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ABSTRACT

This study explores the factors that affect Latino college student experiences in the first year of college and adjustment in the second year of study when many minority students dropout. The study examined data from five primary sources and focused on Latino college students who were semifinalists for a national scholarship award. The National Survey of Hispanic Students, a comprehensive longitudinal survey of college student experiences, was sent to students in the cohort in summer 1991. Fifty-nine percent responded. A follow-up survey and the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) was sent in early 1993 and netted a 57 percent response. Other sources included the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, "The College Handbook," precollege surveys, and institutional files at the Higher Education Research Institute (University of California, Los Angeles). Results included: (1) Chicanos were significantly less likely than other Hispanic ethnic groups to score high on social adjustment in the second year of college; (2) no other student background characteristics including high school grade point average, were significantly related to college adjustment; (3) students attending large institutions reported high social adjustment and attachment; (4) students attending private colleges tended to score higher on SACQ measures; and (5) perceptions of a student-centered faculty and administration were associated with better academic adjustment. Five tables display data. (Contains 32 references.) (JB)

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Latino Student Transition to College: Assessing Difficulties and Factors in Successful College Adjustment

by

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Jean Endo
Editor
Forum Publications

Latino Student Transition to College: Assessing Difficulties and Factors in Successful College Adjustment

Abstract

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the factors that affect Latino student adjustment in the first and second year of college. The study examines data from a national, longitudinal survey of Latino students along with a psychometrically-tested instrument, the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire. Dimensions of the campus climate affect all forms student adjustment, as do transitional experiences that are common to most students in the first year. Implications of the findings suggest further college programming and monitoring of adjustment in the second year of college.

Introduction

Within the last decade, administrators developed programs directed at easing students' transition from high school to college as a means of reducing attrition rates in the first year. Specifically, there has been a recent proliferation of program activity and writing on the freshman year experience (Upcraft, Gardner & Associates, 1989; Shanley & Hearn, 1991) with increasing attention devoted to minority student transition to college (Ackermann, 1991; Graham, Baker, & Wapner, 1985). However, only a few studies have focused on the transition experiences of Latino¹ college students or aspects of their adjustment (Attinasi, 1989; Ascher, 1985; Duran, 1983; Quintana, Vogel, & Ybarra, 1991; Smedley, Myers, & Harrell, 1993). Improved data collection methods, both at a national level and on individual campuses, reveal a portrait of Latino educational progress that is characterized by stagnation despite a growing, heterogeneous Latino population in the United States (Valencia & Chapa, 1993; Carter & Wilson, 1992). Given that this population has the potential for growth in future enrollments at the postsecondary level (McCool, 1982), research on Latino student transition to college life is both timely and necessary.

The primary purpose of this study is to understand the factors that affect Latino student adjustment to college life. Although the Latino students identified in this study have the highest potential for success, there is a significant amount of adjustment that must take place in the transition to any undergraduate institution. Our objective in this paper is to explore data from a national, longitudinal survey of Latino students along with a psychometrically-tested instrument in order to understand both the experiences of Latino students in their first year and adjustment in the second year of college.

The second year may be particularly important because it represents the time before a second transition occurs, in which students will soon make a commitment to an academic major and enter a new phase of their college career. According to researchers, the second year is a time when students

¹We use the term Latino as a general term to refer to Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, and Spanish Caribbean students.

become more dissatisfied with college and may experience a "sophomore slump" (Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Additional evidence suggests that some institutions that recruit high-ability African American and Latino students have high first-year retention rates, but have increasing rates of attrition in subsequent years (Muñiz, 1994). Students may also experience additional difficulties, as one student wrote in our study, "Actually, my first year of college was rewarding and satisfying....[The] 2nd year is kicking my ass." Our goal is to provide researchers and practitioners with insights into aspects of the first year that may impact adjustment and Latino student success in the second and subsequent years of college.

Perspectives on College Adjustment

Research on student attrition addresses some aspect of college adjustment, either by implication or by including some measures that represent college adjustment directly in their models (Bennett & Okinaka, 1989; Chartrand, 1992). However, college adjustment has not typically been the object of systematic study, nor do researchers rely on a single definition of college adjustment that might distinguish it from other constructs used in attrition models (see Baker & Siryk, 1984 for a review). For example, Chartrand (1992) identifies the psychological outcomes in the Bean & Metzner Attrition Model (1985) as adjustment outcomes: Adjustment is defined as institutional commitment, feelings of academic adjustment, and the absence of psychological distress. Another study conceptualizes college adjustment as the "opposite of transitional trauma," which is defined as the "level of alienation a student experiences when unfamiliar with the norms, values, and expectations that predominate" (Bennett & Okinaka, 1989). Although linking college adjustment with attrition is of critical importance, a focus on the development and monitoring of college adjustment indicators is necessary if they are to serve as an effective early warning system for institutions (Kroetseng, 1991). Moreover, without specific attention to the nature of transitional trauma, we are less informed about the difficulties students' experience and the successful strategies that individuals and institutions use to resolve them.

