University of Arkansas-Cossatot:

Barriers Facing Hispanic or Latino Students Seeking Post-Secondary Education

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University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service
ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS-COSSATOT

UA-Cossatot is an NCA-accredited two-year institution affiliated with the University of Arkansas System. It was founded in 1975 and has campuses in De Queen, Nashville and Ashdown, Arkansas. UA-Cossatot offers degrees and certificates in more than two dozen fields. The College also offers four Associate’s degrees completely online, and has a roster of more than 60 online courses. **UA-Cossatot embraces diversity and is committed to improving the lives for those in our region by providing quality education, outstanding service, and relevant industry training.** For more information on UA-Cossatot please visit: http://www.cccua.edu

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.................................................................................................................4
Abstract ........................................................................................................................................6

Project Description....................................................................................................................7

Literature Review ........................................................................................................................9
  Profile of Hispanic or Latino Students ......................................................................................9
  First Generation College Students ..........................................................................................11
  Barriers of Hispanic or Latino Immigrants ...............................................................................13
  Potential Legal Issues ...............................................................................................................15
  Successful Case Studies ..........................................................................................................17

Methodology ................................................................................................................................19
  The Sample ...............................................................................................................................19
  The Research Instruments .......................................................................................................20
  The Facilitation ........................................................................................................................21
  The Data ....................................................................................................................................21

Results ..........................................................................................................................................22
  Participants ...............................................................................................................................22
  Importance, Interest, and Intentions ..........................................................................................23
  Discouragements and Barriers to Pursuing Post-Secondary Education .....................................26
  Important Criteria Involved in College Decisions ....................................................................38
  UA-Cossatot ..............................................................................................................................40

Discussion.....................................................................................................................................42
  Limitations and Potential Biases ..............................................................................................42
  Best Practices ...........................................................................................................................45
  Potential Future Research .........................................................................................................46

Conclusion .....................................................................................................................................48

References .....................................................................................................................................49

Appendix A: Survey Instrument .................................................................................................53
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions .........................................................................................66
Appendix C: Figures .....................................................................................................................67
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Abstract

We, a team of University of Arkansas Clinton School of Public Service students, gathered first-hand perspectives of barriers facing Hispanic or Latino students when pursuing post-secondary education. We researched eleventh and twelfth grade students at De Queen High School to gain insight from upcoming graduates. The investigation involved 24 focus groups and 137 surveys at the school. The data we collected offers compelling evidence concerning the importance of post-secondary education and the barriers for Hispanic or Latino students when pursuing post-secondary education. These barriers included costs, the need for earlier intervention, college information access, family concerns, and immigration status when considering UA-Cossatot or other post-secondary education opportunities. Although most students are interested in pursuing post-secondary education, many felt they lacked the information and the resources needed to actually apply and make the transition. We hope the “University of Arkansas-Cossatot: Barriers Facing Hispanic Students Seeking Post-Secondary Education” report we produced will help our partner organization, UA-Cossatot, advocate for its mission to enhance and expand post-secondary education opportunities for Hispanic and Latino students.
Project Description

We worked with the University of Arkansas (UA)-Cossatot, an accredited two-year University of Arkansas System institution based in De Queen, Arkansas, to help better meet the needs of graduating local Hispanic or Latino high school students. In order to determine the needs of the students, we worked with the faculty and staff of De Queen High School to learn what barriers local Hispanic or Latino students may face with regard to pursuing post-secondary education. We used surveys and focus groups. This combination of methods allowed us to reach a large number of students as well as gain a rich narrative of the barriers faced and how those barriers affected the post-secondary decisions of De Queen Hispanic or Latino students. We used the research instruments to gauge students’ perceptions of college, their interest and intention to apply, college preparation, and potential barriers to pursuing post-secondary education. We were specifically interested in uncovering the barriers to pursuing post-secondary education with UA-Cossatot.

UA-Cossatot has seen record enrollment over the years, yet the Hispanic or Latino student population does not reflect the demographic of the De Queen community (Cossatot Community College, 2013; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). At 19%, UA-Cossatot has the highest percentage of Hispanic or Latino enrollment of any UA system school (S. Cole, personal communication, Sept. 10, 2013). However, this percentage does not reflect the high percentage of Hispanic or Latino students finishing high school in the De Queen area. Fifty-three percent of the students at De Queen High School are Hispanic or Latino students, compared to a state average of 10% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2011). In the city of De Queen, 53.5% of the population identify as Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). We sought to identify why students are not choosing to pursue post-secondary education with UA-Cossatot, or
in some cases, to pursue post-secondary education at all. Through our findings, the team may have the ability to elicit social change by helping UA-Cossatot better serve Hispanic or Latino students by outlining the educational, social, and financial needs of the Hispanic or Latino community in De Queen, Arkansas.

Data from the surveys and focus groups were aggregated and given to the Chancellor of UA-Cossatot. He may use the data conjointly with other departments within the college such as those involved with recruiting, marketing, and admissions in order to develop procedures and policies to better suit the needs of current and future Hispanic or Latino students. The data may also be shared with other colleges and universities. Additionally, the results of the study may be published in an academic journal and/or presented at a conference by UA-Cossatot staff. Many programs for helping high school students reach post-secondary education exist (e.g. Thaler & Sunstein, 2009; Excelencia in Education, 2010; Excelencia in Education 2013a; Excelencia in Education 2013b). These programs have focused on issues of barriers facing immigrants and first-generation college students, including Hispanic or Latino immigrants. However, these programs have been implemented in urban, metropolitan, and northeast environments. The De Queen, Arkansas demographic of Hispanic or Latino high school students is unique in that it is a rural and southwestern Arkansas town. The project team’s work reflected the barriers facing this specific Hispanic and Latino demographic.

On a larger level, these findings may also assist other rural areas to understand the barriers Hispanic and/or Latino communities face when pursuing post-secondary education. According to Farmer, Moon, and Miller (2007) with the University of Arkansas Department of Agriculture, Arkansas has experienced dramatic increases in its Hispanic or Latino population. Between 1990 and 2006, the Hispanic or Latino population in the state has increased by more
than 600% (p. 1). Although this growth has created diversity in local communities, it has challenged schools to provide educational opportunities for the growing Hispanic or Latino population (Farmer, Moon, & Miller, 2007).

