made it difficult to earn an associate degree in the ECHS program. Underdeveloped skills, such as a lack of organization and time management, consistently emerged as themes regarding the reasons for unsuccessful completion of the associate degree. Participant D's revelation of growing fear reflects an underdeveloped skill level and lack of prior knowledge rigor and depth of course work. Participant D resolved his time management issues and fears as a student; he ultimately received his associate degree. Participant F explained the importance of managing time because the classes were “very fast-paced and you do have to study more.” Participant F further stated that “in the classes that were hard it was quite difficult so I would stay during lunch, before school and after school to study more.” Participant J suggested that “because the program is a lot of work, you're gonna have to definitely set some time aside for it.”

The theme of poor time management skills emerged when, participants responded to questions about challenges they experienced in the Associate Degree Pathway. Participants reported that middle school did not provide them with the academic skill set necessary to enter the Associate Degree Pathway. As a result, most participants were unable to adjust to the time demands necessary to be successful due to the ECHS program's rigor, depth, and complexity of coursework.

**Theme: Limited prior rigorous academic experiences.** Many participants reported that limited prior rigorous academic experiences in the ECHS program was a major challenge. They expressed that they had not been prepared for the challenging courses in the Associate Degree Pathways. Some participants believed that they needed to study more than ever to overcome challenges. The theme of limited prior rigorous academic experiences evolved from participants' responses to Questions 1, 2, and 8 of the interview protocols. Questions 1 and 2 addressed challenges in the ECHS program and Question 8 asked about the participants' perceptions of the ECHS program today versus four years ago. These questions yielded responses about misperceptions of the coursework and the level of rigor in the program. According to Participant F,

The workload was a bit more difficult; you definitely had to study more. The materials were kind of hard for me to understand personally. In the classes that were hard, like psychology, it was quite difficult, so I would stay during lunch, before school and after school to study more.

Participant F described how the rigorous coursework required that he work outside of class to keep up. He realized that the content in class was more difficult for him personally to understand than other students in the class. Participant F utilized peer and adult tutoring to overcome this challenge and build an indispensable academic work ethic to obtain his associate degree in the ECHS program.

Participant J explained, "I mean definitely the coursework is hard." He added, "what we were covering was difficult, but I know because I'm a pretty driven person that if I don't understand something, I will just take my own time to actually try to study and research it." He indicated that the coursework in the Associate Degree Pathway was very rigorous. Due to his

personal motivation and drive, Participant J used his own independent means to combat challenges of rigorous coursework. Participant J's approach to independent study started him on the path to fail to obtain an associate degree in the ECHS program.

Participant E expressed his concern for not having enough time to address rigorous coursework outside of school due to external factors. For Participant E, economic family conditions necessitated that he works after school. According to Participant E,

Work that we were given was not necessarily done in class and assigned to go home. Some of us have to work like after school, which is why we are trying to get our associates degree. It's harder for us to do our class work or the homework and then work.

Participant E claimed that "classes tend to get a little bit overwhelming and so having the extra time helps." He recognized that the rigor in the Associate Degree Pathway became unmanageable due to additional responsibilities at home, such as employment. Participant E also described an issue that other study participants expressed (i.e., that rigorous assignments became overwhelming when he needed to complete them at home without academic assistance from adults or siblings). Despite challenging rigor of ECHS coursework and after school work commitments, Participant E developed the necessary academic skills to graduate with an associate degree.

Participant F said, "I thought they're going to be much easier than what they were, which I probably shouldn't have." Participant F mentioned a recurring concern among study participants that they lacked an acute awareness of how rigorous the program would eventually be. Participant F alluded to the recurring issue that middle school failed to prepare him for the rigorous coursework he encountered in the ECHS program. Participant A stated that "you

change your perception as you start taking more classes because you didn't realize that the teachers would be as supportive as they were.” Participant C discussed that “although the program is very hard, there are people who can help you in the early college high school program because you can always take classes with someone you know.” Similarly, Participant D relied on classmates to combat the rigorous curriculum of ECHS. He stated that “you have peers in your groups that actually help you and that's cool.”

To summarize the theme of limited prior rigorous academic experiences, study participants reported it as one of the most critical barriers to success in the Associate Degree Pathway. Most participants came from middle school with an underdeveloped academic skill set and believed unprepared for the rigorous coursework. Some participants adjusted to the rigorous coursework in the program by seeking assistance as they moved on to their junior and senior years of high school.

**Theme: Extracurricular activity participation.** Some study participants reported that being a part of the Associate Degree Pathway in the ECHS program affected their participation in extracurricular activities. This theme emerged among participants as a response to Questions 1, 2, and 9. Several participants were active in extracurricular activities like band and athletics. Most participants believed that this led to the Associate Degree Pathway becoming too overwhelming due to competing time commitments between extracurricular activities and the rigorous course of study in the program. Some participants viewed the Associate Degree Pathway as a deterrent to participation in extracurricular activities and expressed their disappointment in being unable to participate in activities they enjoyed.



Participant E expressed his concern with the Associate Degree Pathway. He was able to obtain his associate degree but regretted not having a normal high school experience while in the program. Participant E explained,

Some of the challenges that I faced related to scheduling some of the classes because they were not accessible for me because of activities I had been a part of for a long time such as band. But I couldn't be in other stuff or other activities. While in ECHS, it is hard to do extracurricular activities in order to pursue that degree.

Participant E recognized that to complete the associate degree, sacrifices were necessary. He realized that he must complete classes in the Associate Degree Pathway before taking classes he enjoyed. This is consistent with other study participants who reported needing to make personal sacrifices to complete the associate degree.

Participant J suggested, "Don't get involved with the whole bunch of extracurricular activities...it is very taxing and takes a lot of your free time." Most of Participant J's time in high school was spent trying to obtain the associate degree, which left little time to participate in other school activities. Similarly, Participant F explained that succeeding in the program required choosing between participating in extracurricular activities or the Associate Degree Pathway of the ECHS program. Participant E stated, "there are still some sacrifices that have to be made." He added, "if you truly want to get your associate degree in high school, there's nothing here that's going to stop you from doing it and everything is here is to support you."

Participant F suggested that it is nearly impossible to succeed in the ECHS program and participate in extracurricular activities. He understood that sacrifices were essential and that it was up to each student to succeed. Participant F also expressed that there is no excuse for failing in the program as assistance is always readily available.

Participant A was involved in athletics for the four years of high school and his explanation of the effects extracurricular activities had on his chances of obtaining an associate degree were very different than Participants E,F, and J above. Participant A had to perform in the classroom or else his mother would take athletics away. He described it by expressing that “I’m expected to pass and with the best way possible, and anything less then she get involved.”

To summarize the theme of extracurricular activity participation, most participants believed it was impossible to earn an associate degree and participate in extracurricular activities. Some study participants believed that being unable to participate in extracurricular activities was disappointing. Their feelings stemmed being unable to participate in activities they previously enjoyed due to the amount of studying necessary to be successful in the Associate Degree Pathway. This study revealed that the resentment of not having time to participate in extracurricular activities was a catalyst for students dropping out of the Associate Degree Pathway. Some participants reported making this tradeoff because they wanted a *normal* high school experience. These participants also reported having the leverage to make their own educational decisions concerning leaving the Associate Degree Pathway.

**Theme: Institutional agents present in the students’ lives.** Participants reported that institutional agents present in their lives positively affected their success and ability to overcome challenges. Participants reported that succeeding in the Associate Degree Pathway of the ECHS program depended on adults who took time to make sure they were successful. Most participants reported that these adults were responsible for fundamental good teaching. They also possessed a caring and compassionate personality aimed at ensuring student success in the program. The theme of institutional agents was present in the students’ lives emerged from responses to

Questions 3 and 4 on the interview protocol. Participant A appreciated that adults supported his success. He said,

I would say the first one that comes to mind was my first AVID teacher freshman year and although I didn't stay, she still kept up with me and made sure I was on track doing what I needed to do to make sure I got into college and I was performing.