One common element among studies that attempt to focus specifically on college adjustment is that they refer to some level of psychological distress (or lack thereof) and concerns about a variety

of dimensions of a students' role that include both the personal, social, and academic arenas. Smedley, Myers, and Harrell (1993) use a stress-coping model to describe the adjustment process that occurs among minority freshmen. Using a variety of instruments, the authors measured chronic student role strain, episodic life events that cause stress, and minority status stressors in relation to three adjustment outcomes: psychological distress, feelings of well-being (e.g. health, mood, emotional stability), and academic achievement. They conceptualize college adjustment as a function of student attributes, psychological and sociocultural stresses, and the strategies students use to cope with these stresses. Their perspective is useful for the present study because they acknowledge that students face a variety of stressors in adjustment to any college, and that racial/ethnic minorities face additional stressors beyond those typical to all students. The authors found that interracial conflicts and experiences of overt discrimination were not as "debilitating minority status stressors as those that undermined students' academic confidence and ability to bond with the university. These stresses come from both internal sources as well as from demographic composition and social climate of the campus" (p. 448). While Smedley, et al.'s view is distinctly psychological in nature, our view builds on the sociological implications of their perspective. We focus on the environmental influences which include the structural and climate characteristics of campuses that may facilitate or hinder areas of college adjustment.

A general assumption underlying many campus programs is that frequent interaction across race/ethnicity will lead to successful minority adjustment on predominantly white campuses. In a recent meta-analytic study of Latino student adjustment, Quintana et. al (1991) concluded that "Latino students who are familiar and comfortable with Anglo culture experience less stress in universities that are dominated by Anglos" (p. 164). However, this view does not take into account the nature of the climate for intergroup relations. For example, sociologists posit that higher contact among different racial/ethnic groups can sometimes result in increased opportunity for conflict (Blalock, 1967). Several studies have shown that Latino students tend to have more negative perceptions of the campus climate than white students (Hurtado, 1992; Loo & Rolison, 1989). In addition, Latino students are more likely to perceive racial/ethnic tensions in environments where

they do not feel valued by the faculty and administration (Hurtado, 1994). Quintana et al. (1991) also found studies that show students' positive attitudes toward other groups and a secure ethnic identity were associated with lower levels of stress on campus. Therefore, different dimensions of a college's climate that include individual interaction across race/ethnicity, student perceptions of the climate for intergroup relations (racial/ethnic tension), experiences of overt discrimination, as well as the college's structural diversity in terms of Hispanic enrollments may affect Latino student adjustment.

There are additional characteristics of institutions that may impact college adjustment. College selectivity represents the general level of academic ability among the student body and, therefore, may pose challenges to academic adjustment for students. Both selective institutions and private institutions also tend to have distinct racial climates (Hurtado, 1992). College size may be particularly important in college adjustment because it may contribute to students' feelings of anonymity, sense of community, and isolation (Chickering & Reisner, 1993). On the other hand, students are often more satisfied with the diversity of opportunities for student life on large campuses (Astin, 1993). The impact of college size on college adjustment may have much to do with how students make sense of these environments, which is an important aspect of the transition process (Attinasi, 1989). The significant contribution of each of these institutional characteristics to college adjustment were explored in this study.

Although researchers have used a variety of instruments to study college student adjustment in the past, we selected the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) to assess adjustment to typical areas of student concern. Researchers have used the College Adjustment Questionnaire (Thompson & Fretz, 1991), the Student Transition Questionnaire (Chartrand, 1992), or the College Inventory of Academic Adjustment (Borow, 1949 cited in Baker & Siryk, 1984) to study student adjustment. We found that these instruments were either difficult to obtain, no longer in use, or are not widely used on college campuses. More importantly, developers of the SACQ have conceptualized college adjustment as a multifaceted construct whereby students may find ease in some areas and difficulty in other areas of college life (Baker & Siryk, 1989). Developers of the instrument also devote considerable attention to the publication and replication of research results,

updating these periodically by contacting users of the SACQ instrument. For example, one study revealed that sophomores tend to score higher on the SACQ than first year students, and that Hispanics tend to score lower on the SACQ than non-Hispanics (Albert, 1988 cited in Baker & Siryk, 1989). Thus, the SACQ instrument is accompanied by recent research results, norms for specific institutions, and provides helpful information about its use in college counseling. There are some aspects of the first year transition experience, however, that are not currently measured by the SACQ instrument.

Researchers have begun to study a variety of postmatriculation experiences that provide insights into the difficulties and successful strategies individuals use in assuming their new college student roles. First, students must learn how to manage resources such as personal time and financial matters. Specifically, management of personal time is associated with anxiety among undergraduates (Strang, 1981). Financial concerns also create anxiety among students; several studies show that Latinos tend to experience greater levels of stress associated with financial concerns than Anglo students (Quintana, et al, 1991). Another area of transition research involves student separation from the family. On-campus residents tend to be better adjusted to college than commuters (Wilson, Anderson, & Fleming, 1987), but one study qualifies these findings: it is not the actual distance from home that impacts adjustment but the perception of the distance being "just right" (Mooney, Sherman, & Lo Presto, 1991). This supports research that shows students are better adjusted when they maintain residential and economic independence, but also maintain a supportive relationship with parents (Anderson & Fleming, 1986).