**Literature Review**

The literature often describes Hispanic students as a part of the more broadly defined Latino population. Although our research in De Queen will relate to those students identifying as Hispanic or Latino, in many cases the terms “Hispanic” and/or “Latino”¹ are used in the literature independently.

In 2003 Hispanics and/or Latinos surpassed blacks as the largest national minority (Tienda & Mitchell, 2006). Although the share of Hispanic and/or Latino adults, ages 25 and older, with bachelor’s degrees doubled from 5% in 1970 to 10% in 2000, this growth has been much slower than that of white or black adults (U.S. Census Bureau, 2003). The percentage of whites with bachelor’s degrees grew by 145%, and the percentage of blacks with bachelor’s degrees grew by 250% during the same time period. To help better understand the context of this research, potential barriers faced by the Hispanic or Latino student population including immigration, first-generation college student challenges, potential legal issues, and similar successful projects should be considered.

**Profile of Hispanic or Latino Students**

¹ In order to avoid misrepresenting the findings in the literature or unfairly generalizing about the population, the terminology relating to each source reflects the terminology used in that source. For example, information in an article that mentions only “Hispanic” students has been presented as “Hispanic” students rather than “Hispanic or Latino” students.
Program and policy efforts are often led by a “limited and inaccurate” profile of Latino students (Santiago, 2011, p. 8). While it is commonly assumed that the majority of Latinos are “immigrants, high school dropouts, and English language learners,” the majority of Latinos in the U.S. are “native-born, high school graduates, and English language dominant” (p. 8). For example, in 2007 60% of Hispanics in the U.S. were U.S.-born, and 80% of Latino school-age children were found to have little to no trouble speaking English. Santiago notes that although high school completion among Hispanics is increasing, Hispanics are more likely to be assigned to lower-level academic tracks during high school, affecting the level of college preparation they receive.

Regarding college enrollment, the rate at which Hispanic high school graduates attend college is lower than for non-Hispanic high school graduates. Only 37% of all Latino high school graduates, including Hispanic graduates, between the ages of 18 and 24 are enrolled in college, compared to 40% of black and 49% of white high school graduates (Reyes & Nora, 2012 pg. 2). Additionally, only one in ten Latino adults, including Hispanic adults, between the ages of 18 and 24 hold a college degree. These students are also more likely to be the first in their families to enroll in college and are more likely to enroll part-time than other ethnic groups (Santiago, 2011). Almost half of Hispanic students enrolled in college are enrolled in community colleges. Hispanic students also tend to enroll where they live more than other students. “In 2008, 93% of Latino students attended institutions in their state of legal residence.” (Santiago, 2011, p.9)

According to Santiago, over 75% of Hispanic students work at least part-time during their enrollment. They also tend to receive lower financial aid than the average aid among all students, with the exception of work-study aid, despite greater percentages of Hispanic students having lower family incomes. Santiago’s profile of Hispanic students outlines some initial barriers that
may be faced by the general Hispanic student population of De Queen.

**First Generation College Students**

During the 2007-2008 academic year, approximately half of all Latino college students had parents whose highest level of education was a high school diploma or less (Reyes & Nora, 2012, p. 2). Parental education can have a powerful influence on the level of schooling children complete (Alon, Domina, & Tienda, 2010). Parental education can serve as a sort of achievement “floor below which offspring are not likely to fall” (p.1808). Reyes and Nora (2012) define students whose parents did not enroll in college and/or whose parents did not graduate from college as “first-generation students” (p.3). Children of parents who lack college degrees are less likely to pursue post-secondary education than children of college-educated parents. In 1994, 93% of high-school graduates whose parents had some sort of college education were enrolled in a post-secondary institution; however, only 59% of first-generation students were enrolled. Additionally, college-educated parents are better able to express their expectations for post-secondary achievement for their children from an early age (Alon, Domina, & Tienda, 2010). College-educated parents have a better understanding of post-secondary admissions processes, funding options, and general environment.

In a study for Texas A&M, Christopher Teran (2007) found significant differences between first-generation and non-first-generation students. Across ethnic groups, first-generation students take fewer college preparation courses than their non-first-generation counterparts. First-generation students also reported feeling less prepared for college. In the study “First-Generation College Students: Additional Evidence on College Experiences and Outcomes,” the barriers faced by first-generation students are compared to their college peers (Pascarella, Pierson, Wolniak, & Terenzini, 2004). Traditionally, first-generation students confront more
emotional and cultural challenges when transitioning from secondary school to college compared to their peers. According to Pascarella et al. (2004), “These investigations consistently indicate that, compared to students whose parents are college graduates, first-generation students are more likely to leave a four-year institution at the end of the first year, less likely to remain enrolled in a four-year institution or be on a persistence track to a bachelor's degree after three years, and are less likely to stay enrolled or attain a bachelor's degree after five years” (p. 250). Moreover, first-generation college students are less likely to enroll in graduate or professional programs four to five years after graduation compared to students whose parents have college degrees (Pascarella et al., 2004).

In addition to facing different barriers, first-generation students also tend to experience college differently than other students. Pascarella et al. (2004) found that first-generation students gleaned significantly greater positive benefits from involvement in extracurricular activities. First-generation students also experienced greater developmental benefits from arts, math, science, and engineering classes than other students. In turn, technical and/or pre-professional courses tended to have stronger negative effects on “science reasoning, writing skills, and learning for self-understanding” for first-generation students than for other students (p. 274). When compared to other students, first-generation students also tended to work more hours per week during college. Their work responsibilities tended to have “stronger negative implications” for their growth during their time at college (p. 273). The research concludes that the level of parental post-secondary education significantly affects the decisions of students regarding college decisions and the experience students have once in college.

If the college enrollment and achievement gaps for Hispanics are to close in accordance with the nation’s degree attainment goals, it seems that more Hispanic students from first-
generation college backgrounds must gain greater access to and success in college (Reyes & Nora, 2012 pg. 2). A study of a program for college-bound Hispanic students in Heritage High School, a large public school in a metropolitan area in the northeastern United States found that Hispanic students entered the program with a “vague desire” to further their studies through college, but lacked the information and preparation required to pursue a college education or plan for a professional career (Abi-Nader, 1990, p. 49).