He understood that the adults in the Associate Degree Pathway cared about his success throughout his four years of high school. The theme of *institutional agents* appeared in many participants' responses. Participant A explained that institutional agents provided a significant level of support at school that went beyond the classroom and was essential for success.

Participant B explained how teachers influenced his success as an ECHS student and stated that "my mentoring relationships were with my Dual Credit teachers."

Participant B realized that his teachers and their building of trusting relationships with their students were critical. Participant B met with teachers regularly to discuss his progress. Participant B described teachers as being empathetic and understanding that the students had a lot on their plates. Similarly, Participant C believed that "assistance was available for whatever comes to your mind when you're like a freshman or sophomore because the most difficult thing was to get through." Participant C also revealed another theme (i.e., students feeling unprepared for the rigors of the program) and stated that "the ECHS director helped me to be successful by asking me to look into my future." Participant C believed that the program director was instrumental in building trusting relationships with students. The program director addressed the social and emotional learning needs of students by serving as their guidance mentor.

Participants D, E, and F echoed the feeling of most participants regarding institutional agents in the Associate Degree Pathway of the ECHS program. Participant D stated that "my

AVID teacher, my counselor and program director helped me a lot.” Participant E similarly described that “the counselors and the director for the Early College High School program tried pushing me in the right direction.” Participant E acknowledged that the counselors and the program director provided motivation and support to be successful. Participant F stated, “teachers definitely helped me get through some of the classes.” Participant F realized that of all the support available to students in the program, teachers acting as institutional agents had the most impact on his success. Comments from Participants D, E, and F suggested that the adults in the ECHS program created a small learning community where students received support for academic, social, and emotional learning needs.

To summarize the institutional faculty and staff present in the students’ lives theme, most participants reported that support from adults was essential to succeeding in obtaining an associate degree. Institutional agents included teachers, counselors, and the ECHS director. According to participants, these individuals ensured success by providing an array of academic, social, and emotional learning services. From the appreciative tone of the student responses to questions about how they overcame challenges in the Associate Degree Pathway, I understood the effect institutional agents had on students enrolled in the ECHS program. The tone of the students was similar when they described other mentoring relationships. Many participants were appreciative that adults provided academic, social, and emotional support that they lacked at home.

**Theme: Parental support.** Most participants credited parental support in their success in the program. Support did not consist of cultural capital, but of encouragement and the freedom to make individual educational decisions. Parental support was a motivator for students to succeed in the ECHS program. The theme of parental support evolved from the participants’

responses to Question 6 of the interview protocol. Despite not attending college or struggling to assist their children academically, most participants reported that their parents were supportive in their decisions in the program. Participant A said,

When it comes to education, me and my mother have always had like this unspoken agreement that she put a roof over my head with food on the table. So I'm expected to pass and with the best way possible and anything less or she would get involved.

Participant A described the relationship between his single mother and himself during this process of attempting to earn an associate degree. Participant A's mother supported him by trusting that he would make good choices but lacked full understanding of how the program functioned. Participant A eventually dropped out of the Associate Degree Pathway and dedicated himself to athletics. The right for students to make their own decision to remain in the Associate Degree Pathway was common for the study participants. Participants explained that the ECHS process was foreign to many parents or guardians. Some parents lacked an understanding of the monetary advantages of students earning an associate degree while they were still in high school.

Participant B reported, "my parents have encouraged me since I was young and been supportive." He explained that his parents encouraged and supported him but he made his own academic choices in the ECHS program. Participant B left the Associate Degree Pathway to pursue interests in digital media and journalism. This was a decision that his parents fully supported. Participant B's comments suggest that his parents that did not fully understand the future monetary benefits of the associate degree by letting their son opt out.

Participant C stated that his parents "were supportive but not very knowledgeable about the process due to their lack of English fluency." Participant C struggled to communicate

pertinent school information about the Associate Degree Pathway to his parents in English. He also struggled to meet state testing requirements to enroll in college-level course work due to his language barrier. Participant C was the only student in the study classified as limited English deficient (LED), which made the academic process more difficult for him. Understanding the benefits of the associate degree was nearly impossible for Participant C's parents.

Participant D described his parent's support as "very interactive and always reminding me that this was a lot of work." Both of Participant D's parents were highly-involved. Unlike many other participants' parents, they had some college experience and conveyed this to their son. Participant E said the following about his parents; "They wanted me to really try hard to take those college courses and get your degree so that way you don't have to spend the money on it." His parents understood the importance of obtaining free college credit while in the Associate Degree Pathway to alleviate costs after high school. Participant E used the advice from his parents as motivation to obtain his associate degree. Similarly, Participant F stated that his parents "encouraged me to do well and were always supportive over four years." His parents supported his academic and extracurricular activities during high school. Participant F's parents were very supportive, and he believed he could not let them down by failing to receive his associate degree.

Thus, most participants described parental support as permission to make their own decisions regarding whether to stay in the Associate Degree Pathway. Most parents allowed their sons to decide, rather than forcing completion, because they lacked sufficient knowledge of the benefits of obtaining an associate degree while in high school. Some parents fostered an expectation that their son would finish the associate degree; of those, all study participants

successfully completed the degree. Participants who reported no parental support were unable to finish their associate degree before they finished high school.

**Theme: Limited social and cultural capital.** Most participants in this study reported having little to no social and cultural capital when entering the higher education program. Many participants reported a lack of knowledge about college due to their parents, guardians, or immediate family members. The lack of social and cultural capital may explain why the participants' perceptions of the Associate Degree Pathway in the ECHS program were much different at the beginning of the program than when they graduated from high school. Many participants originally envisioned attending a brick and mortar college campus building. They had little knowledge of the rigor involved in the ECHS Associate Degree Pathway. Participant D described his experience before entering ECHS by stating that "before you enter any class, you think it will be like a University."

The lack of social and cultural capital theme emerged from the study participants' responses to Questions 6 and 8 on the interview protocol. Participant A explained, "You feel that college classes are hard because I'm pretty sure you went to the presentation in eighth grade and you feel they are going to be like hard, like super difficult so at this point I was preparing for the worst."

Participant B agreed. "I thought the program was going to be super hard and involve a ton of studying." Prior to entering the Associate Degree Pathway, these participants had no immediate family members or other mentors to teach them about the college experience.

Participant D reported that "before you enter any class, you think it will be like a university." He continued, "however, our school brought the teachers in here to give us advice as an incoming ninth-grader." These comments indicate a lack of social and cultural capital and a

lack of knowledge about the higher education process, specifically the ECHS program. Based on analysis of participants' responses, I found that the students lacked both social and cultural capital and knowledge about the college-going process before they entered the Associate Degree Pathway.

Participant E stated, "So the college perspective was that it was a lot more work, but I found classes to be interesting." Participant F said, "I thought they're going to be much easier than what they were, which I probably shouldn't have." These comments suggest a lack of social and cultural capital because they had no connection to more knowledgeable adults to advise them. Many participants' parents did not attend college and therefore could not build the necessary cultural capital that students needed before entering the Associate Degree Pathway.

Participant J described his perception of college before he entered the ECHS program by stating that "I was definitely expecting challenging courses that would make me and shape me into a better person." He added, "I wanted to grow and become smarter and become more independent." Finally, he reported that he "just saw the classes that not only look good on your resumes but ultimately make you a better person."

To summarize the theme of limited social and cultural capital, participants shared their perceptions of college before they entered the Associate Degree Pathway and their parents' social and cultural capital. Students with no exposure to college culture at home struggled more than students whose parents had some knowledge of the college process. Parents who possessed social and cultural capital and knowledge about the college-going process transmitted it to their sons, resulting in the successful attainment of an associate degree.

**Theme: Positive experiences in the ECHS program.** The theme of positive experiences in the ECHS program evolved from the study participants' responses to Questions 5, 7, and 9 of



the interview. Most participants agreed that the Associate Degree Pathway in the ECHS was a positive aspect of their lives. Many participants described the program as an opportunity that not many students have and that new students in the program should take advantage of. Participant A said,

I would have to say there is no excuse as to why you can't fulfill your potential because Early College High School is here so that you can take advantage of. So it is really a matter of are you willing to put the work.