Attinasi (1989) highlights a third area of student transition that involves making sense of large, new environments. Students resolve this transition dilemma by finding their niche and learning how to negotiate the physical, social, and cognitive geographies in college. These geographies are negotiated with the help of "peer knowledge sharing" and peer "mentoring" (p. 208), which is an important a strategy for college adjustment. In summary, managing resources, maintaining independence yet sustaining healthy family relationships/support, and success in getting to know their

way around the various geographies of a campus are important transitional experiences in the first year that are hypothesized to have a positive effect on college adjustment in the second year.

Method

Data Sources

This study utilized five primary sources of data focusing on Latino college students who were among the top PSAT achievers identified as semifinalists for a national scholarship award (see Hurtado, 1994 for further details on the design). These national data constitute one of the few panel studies available on a select but important population of Latino students who demonstrate potential for academic success. Although the larger study focused on five cohorts of students, the current study focuses only on the cohort of Latino students who entered four-year colleges in 1991. Precollege information was obtained from the Student Descriptive Questionnaire, a survey administered to students when they took the SAT examination. The survey is designed to obtain information about a student's background, high school preparation, and college preferences. Analyses were limited to cases that had both SDQ data and responses to longitudinal follow-up surveys at two subsequent time points in their college career.

The National Survey of Hispanic Students (NSHS) was developed as a comprehensive longitudinal survey of college student experiences. The survey was sent to student home addresses in the late summer of 1991. A reminder postcard was sent two weeks after the first wave of surveys, and two weeks subsequent, a second survey was sent to nonrespondents' homes. Surveys arrived throughout early Fall of the 1991-1992 academic year, with an overall student response rate of 49%. In addition to the survey data, information about each college attended was linked with data from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Educational Data Systems (IPEDS), *The College Handbook* (1992), and institutional data files maintained by the Higher Education Research Institution at UCLA. For this study we relied primarily on the institutional enrollments and college selectivity data obtained from these sources.

A follow-up of the NSHS was sent to 1,091 students who were members of two cohorts in early 1993. Surveys were sent to parent's homes, college addresses when available, and updated addresses received the summer following administration of the first NSHS survey. Follow-up postcards were sent two weeks after the first wave, and a second survey was sent to nonrespondents four weeks later. Phone calls were made to nonrespondents with valid phone numbers obtained from the first survey. Finally, a third mailing of the survey was sent to nonrespondents in the summer. These efforts produced an overall response rate of 57% for the most recent survey.

The NSHS follow-up was developed specifically to compare students' experiences and attitudes at the end of the second year of college with student responses on the first survey. The follow-up survey used new measures and replicated measures from other research studies, repeated questions from the first survey, and included newly developed measures. We conducted in-depth interviews with minority students, in their first and second year of college, in order to develop additional items regarding their transition experience. We developed a set of items that corresponded with their experience and modeled Attinasi's (1989) concepts of "getting in" and "getting to know" various campus geographies. Additional transition measures include survey items that reflected areas where students appeared to have the most difficulty during the freshman year (e.g. managing time, money, schedules, and issues regarding leaving the family). See Table 1 for all variables, scales, and measures used in the model.

In addition to the NSHS follow-up, students in the 1991 cohort were sent the Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ). The SACQ is a psychometrically -tested instrument, used at many colleges and universities, that was designed to measure how well students adapt to the college experience (Baker & Siryk, 1989). The SACQ measures overall student adjustment and is composed of five main scales: Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Personal-Emotional Adjustment, and Attachment. With few exceptions (Graham, et al., 1985), the SACQ has been used primarily in single-institution studies, and is often administered in classrooms along with other psychometric instruments. This study represents the first administration of the SACQ via mail to Latino students attending a variety of four-year institutions. There was a 51.1% response rate for the

SACQ among the 1991 Latino cohort. While normally administered during the first six weeks of college to assess adjustment (Baker & Siryk, 1989), we administered the SACQ at a later time point to assess different aspects of the first year in relation to adjustment in the second year of college. Scales derived from the SACQ were constructed according to Baker & Siryk's (1989) instructions. Alpha reliabilities for each of the SACQ subscales, reported in Table 1, ranged from .85 to .88 and are similar to those specified in the literature (Baker & Siryk, 1989). This suggests that the SACQ scales are useful for Latino students identified as high achievers in high school and also for the assessment of adjustment in the second year of college.

Sample

Analyses were limited to students who began college in the Fall of 1991 because we were interested in the adjustment of the most recent college entrants among the five NSHS cohorts. We also wished to combine the use of the SACQ instrument with information about their college experiences provided by the NSHS longitudinal data. Only those 203 students who had been matched with each of the other sources of data (SDQ, first NSHS survey, follow-up NSHS survey, institutional data, and SACQ) were selected for analysis. Females constitute 59%, Chicanos 46%, Puerto Ricans 21%, and Other Latinos (including Cubans, Central and South Americans) 33% of the sample.