**Barriers of Hispanic or Latino Immigrants**

Hispanic or Latino immigrant students face additional barriers beyond those of their non-immigrant peers. According to a report published by the American Council on Education (2011), the following barriers have been identified:

**Age at immigration.** According to the American Counsel on Education, most Hispanic immigrants enter the United States around age nine or older and attain the same academic success as American-born children (ACE, 2011). However, immigrant youth that enter the country later in childhood “are four times as likely to drop out of school as those who arrive early in childhood (33% vs. 8%)” (para. 5).

**Schooling in country of origin.** Immigrants who struggled with education in their home country are less likely to enroll when they enter the United States. If they were not actively involved in a successful education pattern before they arrive, they are less likely to enroll in American schools upon arrival. The American Counsel on Education notes that of “Hispanic young adults aged 18 to 24 who do not hold a high school credential, 46% have never attended a school since arriving in the United States” (para. 5).

**Language barrier.** Among Hispanic immigrant households, only four percent use English as the primary at-home language, compared with 39% for U.S.-born Hispanics. Seven
out of every 10 Hispanic immigrant adults who have less than a high school education do not speak English well, if at all (para. 6).

Pressing economic needs. The large workforce among Hispanic immigrants focuses on low-skill, low-wage trades. This limits the possibility of seeking post-secondary education due to expenses, especially the ones associated with conventional education (para. 6).

Legal status. The previously mentioned ideas can be even more perplexing for undocumented citizens, subjugating them into very trying circumstances. Typically, they do not have as much schooling and are known to work more low-paying jobs than legal immigrants. ACE reports, “As of 2008, about 12 million people in the United States were estimated to be without legal status, making up about 30% of the immigrant population” (para .5).

To further examine the barriers facing Latino students from post-secondary education. Atiles, Bohon, and Macpherson (2005) published an article entitled “Educational Barriers for New Latinos in Georgia.” The article cites two major barriers, according to respondents they interviewed in the state of Georgia: “a lack of knowledge” and a “lack of eligibility” (p. 54).

According to the article, counselors also share the blame in not helping Latino students gather information about college careers. The authors continue to argue that when it comes to providing knowledge to Latino students on options for college, there are not enough trained staff or counselors for all students (Atiles et al., 2005). Many counselors are not aware of available grants for Latinos, do not focus on Latino-specific opportunities, and lack the adequate tools to help parents assist their children. A general disconnect between school staff, parents, and students attributes to the problem. “Parents don’t know what kind of questions to ask, they don’t know how to fill out the paperwork for it, they don’t know where that research is for them to get it ... they don’t know where they can go to college and get it all paid because they are Latino”
At the time of this research Bohon and Macpherson criticized Georgia’s lack of low-cost college options. Georgia, the 10th most populous state in 2005, accounted for only 15 two-year colleges at that time; however, its neighbor North Carolina, a state nearly equal in population at had 58 two-year colleges (Atiles et al., 2005, p. 55; Community College Policy Center, 2004). This affects Latino students directly because Latinos were more likely than most ethnic groups to enroll in a 2-year college (Lowell & Suro, 2002). Furthermore, “The absence of an adequate junior college system in Georgia may limit Latino post-secondary education options, especially for the poor” (Lowell & Suro, 2002; Atiles et al., 2005, p. 55).

The researchers found that the “technical colleges rarely offer a curriculum that the Latino parents [saw] as valuable for their sons” (Atiles et al., 2005, p. 55). Focus group participants shared that the only offered courses were in “business administration, nursing, and day care licensing” which they assumed would not be useful professions for men (Atiles et al., 2005, p. 55). The parents wanted more “practical,” vocational options such as “automobile repair, electronics, and computers” (Atiles et al., 2005, p. 55).

Potential Legal Issues

Hispanic students face potential legal barriers in light of their citizenship status. Tuition fees are a problem undocumented students face when pursuing secondary education. In 1982, a Supreme Court decision ruled in favor of undocumented children in receiving free public schooling (Drachman, 2006). This decision was only applied to the undocumented students attending K-12 (Drachman, 2006). “The Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRIRA), both enacted in 1996” disallowed undocumented students from benefitting from any in-state tuition grants or programs for post-secondary education (Drachman,
Some states, such as South Carolina, have completely barred their undocumented students from enrolling in post-secondary education (Financial Aid and Scholarships for Undocumented Students, 2013, para. 4). Nevertheless, a variety of states throughout the country have found ways to allow undocumented citizens to attend their schools and participate in “in-state tuition benefits” (para. 4). In this regard, the laws vary state to state and in-state tuition is addressed differently. Several states\(^2\), not including Arkansas, have already passed in-state tuition laws, allowing undocumented students to pay in-state tuition (Financial Aid and Scholarships for Undocumented Students, 2013, para. 5). Additionally, undocumented students and illegal aliens generally do not qualify for many sources of financial aid. In order to be eligible for federal student aid a student must be a U.S. citizen or permanent resident.

There is also political opposition for undocumented students seeking post-secondary education. A major political opposition was the “Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act” (Ojeda et al., 2012). It was a bipartisan bill created in hopes of alleviating the immigration struggle (Ojeda et al., 2012). However, others saw this act as a problem. According to Mark Krikorian, the executive director of Center for Immigrant Studies, the DREAM Act is “amnesty for illegal aliens” (Drachman, 2006, p.97). Drachman goes on to explain that those opposing the DREAM Act believe that no one should reward illegal immigrants by allowing them into their colleges while American parents have a difficult time paying for their children’s tuition (Drachman, 2006).

In April 2013 Arkansas Senator Joyce Elliott sought support for the Immigrant Education Bill that would have extended cheaper in-state tuition rates to immigrants who came to the

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\(^2\) States that have already passed laws allowing students of immigrant parents to pay in-state tuition include: Texas, California, New York, Utah, Illinois, Washington, Nebraska, New Mexico, Maryland (community colleges), Oklahoma, Wisconsin, and Kansas (Financial Aid and Scholarships for Undocumented Students, 2013, para. 5).
United States illegally (Associated Press, 2013). The original proposal allowed anyone who has attended an Arkansas high school for at least three years and has a high school diploma to pursue post-secondary education in Arkansas at in-state tuition rates. Because her original proposal failed to gain support, she amended it to allow institutions the opportunity to extend in-state tuition.