Participant A believed that every student was in control of their own destiny in this program. Participant A considered the ECHS program as an opportunity for students to improve their futures. He had a positive experience while enrolled in the program.

Participant B stated, "I would encourage students to take Dual Credit classes and if they do not want the associate degree to focus on getting as many college hours as you can." He understood the advantages of being in the ECHS program. Similarly, Participant C advised, "it does not hurt you to continue trying to get college credit for your associate degree even if there's nobody at home to assist." Participant C recognized the benefit of getting college credit regardless of his home situation.

Participant E believed that the program was positive but made a few suggestions. Participant E stated, I think program itself has been a really good concept and has been growing in its execution. I think there is just something maybe that early college kids can have rather than having a set schedule because professors also have certain days they can only teach. We should have different dual credit professors that change for the different subjects on different days. I was kind of thinking more of a college where the professor comes in and does it Monday, Wednesday

and Friday. You have time during that class for you to do the work. Classes tend to get a little bit overwhelming and so having the extra time helps.

He revisited the time management theme and suggested ways for the program to assist students with this issue. Participant E developed sense of cultural capital. He mentioned implementing more of a typical college schedule rather than the current high school schedule for the Associate Degree Pathway.

Participant F described participating in the Associate Degree Pathway of the ECHS program as very positive. He stated,

I mean obviously the program is very successful and it means that you will get a lot of college hours out it. I would tell [new students] it's not going to be like an easy task and it will have its challenges. It is definitely doable it's really up to you to disappoint yourself. Study more really and don't slack off.

He described the program as a positive experience but warned future participants that the journey is very difficult. Like other participants, Participant F believed very strongly that it is up to each individual student to ultimately succeed or fail in the program.

Participant J described his experience in the Associate Degree Pathway as positive as well and offered advice regarding his home situation. He stated,

You won't know what to do at home and you don't have a lot of help at home so definitely be self-disciplined. Also what I would tell [new student] that may want to challenge yourself. It's not necessary challenging because like I mean if you pay attention in class and do what you have to.

To summarize the theme of positive experience, all participants described the Associate Degree Pathway as a good opportunity. Many participants reported that the program had the

potential to change the lives of each student after high school due to the benefits of earning college credit before graduating. Study participants acknowledged that the Associate Degree Pathway was very challenging and consistently advised that success in the program depended on how badly the student wanted to earn an associate degree.

Participant D suggested that future ECHS students needed to know that the Associate Degree Pathway was a good thing. He stated that “no matter what you would like to do or whatever comes to your mind concerning your time in this program, you can finish it over time.” Although Participant D struggled through the program, he always believed that the positive support he received from the adults in the program and his parents kept him going.

Most participants reported that being a Hispanic male in the Associate Degree Pathway had little or no effect on whether they succeeded in the program. Participant A stated, “I would say it never really impacted me but there is some sort of stigma towards Hispanic males and that motivated me to perform the way I did.” Participants B, C, and D agreed that it had a minimal effect on program success. However, Participant E stated,

I’ve had people saying that as a Hispanic, you’re not smart has crossed my mind. I also had trouble speaking up because I was a Hispanic in a class where many were not Hispanic. It is hard to speak out. It is really about wanting to be better for my family and be better than my family in the past. I just wanted to improve my life quality.

Participants stated that they did not feel that being a Hispanic male affected their overall success in the program. A possible explanation for this reported perception is that the study occurred in a small rural area where most students knew each other since elementary school and being a Hispanic male in advanced courses was as common as other racial groups. Most

participants reported feeling in no way inferior to other students or uncomfortable being in classes where they were a racial minority.

**Theme: Lack of work ethic.** The theme of work ethic emerged in responses to Questions 9 and 10 of the interview. Participants reported that a strong work ethic was essential to be successful in the ECHS program. Participants described the importance of developing work ethic because the course work became more intense as they progressed into their junior and senior years. Participants believed that work ethic was especially important if students participated in extracurricular activities. Participant A explained, “I would say go for it and attack it head on but do not underestimate...it is better to overestimate and it’s just a matter of do you want it and are you willing to do the work.” Students determine their own work ethic, which influences their success in the Associate Degree Pathway. Participant A summed up his work ethic experience by stating that “I just had to do it, especially being in a classroom where the students are very competitive meant it was a matter of can I get it done.” Meanwhile, Participant C shared his experience of having to develop work ethic by reporting that “it does not hurt you to continue trying to get college credit for your associate degree even, if there's nobody at home to assist.”

Participant E stated, “there are still some sacrifices that have to be made.” He added, “if you truly want to get your associate degree in high school, there's nothing here that's going to stop you from doing it and everything is here is to support you.” Participant F said, “it’s not going to be like an easy task and it will have its challenges, but it is definitely doable; it’s really up to you to disappoint yourself.” He added, “study more really and don’t slack off.” Participants E and F confirmed the difficulty of obtaining an associate degree and recognized that it requires personal work ethic to be successful in the program.

Participant J spoke of the importance of establishing self-discipline to be successful. “You won’t know what to do at home so being self-disciplined and challenging yourself is important...the program is very taxing and takes a lot of your free time away.” He described a lack of available resources at home; therefore, he developed self-discipline to complete his coursework at school.

To summarize the work ethic theme, most participants believed work ethic was essential to success in the program. Participants’ responses indicated that there were many systems of support in the Associate Degree Pathway but students needed to possess self-discipline to succeed. Their responses suggested that work ethic was another underdeveloped skill that participants did not possess when they first entered the Associate Degree Pathway.

**Theme summary.** Table 2 includes a summary of the emergent themes, and indicates which participants contributed to each theme.

Table 2

*Factors Affecting Hispanic Male Student Success in the ECHS Program by Participant*

Theme	P-	P-	P-	P-	P-	P-	P-
	A	B	C	D	E	F	J
Poor Time Management	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Limited Prior Rigorous Academic Experiences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Extracurricular Activity Participation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Institutional Agents Present in the Students' Lives	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Parental Support	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Social/Cultural Capital	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Positive Experience in ECHS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Lack of Work Ethic	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

In the next section, I used textual and structural descriptions of the collected data to describe the individual and collective experiences of the participants in the study. The textual-structural synthesis created the foundation for understanding the essence of the phenomenon.

**Composite Textual Description**

The composite textual description of data analysis included the creation of a collective description of how 12th grade Hispanic male students experienced the Associate Degree

Pathway. I analyzed data from participant interviews by identifying emergent themes that informed my creation of the composite description of the challenges students faced when attempting to earn an associate degree. By utilizing the emergent themes, data revealed the group description of what it was like to struggle in the Associate Degree Pathway.

All but one participant credited institutional agents or other individuals who occupy key positions of relatively high importance and authority as being instrumental in their success in the ECHS Associate Degree Pathway. Institutional agents in a student's social network directly communicated or negotiated the communication of important social capital (Stanton-Salazar, 2011). Participants in the study reported that teachers, the ECHS director, and counselors facilitated social and cultural capital and provided knowledge about the college process. Participants explained that institutional agents were key motivators throughout the program.

Regarding the theme of parental support, every participant except for one credited parental support as a reason they were able to be successful in the program. Many parents did not understand the ECHS program, but they supported their sons' efforts to obtain an associate degree. Participants reported that many parents became aware of the rigor of the program and motivated them to not give up. Some participants reported that their parents left it up to them to decide whether to remain in the Associate Degree Pathway.

Despite the challenges and sacrifices (e.g., limited time for extracurricular activities) that the Associate Degree Pathway created for the participants, almost all of them reported that the ECHS program positively affected their high school careers. Almost all participants reported that future students should take advantage of the opportunity to earn an associate degree in high school by staying focused and avoiding other activities that may affect their chances of being successful. Many participants believed that the ECHS program helped them develop the work

ethic they needed to be successful in college.

Finally, many participants reported that poor time management was a major challenge to their success in the program. Participants suggested more down time during the day so that students could study or complete complex assignments. Some participants expressed frustration with having to complete rigorous assignments at home without assistance. Other participants in the study participated in extracurricular activities and struggled to fulfill the obligations of college classes.