Analyses

Exploratory factor analyses were conducted, utilizing principal axis factoring and oblique rotation methods, to reduce the number of measured variables for analyses. Items that had a factor score of .35 or over were retained in development of subsequent scales. These results are available in Appendix A-2, along with alpha reliabilities. Multiple regression analyses were conducted to identify the significant determinants of each of the SACQ adjustment subscales. Independent variables that reflected student background characteristics, college structural characteristics, general college climate measures, and student behavior measures were entered in a hierarchical fashion. (See Table 1 for a listing of scales and measures used in the regression models.)

---Place Table 1 about here---

In addition to the regression models, several analyses were conducted to assess student difficulties and facilitators of adjustment. We investigated the relationships between the SACQ adjustment scales and student reports of individuals/offices that assisted them in the first year of college. Partial correlations were conducted, controlling for student background characteristics, to assess the effects of categories of individuals that students identified as facilitating adjustment in college. Content analyses of open-ended questions were also conducted in order to obtain additional information about sources of support and difficulties in college. Categories were developed through an iterative coding process, where members coded the same responses, discussed discrepancies, and re-coded student responses until consensus was developed about the category and the categorization of each student response.

Results

Table 2 shows the results from regressing each of the SACQ adjustment measures (Academic, Social, Personal-Emotional, and Attachment) on student background characteristics, college structural characteristics, college climate measures, and student behaviors during college. Controlling for all measures, results indicate that Chicanos were significantly less likely than other Hispanic ethnic groups to score high on social adjustment in the second year of college. With this one exception, virtually none of the student background characteristics are significantly related to college adjustment. High school grade point average² is not significantly related to academic adjustment in the second year of college. This indicates that differences between colleges and specific college experiences are more likely to directly affect college adjustment than any precollege measures for this specific student population.

² Additional regression analyses were conducted using SAT scores to examine the relationship between prior performance and the SACQ scales. Results confirmed that neither high school GPA nor SAT scores were significant predictors of academic adjustment in the second year. The SAT scores were normally distributed, ruling out the possibility of a restricted range problem.

---Place Table 2 about here---

College size has a significant effect on social adjustment and attachment. However, inspection of the bivariate correlations show that size was not significantly related to these adjustment measures. Once other college experiences are controlled in the regression equations, such as Ease in Getting to Know My Way Around in the Social Adjustment equation and attending a private college in the Attachment equation, we find that size is positively correlated with these two adjustment outcomes. This is called a suppressor effect, where the relationship between the two independent variables (e.g. size and private control of the college) hides or suppresses their real relationships with the dependent measures (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Such a positive effect of size would not be immediately evident in a single institution study, nor studies that neglect to control for a number of college experience measures in a multivariate analysis. This finding indicates that students attending large institutions reported high social adjustment and attachment, once other measures were controlled in the study. The implications of this finding will be detailed in the discussion section of this paper.

Students who attended private colleges tended to score significantly higher on SACQ measures for social adjustment and attachment. In addition, students who attended institutions with higher Hispanic enrollments were more likely to report ease in academic adjustment in their second year of college. No other additional college structural characteristics had a significant relationship with the adjustment measures.

Each of the college climate measures were significantly associated with different types of college adjustment. Latino perceptions of a student-centered faculty and administration were positively associated with Academic Adjustment. In contrast, perceptions of a hostile climate for diversity were negatively associated with all adjustment measures. Specifically, perceptions of racial/ethnic tension were negatively associated with Personal-Emotional, Academic, Social Adjustment and Attachment. Students who actually reported experiences of discrimination also tended to score significantly lower on the Attachment scale.

Many student behaviors during the first and second year are positively associated with adjustment, suggesting that some of these experiences are important mediating experiences that facilitate successful adjustment to college. Managing such resources as time, money, and schedules and perceiving the amount of school work as manageable in the first year were positively associated with academic and personal-emotional adjustment in the second year. Interaction with faculty in the second year is also associated with academic adjustment, although the causal relationship between these measures is less clear because they were measured at the same time point. Maintaining family support in the first year was positively associated with personal-emotional adjustment. The Ease in Getting to Know My Way Around scale was positively related with the Social Adjustment and Attachment scales. The amount of time socializing with friends in the first year was also positively associated with Social Adjustment. These results indicate important transitional experiences that affect adjustment in the second year of college.

In addition to those experiences that are important to adjustment, we examined information regarding assistance from individuals associated with the college. Table 3 shows partial correlation results that reveal the relationship between the SACQ scales and people/offices that made it easier for the students to adjust in their first year. The partial correlations were completed controlling for gender, ethnicity, SES, and high school GPA. Of the categories of individuals/offices listed, five had significant effects on students' adjustment. Resident advisors, academic counselors, and upperclass students all had positive influence on students' adjustment to the institution. Students who reported that resident advisors and upperclass students assisted in their first year scored higher on the Social Adjustment and Attachment scales in the second year of college. Resident advisors and other upperclass students can help students become familiar with social activities, the environment, and new relationships on campus. These individuals can help first year students feel comfortable in their new environment.