**Successful Case Studies**

In San Marcos, Texas, high school superintendents and administrators at Austin Community College were researching ways to get the large Latino population into college (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009). They implemented a simple requirement to nudge high schoolers into college. They required that each student complete an application to Austin Community College in order to graduate high school. Moreover, students were pulled from English classes to meet with the college’s staff counselors, who shared information about financial aid and introduced students to the universal symbol of teenage freedom: the automobile. According to Thaler & Sunstein (2009), “They talked about how much more money college graduates earned compared to high school graduates, explaining it as the difference between a Mercedes and a KIA” (p. 207). This effort had huge results. Between 2004 and 2005, San Marco High School students who went to Texas colleges rose from 34% to 45%. In 2009, more than 45 Texas high schools have replicated similar programs and Florida, California and Maine are implementing the program in high schools. The simple nudge of applying to at least one college before graduation has extraordinary results by providing high school students with a choice to pursue post-secondary education in both urban and rural environments (Thaler & Sunstein, 2009).

The Early High School College Initiative (ECHS) launched by El Paso Community College (EPCC) provides Hispanic students the opportunity to complete an associate degree
while attending high school (Excelencia in Education, 2010). The initiative provides an accelerated learning environment for motivated students that might not otherwise pursue post-secondary education. In 2006, the initiative partnered with Socorro Independent School District (ISD) and has now expanded to five districts in a joint effort to support ECHS students. Currently, 1,522 students are attending Early College High Schools and over 80% of those students are Latino (para. 3).

Similarly, Brownsville Early College High School (BECHS) partners with the University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) to offer an accelerated program in which students can obtain a high school diploma and an associates degree simultaneously (Excelencia in Education, 2013 a). BECHS support high school students with counseling, mentoring and academic support programs, such as UTB STEM learning communities. These support programs are available to students during their first year of college to help them become life-long learners and encourage students to be leaders in their communities. Ninety-nine percent of participating students are Latino, and 97% are economically disadvantaged (p. 12).

The Latino Leadership and College Experience Camp (LLCEC) began as a college preparation camp for students in 2006 through the Bluegrass Community and Technical College (Excelencia in Education, 2013 b). An intensive college literacy program, the LLCEC nurtures peer and professional mentoring, increases self-awareness, and engages students in areas of social justice. The goal of these efforts is to provide educational opportunities to Latino students by facilitating student’s involvement in activities on campus or in the community, create ACT action plans for students below grade level, and increase enrollment in dual credit and early college courses. Since the initiative’s initiation in Fall 2006 to Fall 2011, Latino student enrollment at the college level has increased 130% (p. 16).
Methodology

A systematic approach helped determine barriers Hispanic or Latino students face with regard to pursuing post-secondary education with the UA-Cossatot. We administered a survey and facilitated focus groups with De Queen junior and senior level high school students.\(^3\)

The Sample

De Queen High School is the only public high school in De Queen, AR, where UA-Cossatot has its main campus. Although the university serves students from other areas, the largest number of students come from Sevier County (S. Cole, personal communication, September 10, 2013). Additionally, the largest proportions of Hispanic or Latino students enrolled at UA-Cossatot are associated with the De Queen campus. Of the Sevier County public high schools, De Queen High School is the largest in terms of number of students enrolled (World Media Group, LLC., 2013). De Queen High School has the highest percentage of Hispanic or Latino students, with roughly 50% of eleventh and twelfth graders identifying as Hispanic or Latino. This percentage has continued to increase year after year since at least 2007. Because UA-Cossatot recently received a grant to place a career counselor within De Queen High School, they are particularly interested in the barriers faced by Hispanic or Latino students in this school (S. Cole, personal communication, September 10, 2013).

Currently, De Queen High School has about 300 students enrolled in grades 11 and 12. Announcements about the project were made to junior and senior level English classes. Two teachers, who have the majority of eleventh and twelfth graders in their English classes, granted

\(^3\) Our research procedures were reviewed by the University of Arkansas at Little Rock’s Institutional Review Board to ensure the protection of the students involved in the research.
permission to make these announcements during the first few minutes of each junior and senior level English class. This allowed most students the potential to participate in the survey since English classes are required for nearly all students. Because participation was dependent on both the consent of the parents and the assent of the students, and the return rate on the permission forms was expected to be low (less than 50%), it was important to provide a large number of students the opportunity to participate (Rodgers, 2006). Students were given a consent form to take home for their parents to review and sign prior to taking the survey and participating in the focus group. The students had a week to return the forms. The teachers and career counselors were essential to the consent process, reminding the students to return forms, collecting forms, and issuing new forms when needed. They also emphasized the importance of the study and the role the students could have in it. On the first day of each grade’s facilitation, those students that returned the consent form were given time to read an assent form and decide if they wanted to participate.

**The Research Instruments**

We developed a survey and focus group protocol (see Appendix A and B) to structure the information-gathering process.

The method of surveying high school students allowed us to determine some of the barriers they may be facing with regard to pursuing post-secondary enrollment at UA-Cossatot in a non-invasive, anonymous way. Through the survey we gained basic information regarding attitudes towards college and the potential barriers faced by students such as academic, financial, social, etc. The survey consisted of six sections and was designed for online administration (Appendix A).

We designed a focus group questionnaire (Appendix B) to guide our facilitators to further
explore the areas students identified through the survey as barriers. During the focus groups we uncovered how these general barriers affected the De Queen students and their decisions about post-secondary education. Like in the survey, students were asked about their intentions to pursue post-secondary education and their awareness of the admissions and financial aid process. They were asked questions about how they and their families perceive post-secondary education. However, the ultimate goal was to discuss reasons students might choose not to pursue post-secondary education or choose not to pursue UA-Cossatot.

The Facilitation

We held three facilitation days, two for focus groups and one for the survey. During the facilitation days the English teachers allowed their students to participate during their class periods. The focus groups were held on the first two facilitation dates, and the survey was conducted on the third facilitation day.

Each focus group session consisted of three to 10 students; however, most groups were made up of six to eight students. Groups of ten or more students were split into smaller groups for separate sessions.

The survey was administered electronically, through Google Forms.

Participants were asked to reserve approximately 20 minutes to complete the survey and approximately 45 minutes to complete the focus group. Any student had the opportunity to complete the survey once and/or participate in only one focus group. Participants of the survey and focus groups were provided with refreshments.