### **Composite Structural Description**

All participants in the Associate Degree Pathway in the present study entered the program as first-generation college students. Many participants reported that the rigorous academic expectations in the program were a major challenge. Some participants explained that middle school did not prepare them for the rigorous coursework they experienced in the ECHS program. They described the program as extremely difficult; many relied on peers to help them understand the coursework. Most participants reported that very little academic support was available at home, so they resorted to morning or after school tutoring. Other participants believed that some teachers in the program did not fully explain the coursework and were unwilling to be flexible with their time. According to one participant, some teachers responded to questions from students with “you should know this, you are college students” (Participant J).

Regarding the theme of social and cultural capital, all participants had different perceptions of college before they entered the program. They reported assuming that college classes would be at a university and not at their local high school. Participants expressed the inability of their parents or guardians to provide college advice due to their limited experiences with the college process. Most participants also reported never visiting a college or university



outside of their hometown. All participants reported having little or no initial knowledge of college entrance requirements, financial aid, scholarships, and types of degrees.

Regarding being a Hispanic male pursuing higher education, almost all participants reported that race minimally affected their success. Two students reported feeling out of place in classes with mostly White students. One student reported not wanting to speak up because he was embarrassed by his lack of English proficiency. Most participants did not notice that they were the minority in the college classes and considered their classmates as friends.

Due to their backgrounds, all participants believed that they had something to prove by obtaining an associate degree. One participant from a single-parent home reported that he needed to remain in the program to succeed rather than risk losing by participating in athletics. The student reported that if he was not successful in the program, his mother would have to step in and make negative decisions about his participation in extracurricular activities (Participant A). Another participant reported that the program had the potential to change his quality of life. A different participant described wanting to be successful because he wanted to show everyone that he was a full-time high school student, in band, worked part-time, and was able to get over 40 college hours. Other participants reported that being the first in their family to go to college might influence younger siblings to pursue higher education.

### **Textual-Structural Synthesis**

Most participants had little or no social and cultural capital before they entered the Associate Degree Pathway. Support did not consist of social or cultural capital, but of encouragement and trust to make independent educational decisions. They were unfamiliar with the rigors of college coursework due to a lack of rigorous academic experiences in middle school. Parental support was available in the form of moral support, but parents did not provide

academic support for the students. Participants reported struggling with time management and developing a strong work ethic.

Participants who were successful in the program connected with institutional agents who contributed to their success. These adults shared knowledge about college with the participants and filled the college-specific social and cultural void the participants' parents created.

Participants also engaged with peers to better understand the rigorous college coursework. Five out of seven participants reported that they had a positive experience in the ECHS Associate Degree Pathway and suggested that future students take advantage of this opportunity to earn a college degree while in high school.

Most participants in this study did not earn their associate degree in the ECHS program. Also, many participants were unwilling to sacrifice extracurricular activities. The decision to dedicate time to extracurricular commitments prevented many participants from maximizing study time to fully understand the rigorous coursework in the Associate Degree Pathway. A lack of time management skills and limited social and cultural capital at home may be why most participants dropped out of the Associate Degree Pathway after receiving little or no guidance from parents. Many participants said that their parents let them decide whether to complete the Associate Degree Pathway.

### **Summary of Findings**

As presented in the Presentation of Data and Results section, there were eight themes that emerged from the interview data that answered the two research questions. The following two sections are intended to present the research findings identified through the interview protocol. Participants' responses to the interview protocol solidified the themes and answered the research questions.

**Research question 1.** The first research question was: How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) program describe their educational experience? The question explored how 12th grade Hispanic male students describe their educational experience while enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of the study site's ECHS program. The following themes, which are discussed in the Data Analysis and Results section above, were relevant to answering this research question: (a) poor time management skills; (b) limited prior rigorous academic experiences; (c) extracurricular activity participation; (d) institutional agents present in the students' lives; and (e) parental support. These themes emerged from analysis of the participants' responses to the interview protocol (see Appendix A).

**Research question 2.** The second research question was: How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) describe the Associate Degree Pathway? The second research question explored participants' attitudes towards the Associate Degree Pathway of the ECHS program and how these attitudes affected their success in the program. Three of the themes discussed in the Data Analysis and Results section above were relevant to answering the second research question: (a) limited prior social and cultural capital about college; (b) ECHS as a positive experience; and (c) lack of work ethic. These themes emerged from the participants' responses to Question 5 to Question 10 on the interview protocol.

Using the two research questions as a guide, which also served as the basis for the interview protocol, I explored how 12th grade Hispanic males experienced the Associate Degree Pathway in an ECHS program in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS via in-depth semi-structured interviews regarding challenges, mentors, parental support, overcoming challenges,

Hispanic males, and perceptions of college. The data analysis validated some of the information presented in the review of literature reflected in the following findings:

1. Students who obtained an associate degree developed a college-ready academic skill set thanks to the help of institutional agents.
2. Students with little or no higher education social and cultural capital struggled to obtain an associate degree.
3. Parental support was crucial for program success but did not always lead to the completion of an associate degree.

The need for institutional agents or more knowledgeable adults or peers to assist with rigorous college curriculum in the ECHS program was consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory. The findings also confirmed past research that indicated participants received little to no higher education social and cultural capital from their immediate family (Cates & Schaeffe, 2011; Chavira et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011). This was consistent with Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory that limited social and cultural capital reduces a student's chances of postsecondary success. The findings also revealed that Hispanic males' family support is one of the most important components for postsecondary success; a component commonly found in the review of literature in Chapter 2.

I identified expected findings in Chapter 3 as institutional, familial, and personal factors that Hispanic male students experienced in higher education; these were not all met as a result of the interview protocol. For example, the expected finding of participants facing institutionalized academic discrimination due to being Hispanic was not met because participant responses to the interview protocol did not report this experience. However, the findings of study participants not being college ready and the lack of parental, social, and cultural capital were consistent with

participant responses. Participants' experiences were limited to their enrollment in an ECHS program instead of their enrollment at a college campus. For example, study participants did not report experiences of institutional discrimination as a Hispanic ethnic group that was previously reported by authors in the literature review (Cerna et al., 2009; Dolan, 2009; Gonzalez, 2015; Moreno & Gaytan, 2013; Salinas & Alarcón, 2016; Witkow et al., 2015). Most of the study participants reported that because they all grew up in the same town and went to the same schools; they did not feel inferior being a minority and Hispanic in the Associate Degree Pathway classes.

### **Summary**

This chapter included analysis of data from the participants' interviews using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction. For this study, seven 12th grade Hispanic male students in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program completed interviews about their experiences in the Associate Degree Pathway. Data analysis revealed emergent themes in their responses: (a) poor time management skills; (b) limited prior rigorous academic experiences; (c) extracurricular activity participation; (d) institutional agents present in the students' lives; (e) parental support; (f) limited social and cultural capital; (g) positive experience about ECHS; and (h) lack of work ethic. Most participants reported having a positive experience while enrolled in the Associate Degree Pathway of this study site's ECHS program. They identified poor time management skills and the limited prior rigor of college coursework as contributing factors that most challenged their success in the program. The findings revealed that although participants did not mention it directly, their responses implied that a lack of social and cultural capital from their parents created barriers to higher education success. Participants reported that institutional agents and parental support were the key elements of program success.

The themes of poor time management skills, limited prior rigorous academic experiences, and institutional agents present in a students' lives closely aligned with Research Question 1 and the conceptual framework of Vygotsky (1978). The themes were found in Vygotsky [1978] (see Table 1), and were related to the educational experience referred to in question 1. The theme of limited social and cultural capital related to Research Question 2 and the conceptual framework of Bourdieu (1977, 1986). The themes of institutional agents, parental support, and positive experiences aligned with Research Question 2 and the conceptual framework of Bourdieu (1977, 1986).

In Chapter 5, I will present my personal analysis of the findings. I will discuss the themes that I described in this chapter and their relationship to the literature from Chapter 2. I will also explore the implications of this research study's findings on practice, policy, and theory. Finally, Chapter 5 will include suggestions for further research about the study topic.