---Place Table 3 about here---

There is a positive relationship between those students who felt their academic counselors helped them adjust and the Academic Adjustment and Attachment scales in the second year. However, students who felt that other freshmen assisted in their adjustment in the first year tended to be less well-adjusted academically in the second year of college. This is preliminary evidence that suggests that students may need the guidance and support of upperclass students or peer "mentors" and staff members for successful academic adjustment.

Additionally, students who felt their peer advisors were most helpful in their first year scored lower on the Social Adjustment scale. This finding could be an artifact of the type of student who sought help and the kind of peer advisors they sought. Some students may face continuing social adjustment problems despite seeking help in the first year; in fact, these students may be more adjusted than they would have been if they had not sought help at all. Students may also not have sought the correct form of assistance, as the survey does not clarify the nature of these peer advisors. They are distinct, however, from resident assistants and other upper class students who both have significant positive effects on adjustment.

Open-Ended Responses

Several open-ended questions were utilized in the NSHS follow-up in order to assess student perceptions of challenges, support, and climate issues in the transition process. Up to four responses were listed for each question which were then coded, categorized, and frequencies were tabulated. Much of the student responses support and reinforce statistical analyses.

When asked, "What was the most difficult aspect of your first year?", 68% of the students responded to this question in various ways (Table 4). According to most responses (26.2 %), academic adjustment during the first year was the most difficult. Maintaining social relationships such as those between college peers, family, and friends were also a common difficulty (24.1% of the responses). In addition, 15.6% of the responses cited time management as very difficult in the first year.

---Place Table 4 about here---

As stated, some of the most frequently cited responses included academic adjustment (level of difficulty and amount of work). Students indicated that most difficulties were due to new performance standards: "Not getting the grades I was used to. I was never at the bottom of a bell curve before." They were also no longer at the top of the class. One student recalled, "Feeling adequate in a situation where everyone else has achieved as much as you or more."

Additionally, students responded that maintaining and establishing relationships (with family, friends, and peers) was problematic. Some felt the most difficulty in:

Getting a support system together. When I got stressed out I didn't want to go crying and complaining to my new friends or home to my family. Now I do though.

The third most frequently described difficulty for these students was managing time. In fact, students in the second year continue to struggle with time management concerns:

Learning to manage my time to do all my work and still be involved. I still have trouble.

Learning to manage time effectively [was the most difficult aspect of my first year]. There are a lot of distractions at school.

Several students also cited the climate for diversity, ethnic/cultural adjustment, and recognition of inequality as a difficulty in their first year. The most difficult transition issues for some students entailed:

[The] Social aspect--[the] attitude of students here was much colder and less caring than in my own violent neighborhood.

Realizing that my life would be a struggle because of the way the system is biased against my ethnicity.

Being treated as inferior by people who only knew that I was a Hispanic (like they didn't know that I did have a brain and some morals and a good upbringing.)

Being so far away from my family and my (Chicano/Mexican) culture made me feel lonely and often times actually depressed.

In order to understand individuals who were influential in helping students through these difficulties, another question was posed, "Who provided the most support for you during your freshman year?" (Table 5). The student response rate for this question was 87%. The majority of responses revealed that students felt college peers provided the most support (40.9%), family was the

next most frequent response (28.3%), and friends (unspecified) were the third most frequently cited source of support (14.8%).

---Place Table 5 about here---

Overwhelmingly, responses stated that college peers including upperclass students, other freshmen, roommates, boyfriends/girlfriends, and residence hall staff provided the most support.

The upperclass Latino students took me under their wing academically and socially.

[The most support came from] fellow students and knowing that other students had the same troubles and concerns I had. We students would talk to each other about school, family, problems, etc., offering each other support and friendship.

Another strong area of support for students during their transition from high school was their family (28.3% of all responses). Students indicated:

My family provided the emotional and [psychological] support that I found so essential. Other Chicanas from the Southwest at my college also helped me cope with being there.

My family [provided the most support]. My grades were there, but my family knew I was homesick and did everything they could to assure me that it was a worthwhile sacrifice.

The responses offered by students in the open-ended questions added to our knowledge base concerning challenges that students faced, people and offices on campus that provided the most support, and perceptions of campus climate. These results point to issues on campus and factors off campus that are influential in providing support and assisting the transition process in the first year. The support of family is clearly a key factor for this population of students and is something that was not especially anticipated when initially conceptualizing the survey. The complexity of difficulties and student strategies for success is difficult to conceptualize from our standpoint as college researchers, which necessitates the collection and combined reporting of qualitative and quantitative results.

Discussion

This study provides insights into the transition experiences and the adjustment of Latino students in the second year of college. Based on prior research, college adjustment was conceptualized in this study as a multi-faceted phenomenon that is characterized by the resolution of psychological distress or transitional trauma. We assessed individual attributes, college structural and climate characteristics, and student transition behaviors in order to understand both the difficulties and facilitators of college adjustment in four areas: academic, social, personal-emotional, and attachment to the institution. The Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire proved to be a reliable indicator of adjustment for this population and was especially useful in combination with longitudinal survey data that examined specific dimensions of the Latino college experience. These instruments provided information about typical adjustment concerns common to most college students, as well as issues that may pose particular problems for minority students on predominantly white campuses.