The Data

Descriptive statistics and basic frequency analyses were performed on the survey results. The SPSS software package allowed the team to compare the responses of different groups. The
responses were categorized so that responses for students identifying as Hispanic or Latino on the demographic portion of the survey could be compared to those who did not identify as Hispanic or Latino. This allowed us to determine the barriers that may be specific to Hispanic or Latino students during the analysis rather than isolating these students during the data collection process. The focus group data was coded, transcribed, and analyzed.

**Results**

**Participants**

Of the 261 eleventh and twelfth grade students who had the opportunity to participate, 139 students took part in the study. All but two of these students completed both the survey and a focus group session. Twenty-four focus group sessions were conducted, and 137 students completed the survey. Of these respondents 50% were eleventh graders and 50% were twelfth graders. Fifty-six percent of the students that answered the question of ethnicity identified as Hispanic or Latino. Two of the 137 students, one in each grade, chose not to answer the question. Fifty-six percent of the eleventh graders who responded and 44% of the twelfth graders identified as Hispanic or Latino.

While 79% of all participants reported being U.S. citizens, only 65% of those identifying as Hispanic or Latino reported being U.S. citizens. Thirteen percent of the Hispanic or Latino students reported statuses of Permanent Resident, and another 21% reported being Nonresidents.

Students identifying as Hispanic or Latino reported lower grade point averages than their non-Hispanic or Latino counterparts. Seventy-nine percent of Non-Hispanic or Latino students reported a GPA of 3.0 or higher, compared to only 53% of Hispanic or Latino students. Additionally, fewer Hispanic or Latino students were in advanced or college-level English courses. Twenty percent of Hispanic or Latino students reported being in an advanced or college-
level English course, compared to 60% of non-Hispanic or Latino students.

A majority of the Hispanic or Latino students surveyed would be considered first-generation students (Figure C1). Ten percent of Hispanic or Latino students had mothers who had attended college, and 7% had fathers who attended college. In comparison, 67% of non-Hispanic or Latino students had mothers and 46% had fathers who had spent some time in college. Sixty-five percent of Hispanic or Latino students reported their mother, and 60% reported their father had not completed high school. Non-Hispanic or Latino students reported that only 5% of their mothers and 5% of their fathers did not complete high school. More Hispanic or Latino students also reported having larger families than non-Hispanic or Latino students, and most Hispanic or Latino students reported primarily speaking Spanish at home.

**Importance, Interest, and Intentions**

When asked how important a college education was to reaching future career goals, 81% of the Hispanic or Latino students responded “very important.” Among eleventh graders, 88% of both Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students regarded a college education to be “very important.” However, twelfth grade Hispanic or Latino students felt less strongly than their non-Hispanic or Latino counterparts. Only 72% of twelfth grade Hispanic or Latino students felt college was “very important,” compared to 88% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. Alternatively, a greater percentage of Hispanic or Latino students felt college was “somewhat important.

Students were also asked why they felt college was important. When asked their agreement with the statement “Education is necessary for me to be successful,” only 9% of Hispanic or Latino and 8% of non-Hispanic or Latino students disagreed. When asked why they felt it was important to go to college one student said, “I don’t want to just be an average Joe.”
few students were interested in college as an opportunity for personal growth. “To have an education,” one student shares, “I guess be more open minded.” Only 5% of Hispanic or Latino and 3% of non-Hispanic or Latino students disagreed with the statement “It is important for me to go to college.” Among eleventh graders, Hispanic or Latino students reported stronger agreement than non-Hispanic or Latino students. This situation was reversed among twelfth graders, with nearly 20% fewer Hispanic or Latino students reporting a strong agreement than non-Hispanic or Latino students. Hispanic or Latino students and non-Hispanic or Latino students reported similar agreement to the statement “I can have a good job without going to college” with nearly 40% in agreement. However, Hispanic or Latino students’ agreement was less strong, with fewer students responding “strongly agree” than non-Hispanic or Latino students. Agreement with these and all other attitude statements toward post-secondary education can be found in Figure C2.1 and Figure C2.2.

During the focus groups many students noted that job opportunities were limited for those that did not go to college, especially in the De Queen area. One student noted, “…GED won’t get you a job…that’s how it’s going to be.” Other students felt that college was important to “get a better future” or “have a better job in the future,” “like a non-labor job.” Many students expressed disinterest in the plant and fast food jobs they perceived as two of the very few options available to those that did not go to college. “Making a better living moneywise. Like, instead of working in a plant you can pursue another thing that you actually love,” remarked one student. Another student added, “I don’t want to be working in the chicken plant. I want to make more than minimum wage.” Other students who were already working viewed college as a way to switch careers:

I just get tired of seeing people work at minimum wage…right now I work at Burger
King, and I hate my job. I want to be able to work and not ‘work’ but just be happy that I go there.

Although the same percentage (98%) of Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students were interested in pursuing college or vocational school after graduation, Hispanic or Latino students reported feeling less strongly than their non-Hispanic or Latino counterparts. Seventy-three percent of the Hispanic or Latino students surveyed responded they were “very interested” and 25% marked “somewhat interested” in going to college or vocational school after graduating; whereas, 88% of non-Hispanic or Latino students were “very interested” and 10% were “somewhat interested.” The difference in interest appears greatest among twelfth graders. Sixty-one percent of twelfth grade Hispanic or Latino students were “very interested,” compared to 88% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. Thirty-nine percent reported they were “somewhat interested,” while only 9% of non-Hispanic or Latino students felt “somewhat interested.” When asked their agreement with the statement “I do not want to go to college,” 12% of Hispanic or Latino and 7% of non-Hispanic or Latino students agreed.

Although Hispanic or Latino students felt college was important and were interested in attending, fewer reported intentions of actually attending. Among eleventh graders, over 90% of both Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students report planning on attending college. Among twelfth graders however, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino students decreases to 76%. Twenty-one percent of twelfth grade Hispanic or Latino students responded that they did not know whether they planned to attend college.

Despite students’ perceptions of the importance of a college education and their interest and intentions to attend, many seniors, with only three months until graduation, had yet to complete an admissions application. Only 55% of non-Hispanic or Latino and 18% of Hispanic
or Latino students had completed an application at the time of the survey in February.

**Discouragements and Barriers to Pursuing Post-Secondary Education**

The focus groups and surveys conducted with eleventh and twelfth grade De Queen High School students unveiled a wide range of barriers and discouraging factors to students considering post-secondary education. Throughout the study a few common themes emerged. Many of the concerns or barriers voiced by students could be attributed to feelings of anxiety and hopelessness, cost, preparation, information, family concerns, and immigration concerns.