## **Chapter 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. Seven participants shared their institutional, familial, and personal experiences while enrolled in the study site's Early College High School's (ECHS) Associate Degree Pathway. Interview questions reflected topics from the literature review in Chapter 2 regarding Hispanic male higher educational achievement. Study participant responses included the following emergent themes: poor time management skills, limited prior rigorous academic experiences, extracurricular activity participation, institutional agents present in the students' lives, parental support, limited social and cultural capital, positive experience in ECHS, and lack of work ethic. In Chapter 5, I include a summary of the results of data analysis and a discussion of the findings in relation to the literature review. I also include the limitations of the study and implications of the results for practice, policy, and theory. This chapter also includes recommendations for future research and a conclusion to the study.

### **Summary of Results**

Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory and Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital were used to frame research questions that informed my development of an interview protocol to collect participants' responses about the phenomenon of Hispanic males' low rates of higher educational attainment. The research questions were as follows:

1. How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in the Associate Degree Pathway of a rural Southwestern United States Early College High School (ECHS) program describe their educational experience?
2. How do Hispanic 12th grade male students in a rural Southwestern United States Early

College High School (ECHS) describe the Associate Degree Pathway?

Study participants reflected on their institutional, familial, and personal experiences as they attempted to obtain a higher educational degree while in high school. Institutional experiences included discussions of the environment that participants experienced as an ethnic group over time. Familial experiences included discussions of the limited ability of family, friends, or community members to assist participants as they attempted to navigate the higher education process. Participants' personal experiences with higher educational attainment reflected participants' academic preparedness for college coursework and their motivation to obtain an associate degree. Participants answered questions regarding these experiences based on past literature that related these topics to Hispanic student higher educational attainment (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Cerna et al., 2009; Chavira et al., 2016; Dominguez, 2015; Edmund et al., 2016; Fry, 2002; Glenn, 2011; Gonzalez, 2013; Gonzalez, 2015; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Stanton-Salazar, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006; Yeh, 2014). This study gave participants voice to describe their experiences as Associate Degree Pathway students in an ECHS program. Data from participant responses may inform ways to improve ECHS programs' programming by addressing students' academic, social, and emotional learning needs.

### **Discussion of the Results**

In Chapter 4, I included data from responses to the interview protocol. I analyzed responses using Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction method. This process revealed themes in the data: (a) poor time management skills; (b) limited prior rigorous academic experiences; (c) extracurricular activity participation; (d) institutional agents present in the students' lives; (e) parental support; (f) limited social and cultural capital; (g) positive experience in ECHS; and (h) lack of work ethic. The study's research questions addressed how 12th grade Hispanic male students



experienced an ECHS program while attempting to earn an associate degree. By eliciting participants' responses about their experiences in the ECHS program, I sought to understand factors that influence the success of 12th grade Hispanic male students. Participants discussed the challenges they faced in the Associate Degree Pathway and how they overcame those challenges. They identified challenges as poor time management skills, limited prior rigorous academic experiences, extracurricular activity participation, and lack of social and cultural capital to learn about the college-going process. Participants reported that institutional agents present in their lives, parental support, and developing work ethic were helpful in overcoming challenges in the Associate Degree Pathway. Participants discussed how they perceived the program when they first entered high school and four years later when they prepared to graduate.

### **Discussion of the Findings in Relation to the Literature**

This study was an exploration of Hispanic male students' experiences in an ECHS program while attempting to earn an associate degree. Findings validated some of the information found in the review of literature. The following sections include discussion of these findings and their relation to the literature.

**Finding 1: Students who obtained an associate degree developed a college-ready academic skill set thanks to the help of institutional agents.** Dominguez (2015) identified poor academic preparation and lack of access to information about college culture as catalysts for Hispanic male students' poor postsecondary achievement. College readiness is one of the most crucial barriers to Hispanic student achievement in higher education (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Berger et al., 2013; Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Chapa et al., 2016; Conley, 2007; Nodine, 2011). Therefore, the need for assistance from institutional agents or more knowledgeable adults to assist with the rigorous college curriculum in the Associate Degree Pathway was consistent with

Vygotsky's (1978) view of higher order thinking and learning as a social process facilitated by institutional agents and ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) believed that students may have the intellectual ability to learn but may lack comprehension of their learning potential. According to Vygotsky (1978), teachers can extend the ZPD by creating strong collaborative learning environments that guide students to learn new concepts. A teacher or more experienced peer can provide scaffolding to support a student's understanding of knowledge domains or expansion of complex skills.

Gonzalez (2013) examined the role of institutional agents on Hispanic student achievement and concluded that Hispanic students comprehend what is necessary to be successful in academics and will contact institutional agents to form relationships with them. Gonzalez (2013) added that social scaffolding conducted by institutional agents helps students successfully transition from high school to college. Other researchers acknowledged that institutional agents provided social development and educational attainment for students of low socioeconomic status (Cates & Schaeffle, 2011; Chavira et al., 2016; Gonzalez, 2013; Stanton-Salazar, 2011).

The study participants who successfully obtained an associate degree developed a college-ready academic skill; institutional agents were an important element of their success. Finding 1 was consistent with past literature identifying a lack of college readiness as one of the most crucial barriers to Hispanic student postsecondary success (Barnes & Slate, 2014; Cerna et al., 2009; Crisp & Nora, 2010; Witkow et al., 2015; Wormack & López, 2013). Participants who obtained their associate degree reported that institutional agents created strong learning environments by building relationships and trust with them, which fostered higher order thinking skills as Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD theory suggested.

**Finding 2: Hispanic male students with little or no social and cultural capital from their immediate family about the college-going process struggled to obtain an associate degree.** Past researchers revealed that first-generation Hispanic males whose parents did not complete or attend college are one of the most disenfranchised populations in the United States when it comes to college access (Dominguez, 2015). Moreno and Gaytan (2013) found that many Hispanic students from low-income families lack certain kinds of familial support that middle-class students have in the form of social and cultural capital (e.g., educated parents who help organize or proofread homework, a computer with Internet access, tutors, or a quiet place to work). Chavira et al. (2016) suggested that social capital reflects parents' education, occupation status, resources, and knowledge of the college system. Participants in the present study received support from their parents that did not consist of social or cultural capital, but of encouragement and freedom to make their own educational decisions.

Finding 2 was consistent with Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory that limited social and cultural capital reduces students' chances of postsecondary success. Bourdieu (1986) argued that parents possess a supply of cultural capital and transmit some of this to their children when parents actively invest in transmitting it. Examples of cultural capital transmission include reading to children, taking them to the theatre or other culturally-relevant events, and exposing them to the college-going culture. According to Bourdieu (1977), parents' ways of thinking, feelings, and behaviors relate to their position in society; children internalize these ways of relating to the world.

The parents of study participants who successfully obtained their associate degree in the ECHS Associate Degree Pathway understood the benefits of the program and motivated their sons to succeed. Successful participants' parents transmitted some form of social and cultural

capital related to the college-going process with their sons. These participants described their parents as interactive, supportive, and informed about the college-going process.

**Finding 3: Parental support was crucial for program success but did not always lead to the completion of an associate degree.** The family unit is the main support system through which Hispanic students feel motivated to achieve a college education (Castillo et al., 2010; Glenn, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006; Yeh, 2014). Yeh (2014) indicated that post-secondary enrollment for a Hispanic student is highest when parents advise their children about education and behavior. Hispanic students' postsecondary patterns revealed that the influence of a family member often contributes to the decision to attend college (Castillo et al., 2010; Glenn, 2011; Sanchez et al., 2006; Yeh, 2014).

Current literature was consistent with some of the participants' views about parental support, but most participants described parental support as permission to make educational decisions about their futures in the Associate Degree Pathway. Most study participants dropped out of the Associate Degree Pathway to pursue other interests, such as extracurricular activities. Gonzalez (2013) stated that "although parents play an important role in motivating and supporting academic endeavors, their lack of institutional knowledge limits their ability to assist in the process of accessing higher education" (p. 6).