We found confirmation for Smedley et al.'s (1993) findings which revealed a significant contribution of climate-related minority status stressors, over and above some of the typical transitional difficulties. Experiences of discrimination have a depressing effect on Latino students' feelings of attachment to the institution; however, it was the perception of racial/ethnic tension that was directly associated with lower levels of personal-emotional adjustment, attachment to the institution, and (to a lesser extent) adjustment in the academic and social arenas. Thus, it is not just the overt experiences of discrimination that require our attention, but rather, attention to the more subtle forms of intergroup dynamics that can undermine all forms of college adjustment for Latino students. The measure of racial/ethnic tension in this study captures subtle intergroup dynamics on campus. Even the most talented Latinos are likely to have difficulty adjusting if they perceive a climate where majority students think all minorities are special admits, Hispanics feel like they do not "fit in," groups lack good communication, there is group conflict, and a lack of trust between minority students and the administration. Students may internalize these climate observations, presumably because these are more difficult to dismiss or sanction than overt forms of discrimination. One way to mediate the effects of negative racial climates is to develop programs that seek to change

these intergroup dynamics by providing opportunities for majority and minority students to discuss their perceptions, misconceptions, and achieve a better understanding of each other through intergroup dialogue (Zúñiga & Nagda, 1993).

Developing programs for increased communication between student groups provides a more thoughtful solution than simply requiring Latinos to "integrate" themselves among majority students. While a small proportion (four percent) of student responses highlighted difficulty in the areas of ethnic/cultural adjustment, there is no clear evidence in this study to support the idea that increased "racial/ethnic mixing" will result in acculturation and consequently successful college adjustment among Latinos. Latino students who interacted frequently with other racial/ethnicity groups were not significantly more likely to demonstrate higher levels of college adjustment. However, we do need additional information about variations in college adjustment that may be related to cultural differences among Latino ethnic groups. We recommend further research on the unique experiences of Chicano students, for example, who tend to demonstrate lower levels of social adjustment in comparison to other Latino groups in this study.

Aside from these specific aspects of the minority experience on campus, we found that aspects of the general transition experience were key to college adjustment in subsequent years. Successful management of student resources (time, schedules, and finances) in the first year has a strong impact on academic and personal-emotional adjustment in the second year of college. Latinos who experienced less difficulty in the first year with the level and amount of school work also demonstrated high levels of personal-emotional adjustment and academic adjustment in the second year. Students who successfully negotiated the physical, social and cognitive geographies on campus (on the Ease in Getting to Know My Way Around scale) had significantly higher social adjustment and attachment to the institution. It should also be noted that the positive effect of college size on adjustment was contingent upon the successful negotiation of these campus geographies (evidenced by the suppressor effects in the regression equation). This supports the idea proposed by Attinasi (1989) which suggest that students make sense of large environments by locating themselves within more manageable campus geographies. These findings emphasize the need to direct further college

programs toward monitoring of student resource management, academic workloads, and assisting students in becoming familiar with the campus environment.

One of the clear facilitators of student adjustment involves the nature of affiliations that students develop with peers (both within ethnic groups and across ethnic groups). The results revealed how important upperclass students are to a student's adjustment to the campus community. Upperclass students and resident advisors are individuals who were at least a year older than the students in our study, and their influence is significantly related to the students' social adjustment and attachment. These findings reinforce the importance of 'peer knowledge' sharing and peer 'mentors' (Attinasi, 1989). However, we found some evidence that suggests that students who rely solely on their freshman peers for support in the area of academic adjustment may be ultimately disadvantaged. Exclusive associations with other first year students may provide some level of support but these do not provide the support students need to make positive changes in their academic habits. Students indicated that academic counselors were particularly important in facilitating their academic adjustment and attachment to the institution.

Students' responses on open-ended questions revealed, that in addition to the help of peers, the support of their family was an important aspect of college adjustment in the first year. Quantitative results verified better personal-emotional adjustment among students who had an easy time separating from the family while also maintaining family relationships and support. This research indicates that students may be better adjusted when they maintain independence, but also maintain a supportive relationship with parents (Anderson & Fleming, 1986). This may be one reason why the distance from home or residing on campus were not significant indicators of adjustment. Maintaining quality student-parent relationships as well as adequate personal autonomy are more influential in the transition process.

Academic adjustment to college in the second year was not significantly related to any of the precollege indicators, presumably because many of the key experiences that occur in the first year have more of an impact on subsequent years in college. For example, becoming accustomed in the first year to the amount and level of school work, managing resources (time, schedules, and finances),

and the structural diversity of the institution are more important to academic adjustment. Latinos who attend colleges where they perceive a student-centered faculty and administration, and have opportunities for interaction with faculty are more likely to be academically-adjusted in the second year. High school grade point average is not directly related to academic adjustment for this Latino sample. Thompson & Fretz, (1991) also found that standardized high school grade point averages were not significantly related to academic or social adjustment for African American freshmen. This suggests that academic adjustment for minority students is not directly related to prior high school performance, yet we leave open the possibility for testing indirect relationships in the future.