**Feelings of anxiety and hopelessness.** Feelings of anxiety and hopelessness, and a lack of motivation and inspiration seem to be intertwined when students spoke about barriers when facing college. Motivation within the family plays an integral role in both the motivation and challenges facing students when considering college. One student said that a family’s experience with college can be a barrier when considering college; a student may not go, if he/she had a family member who had a negative experience. Another student said there may be a lack of family support, “No one motivates them.” The community can also play a role. One student shared, “most people here are raised to be farm people. (It’s) the small town mentality. No one told them that school’s a big deal to them, because people think they can just get by doing pork jobs.”

The fear of loneliness and the transition to college can also play a key role in discouraging students from applying to college. In the focus groups, one student said, “College is different from this place; you do a lot more things...also it's harder, you have more responsibility.” Many Hispanic or Latino students wrote in the survey their biggest concerns were: “If I’ll be able to make it through the whole program” and “being far from home and not being able to pay for college.” This apprehension and concern with the transition to college is
further highlighted in the survey metrics. Seventy-one percent of eleventh grade Hispanic or Latino students agree that they are interested in schools close to home compared with 50% of eleventh grade non-Hispanic or Latino students agreeing. Moreover, 27% of Hispanic or Latino twelfth grade students compared with 15% of non-Hispanic or Latino twelfth grade students strongly agree that they are interested in school close to home. In the focus groups one student had the following concern with regard to moving away for school: “Not knowing what to expect, if you go somewhere different. But if you go somewhere close, it’s ok.”

Students were asked to rank their agreement with the statement “I do not know what I want to do with my life.” Twenty-nine percent of Hispanic or Latino students agree that they do not know what to do with their life compared to 13% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. These percentages further support the perceived lack of readiness, preparation, support, or motivation that many Hispanic or Latino students reported feeling when pursuing college.

Cost. Cost of attendance was perceived to be the largest, most frequently reported, and occasionally, the only barrier for students when considering post-secondary education. Most students reported that cost was a very important factor when choosing a college or university. Moreover, when asked to rank the statement “I can’t afford to go to college,” 51% of Hispanic or Latino students agree that they can’t afford to go to college, while 27% of non-Hispanic or Latino students agree that they can’t afford to go to college.

From these metrics, we confirmed that cost was a major factor for both Hispanic or Latino students and non-Hispanic or Latino students. Thirty-four out of 71 Hispanic or Latino students who answered the question, “what is the biggest challenge or concern with continuing your education?” responded with phrases containing “money,” “cost,” or being “able afford it.” In response to dealing with these cost concerns, Hispanic or Latino students mentioned the need
to apply for scholarships. Yet, one Hispanic or Latino student remained concerned about, “Not having the qualities to apply for a scholarship.” Other barriers concerning scholarships in the focus groups included grades, scholarship requirements, and laziness among students in general. Despite these concerns, a majority of our focus group participants plan to apply for academic or athletic scholarships.

The time and the financial costs of having to support a family are a burden that several students voiced. One student said, “Some people have families, even if they are young. They have kids that they may have to support. It could be hard for them.” One eleventh grade parent mentioned, “I know me with my daughter, I don’t have time to just sit down at a computer for an hour straight to look at scholarships.” One Hispanic or Latino student said, “Getting a job and supporting your family financially and being the person you always dream of becoming” is a big concern. Moreover, school and work balance when considering college was a reiterated barrier. With regard to preparing for college one student said, “I don’t have time when I get home. I get home and I have homework. I leave school and go to work.” Many students in the focus groups spoke about concerns related to working part-time before or while in school. One student said:

I’d be afraid to get a job because over the summer I might find a job and forget about college because it paid well. Even if I don’t like it, I might like the money. I just don’t want to love the money to give up my education.

Another student said, “All people do is think about the money and they forget about school and just keep working.”

This pressure of balancing work and school can be especially challenging for students who work to support their families. One student shared:

College is really expensive, so you have to be making a lot. Maybe they have part-time
jobs, but also since they have to help their family pay bills, they waste money on house payments and decide that they have to leave college instead. They can’t afford it.

To better support students through school, one student recommends, “There needs to be more scholarships. More accessible scholarships that are easier to get.” Another student made an interesting suggestion concerning the prohibitive cost of books and ways in which technology might decrease the financial burden. She shared,

Millions of books are paid (for). What do they do with them? Why don’t they give or leave them in college and let us sign up for them rather than us paying $100 for each book. They could just have it there and makes it less to take. Or, they could have a lot of technology. We could just log in and get the information and get out.

Students reported concerns about the costs of tuition, course materials and supplies, and living expenses.

Through the study, we researched not only perceptions of costs, but knowledge and perceptions of financial aid. When asked how important the availability of scholarships and financial aid is, Hispanic or Latino students answered 83% very important and non-Hispanic or Latino students answered 82% very important. Nonetheless, when asked how familiar are you with federal aid, 49% of Hispanic or Latino students selected I’ve heard of them, but I don’t really know what they are or do, while 28% of non-Hispanic or Latino students selected the same. Despite not knowing much about what financial aid is, 61% of Hispanic or Latino students and 67% of non-Hispanic or Latino students responded “yes” that they do plan to fill out Free Application for Federal Student Aid. When asked if they are eligible for financial aid, 23% of Hispanic or Latino students compared to 42% of non-Hispanic or Latino students responded “yes.” On the other hand, 69% of Hispanic or Latino students compared with 53% of non-
Hispanic or Latino students did not know if they were eligible for federal student aid. Based on these results, we inferred that while scholarships and financial aid are seen as an important factor when considering post-secondary education, there is a knowledge gap on what different forms of financial aid are available and Hispanic or Latino students’ eligibility. This is further highlighted in the survey attitude statement asking whether “it’s easy to find scholarships and financial aid.” Only 11% of Hispanic or Latino students agreed that it’s easy to find scholarships and financial aid, while 42% of non-Hispanic or Latino students agreed. Finally, when asked the survey attitude statement “I know where to find information about financial aid,” 49% of Hispanic or Latino students disagreed, while only 30% of non-Hispanic or Latino students disagreed.