### **Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory**

**Implications for practice.** Study participants believed that their education at the middle school level did not prepare them for the rigorous college-level course material in the Associate Degree Pathway of this study site's ECHS program. Witkow et al. (2015) revealed that college readiness is a strong predictor of postsecondary success. College readiness is a student's ability to make inferences, interpret results, solve complex problems, conduct research, and analyze

conflicting explanations (Conley, 2007). Munoz et al. (2014) added that college readiness is success without remediation in credit awarding two- or four-year post-secondary institutions. Unfortunately, first-year college students who lack college readiness struggle with the pressures of academic requirements (Barnes & Slate, 2014). One remedy to combat students' low levels of college readiness when they enter the Associate Degree Pathway would be to develop a program called Pre-ECHS. This program could track students in middle school who want to be a part of ECHS and increase rigor in their classes. The Pre-ECHS program could require students to attend Saturday sessions to better understand college coursework and the college-going process. Parents of students in this program could also attend Saturday sessions to build social and cultural capital while learning about the college-going process.

Study participants reported that time management was a major challenge that affected their success in the Associate Degree Pathway. Participants expressed their disappointment when giving up extracurricular activities to meet the time commitments required in the ECHS program. Hispanic students improve time management skills by attending precollege programs such as AVID, Project MALES, and Summer Bridge that improve future college success (Edgecombe, 2011; Glenn, 2011; Hernandez, 2016; Kallison & Strader, 2012; Karp et al., 2007; McDonald & Farrell, 2012; Saenz & Combs, 2015; Thompson & Ongaga, 2014; Watson, 2011). AVID is a college-prep academic program that provides a support system to minority and economically-disadvantaged students in the top 25-50% ranking based on GPA of their graduating classes (Glenn, 2011). Saenz et al. (2015) revealed the success of a mentoring program called Project MALES (mentoring to achieve Latino educational success). The model is distinct because it focuses on Hispanic males and best practices for mentoring males of color (Saenz et al., 2015). Another program that improves the success of minority college students

provides minority at-risk students with opportunities for college remediation education to help them feel ready to enroll in college level courses in the summer prior to the fall of their freshman year (Edgecombe, 2011; Kallison & Strader, 2012). Students create personal and professional relationships, establish goals and academic commitments, and develop college-specific social and cultural capital (Edgecombe, 2011; Kallison & Strader, 2012).

At the study site's ECHS program, a possible remedy to the issue of time management could be the creation of a traditional college schedule for students in the Associate Degree Pathway. Currently, students attend each Associate Degree Pathway class five times a week. This leaves very little time during the school day to complete required readings, projects, and assignments. Participants reported that the current Monday to Friday schedule made it difficult to participate in extracurricular activities. The implementation of a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday schedule would leave two days for students to receive tutoring, collaborate with peers, and participate in other school activities. A three-day schedule is a more traditional college schedule, which could prepare students for college-level time management.

Study participants also reported that their parents possessed little or no social and cultural capital or knowledge of the college-going process. Many Hispanic students lack social and cultural capital, which increases the pressures of academic requirements, economic obligations, and social demands (Barnes & Slate, 2014). However, Yeh (2014) found that Hispanics with parents who advised them on educational matters are likely to enroll and remain in postsecondary studies. Chavira et al. (2016) reported that social capital reflects parents' education, occupation status, resources, and knowledge of the college system. Parents transmit social and cultural capital to students, as was the case with the three study participants who obtained an associate degree (Bourdieu, 1986). Creating a bilingual Saturday program for

parents to attend with their children before their freshman year of high school may help Hispanic parents understand the important of college preparation and the ECHS program.

**Implications for policy.** The 85th Texas Legislature passed House Bill 1638 in 2017 requiring the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) and the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to collaboratively develop statewide goals for dual credit (DC) programs in Texas (TEA, 2018). These goals offer direction to (Institutes of Higher Education (IHEs) and independent school districts (ISDs) on items that must be in place to ensure that schools provide high-quality DC programs to Texas high school students. According to TEA (2018), these statewide goals address enrollment in and acceleration through postsecondary education, performance in college-level coursework, and academic advising. This bill effectively mandated that ECHS programs include opportunities for students to receive academic advising from institutional agents who closely monitor their academic performance.

House Bill 22 of the 85th Texas Legislative Session established a public-school accountability system that included a college, career, and military readiness (CCMR) component (TEA, 2018). Public high schools in Texas' student achievement domain rating reflects graduates' preparedness for college, the workforce, or the military. One-way that high school graduates can meet the preparedness for college requirement is by earning an associate degree while in high school (TEA, 2018). This policy defined the Associate Degree Pathway of this study site's ECHS program as a critical part of the overall campus accountability rating.

**Implications for theory.** Participant responses in this study revealed that most Hispanic male students in ECHS lacked the necessary academic skills to successfully engage in the required rigorous course of study in the Associate Degree Pathway. These lack of academic skills can be understood through the theoretical perspective of Vygotsky's zone of proximal

development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) believed that educators should support students by assigning work that challenges without overwhelming them. Most of the study participants reported that the classes in the Associate Degree Pathway were very challenging and overwhelming. Most participants said that middle school had not prepared them for the level of rigor in the Associate Degree Pathway. As a result, it was important that institutional agents recognize that not all students arrive in the program with college-ready skills; instructors and mentors must understand the ZPD to build students' academic skills in the Associate Degree Pathway without overwhelming them. Vygotsky (1978) introduced the ZPD, which is the distance between the competency level at which a student can work independently and the level a student can attain under the guidance of a more knowledgeable person or peer. For example, a teacher acting as an institutional agent may extend the ZPD by creating a strong learning environment in which students learn in a collaborative setting. Many participants reported that when they did not understand the class work in the Associate Degree Pathway, they relied on tutoring from more knowledgeable adults who were able to provide content scaffolding. Some participants said that they relied on more competent peers to assist them with difficult assignments. Participants reported that assistance from more competent peers mainly occurred in classes where the teacher had established a collaborative classroom environment.

The participants also confirmed the importance of Hispanic male students' parents' or guardians' social and cultural capital. Bourdieu (1977, 1986) defined social capital as having access to social networks that create a sense of belonging. Most of the study participants' parents lacked access to immediate social networks and could not connect their sons to adults who could advise them about college matters. Bourdieu (1977, 1986) introduced class habitus (i.e., internalization of the way parents think, feel, and behave according to their position in



society). Children internalize these thoughts, feelings, and actions in their own habitus. For example, class habitus for the parents of participants in this study reflected their perceived value of a college education, past experiences of discrimination in the school system, or working-class world view. Students who dropped out of the Associate Degree Pathway still received support from their parents because they respected their children's interests and wanted to let them decide whether to pursue higher education or a different option (sports, fine arts, technology). Interview data in this present study reported that many parents were not involved in the educational decisions of the students due to a lack of understanding of the benefits of obtaining an associate degree while in high school.

Bourdieu (1977, 1986) viewed cultural capital as the values, knowledge, and ideas that parents transmit to children that influence their school achievement. Through these experiences, a child acquires cultural capital via objectified contact in the home (Bourdieu, 1986). Parental transmission of cultural capital to their children implies that children convert embodied cultural capital into educational success or institutionalized cultural capital into socioeconomic upward mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). However, a child's level of acquisition of cultural capital may be dependent on a family's financial resources and/or the child's academic ability; which means that the level of cultural capital transmitted may not be sufficient enough to move a child into a higher class. The study participants reported that their parents never took them to visit a college campus and some believed that transmission of cultural capital was not something their parents actively pursued.

In respects to Bourdieu's theory, findings from the present study revealed that the ECHS program should expand their efforts to build social and cultural capital for all Hispanic male students enrolled the Associate Degree Pathway. This may include visits to college campuses so

that the students can visualize attending college. Hispanic male students need connections to social networks or institutional agents outside of the school setting to increase their chances of admission to college. Finally, by connecting students with peers who possess social and cultural capital, Hispanic male students may affirm their beliefs that value the importance of a college education. This findings in this study reported that Hispanic male students did not see themselves as minorities or less prepared than their peers in the ECHS program.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

To gain a better understanding of Hispanic male students' experiences in an ECHS program while attempting to obtain an associate degree, I used an interview protocol as a primary data collection tool. A recommendation for further research would be to include a pre-interview survey to determine participants' parental inventory of social and cultural capital about the college-going process. Data collected from a pre-interview survey may provide the researcher with additional insight into why students struggle in the program. Data may also provide ECHS administrators with insight regarding ways to improve existing summer programs to address Hispanic male student needs.