In summary, it appears that students' in-college experiences affect their adjustment far more than student background characteristics. Given this, there is some merit to monitoring the college adjustment process in variety of student life domains, either through counseling or the use of psychometric instruments. Monitoring adjustment is a useful strategy for administrators, institutional researchers, and faculty who wish to improve their student retention rates. For institutions with high first-year retention rates, we suggest the development of programs directed at improving second year college experiences in addition to extensive freshman year programming. Second year students are about to undergo a second transition in preparation for the major, and negative campus experiences and unresolved difficulties will only create additional trauma. Those who wish to improve college adjustment, however, must also look beyond individual factors to consider aspects of the campus climate that may need improvement for the success and valuing of all students.

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Table 1. Measures, Scales: Means and Standard Deviations

	Mean	S.D.
Dependent Student Adjustment Measures *		
Academic Adjustment	148.14	28.96
Social Adjustment	130.69	26.96
Personal-Emotional Adjustment	87.02	22.21
Attachment	107.95	18.08
Student Background Characteristics		
Gender	1.59	.49
Latino ethnic group	1.46	.50
	1.21	.41
SES	14.94	5.44
Distance of the college from home	4.71	1.82
Cumulative grade point average in high school	8.95	1.19
College Structural Characteristics		
Selectivity	1139.03	157.28
Size of college	8906.42	7340.98
College control type (private college)	1.63	.49
Hispanic undergraduate enrollment (structural diversity)	1006.26	2122.23
General College Climate Measures		
Student centered faculty and administration	2.87	.59
Perceptions of racial/ethnic tension	2.26	.68
Experienced discrimination	1.24	.33
Student Behaviors		
Campus residence	1.79	.41
Ease in getting to know my way around	2.95	.61
Managing resources	2.39	.78
Amount of schoolwork	1.87	.55
Maintaining family relationships and support	2.68	.66
Interacted across racial/ethnic groups	2.38	.52
Interaction with faculty	1.92	.41
Socializing with friends	3.57	.99

* Note: Psychometric measures developed in Baker(1989), *Student Adaptation to College Questionnaire*.



Table 2. Regression of Dependent Measures on Student and Institutional Characteristics

	SACO Adjustment Measures							
	Academic Adjustment		Social Adjustment		Personal-Emotional		Attachment	
	b	B	b	B	b	B	b	B
Student Background Characteristics								
Gender	.84	.01	2.93	.06	-5.04	-.11	1.33	.04
Chicano	-6.39	-.11	-6.89	-.13*	-1.16	-.03	-3.34	-.09
Puerto Rican	-3.94	-.06	-.96	-.02	-4.29	-.08	-3.17	-.07
SES	.16	.03	-.03	-.01	.12	.03	-.12	-.04
Distance of the college from home	.63	.04	1.64	.11	.93	.08	.67	.07
Cumulative grade point average in high school	1.12	.05	-.70	-.03	-1.31	-.07	-.75	-.05
College Structural Characteristics								
Selectivity	-.00	-.02	-.01	-.07	.01	.10	.00	.01
Size of college	.00	.04	.00	.20*	.00	-.01	.00	.28**
College control type	5.64	.09	12.06	.23**	-.87	-.02	10.97	.29**
Hispanic undergraduate enrollment (structural diversity)	.00	.16*	.00	.07	1.09	.01	.00	.09
General College Climate Measures								
Student centered faculty and administration	6.49	.13*	2.74	.06	3.35	.09	2.64	.09
Perceptions of racial/ethnic tension	-6.74	-.16*	-6.32	-.16*	-7.74	-.24**	5.43	-.20**
Experienced discrimination	-.69	-.01	-5.05	-.06	-1.86	-.03	-9.75	-.18*
Student Behaviors								
Campus Residence	-1.57	-.02	5.40	.08	.78	.01	6.76	.15
Ease in getting to know my way around	5.18	.11	12.55	.29***	1.43	.04	7.93	.26***
Managing resources	0.63	.29***	2.07	.06	5.47	.19**	1.40	.06
Amount of school work	8.66	.16*	-1.96	-.04	11.35	.28**	-2.98	-.09
Maintaining family relationships and support	.88	.02	3.95	.10	5.12	.15*	.87	.03
Interacted across racial/ethnic groups	-1.44	-.03	3.76	.07	-2.56	-.06	-1.22	-.03
Interacted with faculty	9.72	.14*	4.68	.07	-2.69	-.05	-1.92	-.04
Socializing with friends	.44	.02	5.31	.20***	.06	.00	1.63	.09
R square	.45		.42		.39		.36	

Note: B represents standardized regression coefficients. * indicates $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; *** $p \leq .001$.