**Preparation.** Another very prevalent barrier was a perceived lack of readiness for college. After mentioning that he or she did not feel prepared, a student was asked what might have helped him or her be better prepared. To that question the student responded, “it’s kind of late for us.” Other students were concerned with being academically prepared for college. In our survey one Hispanic or Latino student wrote,

> My biggest concern with continuing my education after high school is being able to finish college. I am not sure if I have been fully prepared with dealing with college-level courses. High school is pretty simple, but I do not think that college would be just as easy.

The need for more college preparation and early intervention in high school was shared passionately by students in all of our focus groups and further resonated in our survey. In the survey when asked whether or not they have taken any preparation courses, only 19% of eleventh grade Hispanic or Latino high school students said “yes” compared to 73% of eleventh grade non-Hispanic or Latino students. This statistic changes drastically in twelfth grade, yet
there is still a noticeable gap. When twelfth graders were asked the same question on whether or not they have taken college preparation courses, 42% of Hispanic or Latino college students said “yes,” yet 42% also said “no.” Comparatively, 53% of twelfth grade non-Hispanic or Latinos students said “yes” and 38% said “no.”

When asked if students would be interested in taking a college preparation class, the answer was overwhelmingly positive. Eighty-six percent of eleventh grade Hispanic or Latino students and 76% of Hispanic or Latino students said yes. This is further highlighted in the focus groups. One student’s response to his or her needs was, “More training, I guess. Like offering classes that teach us how to get to college.” Another student said, “In American History, they shared what classes we take would help us compete in certain areas, but I wish we had known that in ninth.” This need for early intervention is further solidified by the following student’s statement,

Yea, because I remember that in eighth (they told us) everything starts to count. But, I didn’t really care about it in ninth grade when they started to speak about it more seriously. And, now I’m like I wish I could have gone back and done better.

We see this sentiment in the survey question regarding when the school started preparing students for college. While the majority of students reported beginning some sort of preparation between eighth and tenth grade, the importance of the preparation doesn’t resonate, until eleventh or even twelfth grade. In the survey response one student said, “They touched on the subject in the ninth grade. But they really started to hit us with college stuff in eleventh grade.” One student reported that he or she needs more information and is considering the military to allow more time to prepare for college,

Something to get informed and prepared for college because right now by the time I
graduate, I’m not sure if I’m even going to be ready to go to college. I’ve thought about going into the military to just have some time to just think.

When asked if there are any college preparation classes that they would have liked to take but couldn’t, 39% of Hispanic or Latino students said “yes”, while 28% of non-Hispanic or Latino students said “yes.” The focus groups further illustrate the need for guidance in college preparation and additional courses in this area. One student mentioned, “More options or opportunities to take electives from the university now.” Aligned with this point, another student said combining college preparation and electives would be ideal, “We have elective classes that don’t apply to anything right now…Offering classes that teach us how to get to college…more prep.” Moreover, another student suggested, “Yeah,… give us tests every once in a while to see where we need to be, so we can focus on what we need to and not what we don't need to be doing.” Other students desire more hands-on learning, “Just going there and actually seeing it (college campus/programs). Not just hearing it… More college days.”

Although the school counselors served as a primary source of information about college, students perceived that the counselors’ time was spread thinly across many students and responsibilities, and so a majority of students were not getting adequate attention or preparation for college. The following statements were heard throughout our focus group meetings: “I don't feel prepared,” “…don't have all the information,” “we're kind of like just confused,” “like we don't know what the next step is,” and “yeah, they tell us like what to do, but not how to do it exactly or give us examples to show us how.” Students who had received help reflected positively on the experience. One student said, “Mrs. Hill (the counselor) helps with encouragement. She makes sure that we all know our dates and application dates and if we have any problems college wise, we go to her.”
The ACT plays a crucial role in college admissions and for many students at De Queen High School it is a challenging barrier when facing post-secondary education. One student said, “You don’t have anyone pushing you to take the ACT or go to college. You have to do it yourself.” Another student identified an existing opportunity for ACT preparation, “Over the summer, it’s like two weeks of ACT preparation. And then you get a free ACT at the beginning of the year.” Some students viewed this option positively, while others felt it might interfere with other summer obligations. To boost interest in the summer class another student suggested providing an incentive, “Like the benchmark, when we took it they would get us breakfast, so everyone would come. Then, they’d go over open responses and all of that. I think that would be good to do for ACT.” Alternatively, some students felt the ACT played too strong of a role in determining whether students would go to college or not. One such student would like to see scholarships not based on the ACT,

Probably more big scholarships that aren’t ACT based. With Little Rock, I think there is one scholarship. I think it’s a leadership scholarship and I’d like to apply for that…More scholarships like that that aren’t just ACT based would be great.

**Information.** The information source for Hispanic and Latino students can play an integral role as they consider post-secondary education options. One student noted that he or she only learns about colleges during the school’s lunch hour visits. The student said, “They (recruiters) are just sitting in the cafeteria and we don’t have time to meet them because we are getting lunch and trying to eat it before the bell rings.” Limitations also include Internet access. One student said, “I’ve missed the last 6 deadlines for seeing a counselor because [I] don’t have a computer.” According to the survey results, the top three sources of information for Hispanic or Latino students are counselors (88%), Teachers (63%), and Recruiting (60%) (Figure C3).
Comparatively, the greatest percentages of non-Hispanic or Latino students who reported gaining info from a particular source were as follows: counselors with 90%, recruiting with 78% and teachers with 75%. As we mentioned earlier, counselors play an enormous role in disseminating college information to students. Yet, many students expressed a perceived lack of time with counselors. One student said, “All I want is help, help, help. I mean I said Cossatot is my back up plan, but I talked to the counselor and everything…and the counselor won’t see me.” The De Queen High School addition of a career counselor was perceived to be very positive according to students. One student remarked, “I like that we have an actual career coach now. I feel like I can actually go to her rather than the counselors all the time.” Nonetheless, when asked in the attitude statement “I feel that I will be prepared for college when I leave for high school”, only 17% of Hispanic or Latino students selected “strongly agree,” while 33% of non-Hispanic or Latino students selected “strongly agree.”

In the focus groups, students mentioned additional sources of information including UA-Cossatot, family, and the Internet. One student shared her interest in RN school with a UA-Cossatot representative and was sent targeted information. She said,

I’ve had letters from Cossatot sent to me and I had to fill out a sheet when lady from there came. They asked what I was interested in and I put RN, so they sent me classes I need to take for that. I found out that I could get the RN at Cossatot and since taking medical classes here that helps and then transfer to another college for more training.