An additional recommendation would be to implement a rigor and relevance instructional framework at the middle school level. Teachers can use it to monitor their own progress in adding rigor and relevance to their instruction, and to select appropriate instructional strategies for differentiating instruction and facilitating higher achievement goals (International Center for Rigor and Relevance [ICRE], 2018). This would ensure that middle school faculty members understand the importance of rigorous academic requirements for Hispanic male students' preparedness for the ECHS program. Study participants would utilize a rubric to elevate the rigor and relevance of coursework while other students follow a traditional instructional method.

The researcher could measure outcomes according to the number of Hispanic male students who score as advanced or college-ready on the state assessment at the end of the year.

### **Conclusion**

Utilizing the conceptual frameworks of Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD and Bourdieu's (1977, 1986) theory of social and cultural capital, I explored the lived experiences of 12th grade Hispanic male students enrolled in an ECHS program while they attempted to earn an associate degree. From the participants' responses to questions in the interview protocol and the subsequent data analysis via Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological reduction, I found that the development of college readiness, possession of social and cultural capital about higher education, and parental support contributed to levels of success in the ECHS program. Participants who developed college readiness skills and social and cultural capital with the assistance of institutional agents were more likely to obtain an associate degree. Participants with underdeveloped academic skills after their first year in the program who failed to connect with program institutional agents or had parental permission to make decisions about their futures in the program were more likely to drop out of the Associate Degree Pathway.

I am a Hispanic male with a higher education degree; therefore, hearing the study participants share their experiences of challenges in the Associate Degree Pathway helped me view Hispanic males' low rates of higher educational achievement in a different way. For example, rather than viewing Hispanic males who dropped out of the Associate Degree Pathway as apathetic students who lacked work ethic, I understood them as students who had an underdeveloped academic skill set due to a lack of rigorous instruction in middle school. Rather than blaming parents for ignoring students' struggles in ECHS, I realized parents often lack sufficient social and cultural capital to transmit knowledge of college processes to their children.

The findings in this study suggest the possible benefits of creating a Pre-ECHS program to recruit middle school students who want to be a part of ECHS and place those students in more rigorous classes. The Pre-ECHS program could require that students and parents attend Saturday sessions to better understand college rigor and the college-going process. This study's findings also indicate that Hispanic male students may be more likely to earn an associate degree in ECHS programs when they connect with institutional agents who guide them through the higher education process.

Some readers may question the findings of this study because college enrollment for the participants occurred at the ECHS level rather than at a traditional postsecondary institution. However, the Associate Degree Pathway in this study site's ECHS program provided a valuable lens for exploring why Hispanic males' higher education completion rates are markedly lower than similar peer groups. Part of the ECHS deliberate design is to provide assistance to first generation college students of color or low SES so that they may have the opportunity to obtain an associate degree while they are still in high school. The use of a phenomenology in this study helped reveal the factors that affect Hispanic male student success in the Associate Degree Pathway of this study site's ECHS program. The findings and recommendations contained in this study may help create a path towards improved higher educational outcomes for Hispanic male students in ECHS Associate Degree Pathway and beyond.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

**Research Study:** A Phenomenological Study: The Associate Degree Pathway Experiences of 12th Grade Hispanic Male Students in an Early College High School Program

**Time of Interview:**

**Date:**

**Location:**

**Interviewer:**

**Interviewee:**

I would like to thank you in advance for participating in this student interview. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. My role today as the researcher will be to collect and describe your lived experiences of attempting to obtain an associate degree in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS program. I will then categorize the lived experiences that you and other participants share with me into thematic areas of importance that can be utilized by educational professionals in the future to support Hispanic male students in their pursuit of obtaining an associate degree in ECHS programs. Do you have any questions? At this time, we will start the student interview. This interview will last approximately 45 minutes. Please ask at anytime if you need further clarification of the questions.

### Interview Questions

- 1) What are some challenges that you have experienced while attempting to obtain an associate degree in the ECHS program (i.e. school, home, community, etc.)?
- 2) If you were to rank the challenges of participating in the Associate Degree Pathway of ECHS, what would you consider the greatest challenge? (What about second or third challenge?)
- 3) How did you overcome any challenges in the Associate Degree Pathway? (Describe why if you never overcame challenges)
- 4) Describe any mentoring relationships that you have developed while in the Associate Degree Pathway of ECHS? (Who helped you?)

- 5) What discouraged you to continue your associate degree in the ECHS program and how would you describe the factors or incidents that led you to feel discouraged? (ie. school, home, community)
  
- 6) Describe the role your parents played in your attempts to obtain an associate degree? (How did they support or discouraged you?)
  
- 7) How has being a Hispanic male affected or influenced you in the Associate Degree Pathway of ECHS? (Positive or Negative)
  
- 8) What are your perceptions of college-level classes after being in the Associate Degree Pathway? (Did it change from your perceptions the beginning?)
  
- 9) What strategies do you perceive will increase the number of students completing the program with an associate degree in ECHS? (How can we help future students in the Associate Degree Pathway?)
  
- 10) Is there any more information you would like to add about your experience in the Associate Degree Pathway of ECHS?

Exit Script:

Thank you for your participation in this research study. Your responses will be kept confidential. You can email me if you have any questions or concerns about this study: [redacted].

## **Appendix B: Participant Informed Consent Form**

**Title of Research Study:** A Phenomenological Study: The Associate Degree Pathway Experiences of 12th Grade Hispanic Male Students in an Early College High School Program

**Researcher of Study:** Hector R. Esquivel

**Research Institution:** Concordia University–Portland

**Faculty Advisor:** Dr. Mark Jimenez

### **NON-PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may refuse to take part or withdraw at any time. You may also refuse to answer any research-related questions that make you uncomfortable. The study is looking for up to 8 individuals to participate in this study. No one that participates in this study will be compensated.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of a sample of 12th grade Hispanic male students in a Southwestern United States Early College High School Program (ECHS) while they attempted to earn an associate degree. Conclusions from this research study will provide the campus and district leaders an understanding of the variables experienced by male students in the associate degree program that have an impact on student completion. The study may also serve as a catalyst for the approval and implementation of future initiatives, strategies or programs that will help Hispanic male students obtain an associate degree.

### **WHY ARE WE DOING THE STUDY?**

In this research study, the goal is to explore 12th grade Hispanic male high school students' lived experiences while enrolled in the associate degree program in an early college high school. Specifically, this study will explore the problem of how 12th grade Hispanic males' completion rates in a rural Southwestern United States ECHS Associate Degree Pathway lag behind other peer groups in the same program. The duration of the study is approximately three months; your participation will last one month. To be in the study you must consent. Your parent or guardian must also consent to you participating, if you are less than 18 years old.

### **WHAT HAPPENS IN THE STUDY?**

You will be one of 7 students invited to participate in this research study. You were selected as a candidate because you are a high school senior, a male, and at some point you were enrolled in

the Associate Degree Pathway of the ECHS program. The process will include participating in interviews that are approximately 45-60 minutes long. The interviews will occur during one of your senior release periods over a one week span on your current high school campus. The interviews will occur in the Student Services Conference Room of the ECHS. You will be asked questions regarding your experiences while participating in an early college high school's Associate Degree Pathway. Each session will be recorded via digital audio and transcribed. You will also be invited back two weeks later to review the transcript of the interview to make sure that your experiences were captured accurately. This follow-up meeting will last approximately 30 minutes. You will be able to remove words from the interview script, or change them, if you do request to do this on or before Jun 15, 2018.

#### **WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY?**

This research provide you an opportunity to reflect on the experiences associated with participating in an early college high school's associate degree program which could lead to the development and utilization of strategies that enhance your successful completion of the program.