**Table 3. Partial Correlations Coefficients: People Who Helped Students Adjust During First Year by SACQ Scales
(Controlling for Gender, Ethnicity, SES, and High School GPA)**

	Academic	Social	Personal/Emotional	Attachment
Resident Advisor	.02	.22**	-.05	.19**
Faculty Advisor	.08	-.02	.01	.12
Academic Counselor	.19**	.12	.08	.20**
Career Counselor	.05	-.04	.02	.01
Personal Counselor	-.10	-.15	-.06	-.06
Financial Aid Counselor	.09	.05	.02	.08
Peer Advisor	.10	-.14*	-.04	-.06
Upperclass Students	.05	.20**	-.01	.19**
Other Freshman Students	-.14**	.10	-.05	.05

NOTE: *p≤.05, **p≤.01, ***p≤.001

Table 4. Summary of Responses: What Was the Most Difficult Aspect of First Year
 Response rate to item: 68%

Most Difficult:	N:	Percentage:
Academic Adjustment	187	26.2
Social Relationships	172	24.1
Time Management	111	15.6
General Adjustment to Environment	81	11.4
Financial Aid/Money/Working	52	7.2
Ethnic/Cultural Adjustment	30	4.2
Outsider (being alone, not being accepted)	25	3.5
Health	20	2.8
Geographic Adjustment	14	2.0
Transportation	11	1.5
No Difficulties	8	1.1
Historical Events	2	.2

Note: Up to four multiple responses to the question were tabulated for each case for a total of 713 responses

Table 5. Summary of Responses: Who Provided the Most Support During First Year
 Response rate to item: 87%

Most Support:	N:	Percentage:
College Peers (boy-/girlfriend, roommates, other students)	347	40.9
Family	240	28.3
Friends (non-specific)	126	14.8
Administration and Faculty	61	7.2
High school friends, teachers, counselors (outside college)	31	3.7
Myself	26	3.1
Other	18	2.1

Note: Up to four multiple responses to the question were tabulated for each case for a total of 849 responses

Table A-1. Factors Used in Analyses

Factors and Survey Items	Factor Loading	Internal Consistency (Alpha)
Socioeconomic Status:		.78
Parental income ^a		
Level of Mother's education ^a		
Level of Father's education ^a		
Student Centered Faculty and Administration		.79
Faculty here are strongly interested in the academic problems of undergraduates ^b	.74	
Faculty here are interested in students' personal problems ^b	.67	
Campus administrators care little about what happens to students (Reversed for analyses) ^{b f}	-.62	
Administrators consider student concerns when making policy ^b	.57	
Faculty are committed to the welfare of this institution ^b	.55	
Perceptions of Racial/ethnic Tension		.80
Most students at this institution believe that minorities were special admits ^b	.68	
Many Hispanic students feel like they do not "fit in" on this campus ^b	.68	
Students of different racial/ethnic origins communicate well with one another (Reversed for analyses) ^{b f}	-.68	
There is a lot of campus racial conflict here ^b	.67	
There is little trust between minority student groups and campus administrators ^b	.59	
Experienced Discrimination/Exclusion		.61
Felt excluded from school activities because of your Hispanic background ^c	.64	
Were insulted or threatened by other students because of your Hispanic background ^c	.63	
Heard faculty make inappropriate remarks regarding minorities ^c	.48	
Felt pressure to socialize only with other Hispanic students ^c	.42	
Interacted Across Racial/ethnic Groups		.71
Dined with someone from a different racial/ethnic group ^c	.76	
Studied with someone from a different racial/ethnic group ^c	.64	
Had a roommate from a different racial/ethnic group ^c	.51	
Dated someone from a different racial/ethnic group ^c	.43	
Managing Resources		.77
Staying on a schedule ^d	.91	
Managing my time effectively ^d	.84	
Managing my money effectively ^d	.49	
Ease in Getting To Know My Way Around		.66
Seeking help when I need it ^d	.84	
Getting to know my way around ^d	.54	
Communicating with instructors ^d	.53	
Making new friends ^d	.39	

Table A-1. Factors Used in Analyses (continued)

Factors and Survey Items	Factor Loading	Internal Consistency (Alpha)
Interaction with Faculty		
Talked with faculty outside of class ^c	.81	
Time spent talking with teachers outside of class ^e	.49	
Been a guest in a professor's home ^c	.46	
Had a class paper critiqued by an instructor ^c	.39	
Socializing With Friends		
Time spent partying ^e	.70	.59
Time spent socializing with friends ^e	.56	
Amount of School work		
Ease of level of difficulty of school work ^b	.83	.72
Amount of school work ^b	.79	
Felt overwhelmed by all I had to do (Reversed for analysis) ^{c f}	-.43	
Maintaining Family Relationships and Support^c		
Being separated from family ^d	.62	.65
Felt lonely or homesick (Reversed for analyses) ^{c f}	-.71	
Maintaining family relationships ^d	.45	

Note:

- a Factor from Hurtado (1993)
- b Four-point scale: From "Disagree strongly"=1 to "Agree strongly"=4
- c Three-point scale: From "Not at all"=1 to "Frequently"=3
- d Four-point scale: From "Very difficult"=1 to "Very easy"=4
- e Six-point scale: From "none"=1 to "20+ hours"=6
- f Oblique rotation reverses the sign of the factor in the estimation process. As the factor name implies, all were positively scaled for subsequent analyses.