#### **WHAT ARE THE RISKS?**

There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or inconveniences during this study. However, you do not have to answer any questions that you do not want to. The study specifically explores Hispanic male lived experiences. Some of the questions in the interview may cause you to become emotional when describing your experiences as a Hispanic male student who has experienced challenges both at home and at school. A school licensed professional counselor is available for you. The counselor contact information is:

[Redacted]

#### **WHAT ARE MY CHOICES IN THE STUDY?**

All research participants will be strongly encouraged to participate until the interview process is complete. If they cannot complete the interview process but still want their information to be recorded in the study then the participant information will be included in the study. If they cannot complete the interview process and do not want their information recorded in the study then any existing interview files will be erased. Participants will be told they can refuse to answer any question and/or drop out of the study without consequence.

## **HOW DO YOU KEEP MY DATA PRIVATE?**

All information that you provide will be kept confidential and your name will not be used outside of the researcher's notes and records. The notes and records are kept in a way that keeps your name and even your school's name private. All participants and campuses will be given a participant letter A-J to protect their identity. This is a code, or a pseudonym, that will not only be known to the researcher (Mr. Esquivel). Your information will be protected. Any personal information you provide will be coded so it cannot be linked to you. Reports will not even have the name of the school in the report. Interviews will be recorded and the recordings will be deleted once transcription is completed. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption. When the collected data/documents are looked at, none of the data/documents will have your name or identifying information. You will not be identified in any publication or report. Your information will be kept private at all times and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after the study is concluded; recordings will be deleted as soon as possible once transcription is complete.

## **WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

If you have questions or concerns about the research, you can contact Mr. Hector Esquivel at [redacted] You will be given a copy of a consent form explaining all the details of the study. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. OraLee Branch (email [obran@cu-portland.edu](mailto:obran@cu-portland.edu) or call 503-493-6390).

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**DOCUMENTATION OF PARTICIPANT'S CONSENT and Participant's parental  
consent, if less than 18 years of age**

**I agree to participate this study called: A Phenomenological Study: The Associate Degree Pathway Experiences of 12th Grade Hispanic Male Students in an Early College High School Program.**

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Name (print):

**Your parent or guardian must consent as well, if the participant is <18 years old.**

Parent or Guardian Signature (if participant is a minor) \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent or Guardian Name: .**

**Researcher:**

Hector R. Esquivel

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Hector R. Esquivel  
c/o: Professor Mark Jimenez  
Concordia University–Portland  
2811 NE Holman Street  
Portland, Oregon 97221





## **Appendix C: Statement of Original Work**

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously-researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

### **Statement of academic integrity.**

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

### **Explanations:**

#### **What does “fraudulent” mean?**

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

#### **What is “unauthorized” assistance?**

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

## Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University-Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*

*Hector R. Esquivel*

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Digital Signature

Hector R. Esquivel

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Name (Typed)

02/23/2019

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Date

## Appendix D: Emergent Themes by Research Question

Table 3

*Emergent Themes by Research Question*

Research Question	Emergent Theme
RQ 1	Poor Time Management Skills
RQ 1	Limited Prior Rigorous Academic Experiences
RQ 1	Extracurricular Activity Participation
RQ 2	Institutional Agents Present in a Student's Life
RQ 2	Parental Support
RQ 2	Limited Social and Cultural Capital
RQ 2	Positive Experience in the ECHS Program
RQ 2	Lack of Work Ethic

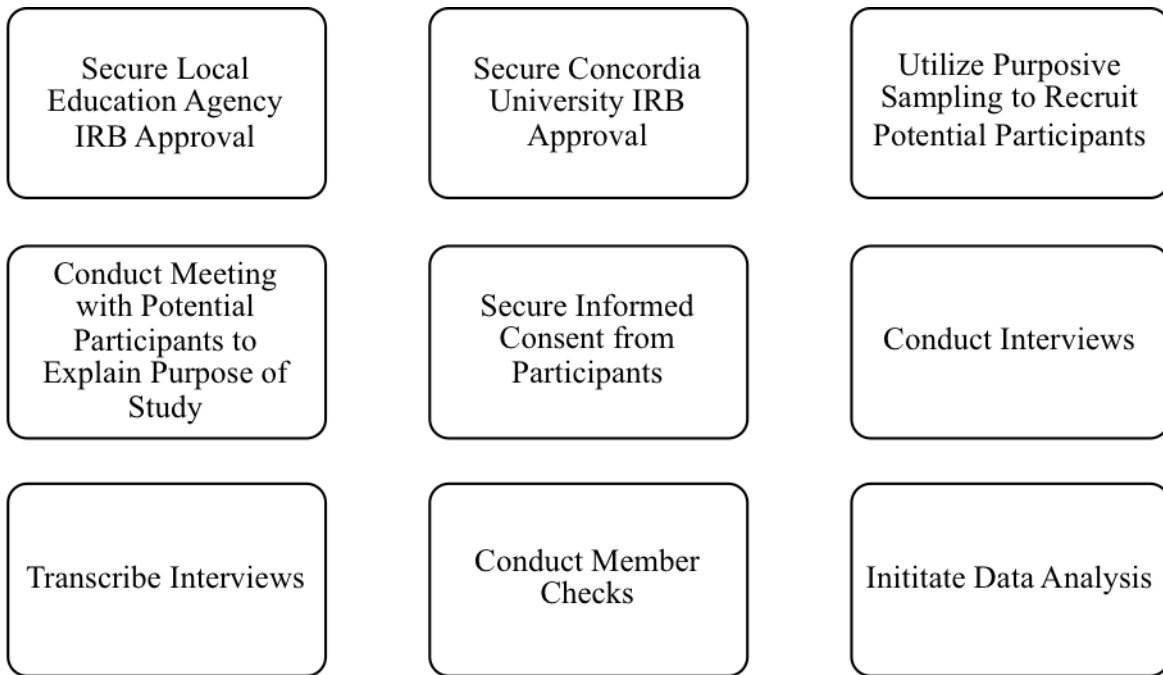
## Appendix E: Participant Characteristics

Table 4

### *Participant Characteristics*

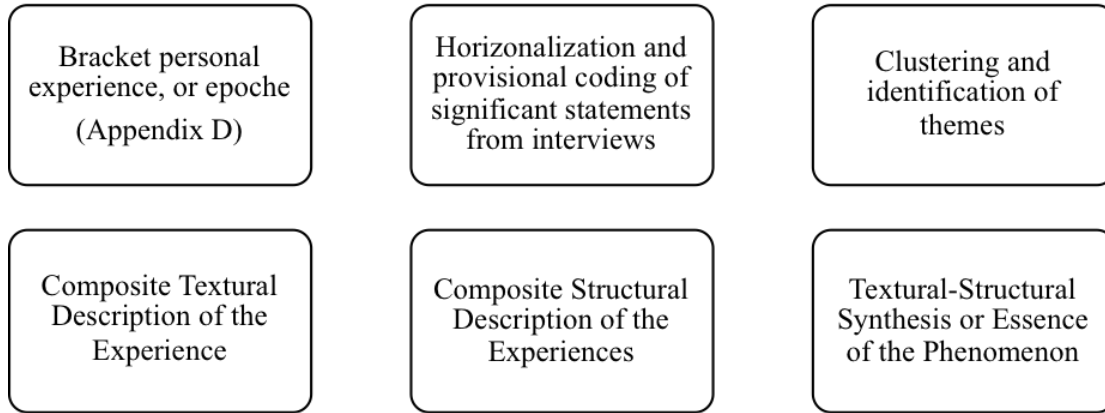
Participant	Age	Academic Status	Family Unit	Extracurricular
A	18	Top 10%, Some college hours	Single Parent	Athletics
B	18	Top 10%, Some college hours	Dual Parent	Digital Media
C	17	Some college hours	Dual Parent	Criminal Justice
D	17	Associate Degree	Dual Parent	None
E	18	Associate Degree	Dual Parent	Band
F	18	Associate Degree	Dual Parent	Band
J	18	Some college hours	Single Parent	Business Program

## Appendix F: Study Procedures



*Figure 1.* Study Procedures

## Appendix G: Data Analysis Procedures



*Figure 1.* Data Analysis Procedures