Ultimately, a majority of students perceived they did not have enough or the right information about college and/or the application process. When asked the statement “I know what I need to do to apply to college,” 45% of Hispanic or Latino students disagreed, while only 22% of non-Hispanic or Latino students disagreed. Similarly, when asked the statement “It is
hard to find out about applying to college,” 47% of Hispanic or Latino students selected “strongly agree,” compared to 33% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. Finally, when asked if resources about college are easily accessible, 10% more non-Hispanic or Latino students than Hispanic or Latino students perceived resources to be easily accessible. Forty-four percent of Hispanic or Latino students felt that college resources were not easily accessible.

**Family concerns.** Through the use of focus groups and surveys, we found that there were some disparities between the Hispanic or Latino students and the non-Hispanic or Latino students in regards to their thoughts and feelings about the role of their families in their college decisions. Some students were influenced very directly by their parents. A student who’s parent’s experience was influencing that student’s decision said,

…My Dad is getting his masters now online. He did his undergrad online too. Just me watching him doing his online classes makes me think, I don’t want to wait. I might as well do it while I’m young. And, I do it when I’m older. So, I don’t have to worry about getting paid enough for other jobs and not have to do hard work like my Dad did. He wants me to have easy life and get a great career in life and be who I want to be.

Thirty-three percent of Hispanic or Latino students “strongly disagreed” with the statement “My parents are involved in my decisions about college” compared to 45% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. The data also shows that 19% of the Hispanic or Latino students agreed that their parents are involved with the non-Hispanic or Latino students measuring at 12%. This illustrates that many Hispanic or Latino students are receiving more involvement from their parents/guardians in terms of their choice to pursue post-secondary education. Further data shows that 57% of Hispanic or Latino students “strongly agree” with the attitude statement “It is important to our family that I attend college,” followed by 35% agreeing with the statement and
The non-Hispanic or Latino students rated at 65% strongly agreed, 30% agreed, 3% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed with the same attitude statement. Based on this finding we suggest there is a slight difference between Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students and the perceived level of encouragement they receive from home in regards to pursuing a post-secondary education.

When presented with the statement “Contributing to my family is more important than going to college,” 11% of Hispanic or Latino students strongly agreed, compared to only 4% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. Thirty-two percent of Hispanic or Latino students “agree” with the statement, compared to the 23% of non-Hispanic or Latino students selecting the same. This agreement might be due to the relatively high rate of teenage pregnancies in Sevier County. A student shared that “I am going to have a baby girl my junior year. When I graduate, she is going to be one year old. After high school, I’m going to have to start working to financially support my child.” Others offered that sometimes students do not have strong parental support and that makes it difficult for first-generation students that are even considering post-secondary education. When answering the statement “Contributing to my family is more important than going to college”, the Hispanic or Latino students answered with 11% strongly agree, 32% agree, 53% disagree, and 4% strongly disagreed. Of the non-Hispanic or Latino students, only 3% selected “strongly agree”, and only 23% chose “agree.” The Hispanic or Latino students tended to feel that although college was important, taking care of or contributing to their families took priority.

A Hispanic or Latino student shared a personal anecdote in regards to pursuing post-secondary education outside of De Queen:

I got accepted to the University of Texas at Arlington but my parents want me to start off
here at the local college and later transfer. I worked really hard into being admitted, but
I’m now going to look into starting here after all and later transferring.

During the focus groups, some students wanted to leave for school, but perceived a family
obligation to stay. However, other students felt pressure from their families to go to college. One
student said, “… I want to go to college but my parents are there to say you’re going [to college]
whether you want to or not.” Other students shared similar opinions.

Immigration and citizenship. The barriers facing immigrant Hispanic or Latino students
presented another particularly bold theme. The students who are not citizens are charged out-of-
state tuition for in-state schools due to their citizenship status. One student noted that many
people know of this barrier, but “do nothing” to help. In the focus groups another student said,

In other states, you have to pay out-of-state and I just found that out; that’s kind of crazy.
Arkansas has a lot of Hispanics and I think they should do something about that…we
work just as hard as the other people, but we aren’t able to apply for the scholarships.

A few students voiced concerns associated specifically with citizenship status. Some felt recent
legislation was helpful. “Since I am a DREAM ACT student I have permission to go to college
but I can only receive so much financial help.” On the other hand, some students still felt the
current legislation in Arkansas was too prohibitive.

For another student the costs of immigration were even greater. In addition to out-of-state
tuition, this student started having to work to support his or her family in order to make ends
meet once the family’s father was deported. Although the state allows students to become
eligible to work and attend colleges, they must pay out-of-state tuition fees, which were
perceived to put college financially out of reach. Other students discussed the worry because
important items, like a social security card, had not arrived in the mail. One student said, “I still
haven’t received my papers or social security card” which are necessary documents in the application process. Documentation, or lack of, is an added pressure to the students who would like to pursue post-secondary education but are unsure of what the next step for them will be. There is a sense of urgency when it is perceived that the only way to apply to college is through proper documentation that has failed to arrive. However, even though students can now legally attend college, they are still unsure of the kind of financial aid that will be made available for them. One student said, “I would like to know what help I could receive financially. Like what scholarships or what can I apply to.”

**Important Criteria Involved in College Decisions**

We asked students about the importance of various criteria when deciding whether or not to pursue a particular college (Figure C4). Hispanic or Latino students rated the duration of the program, cost, extracurricular activities offered by the school, faculty, and family input to be more important than non-Hispanic or Latino students. However, extracurricular activities and faculty were found to be the least important of the selected criteria. Eighty-six percent of the Hispanic or Latino students felt family input was important, with 41% of them saying it was “very important.” Although more Hispanic or Latino students regarded the location of a school to be important, fewer Hispanic or Latino students than non-Hispanic or Latino students felt it was “very important.” The availability of scholarships and financial aid was also reported to be “very important” by 83% of Hispanic or Latino and 82% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. Additional criteria students considered important were the courses and programs offered, the size of the town and/or school, the environment or atmosphere of the school, housing options, and the availability of jobs in the town.

In both the focus groups and the survey students perceived cost to be the most important
factor in their decision. Ninety-two percent of Hispanic or Latino and 87% of non-Hispanic or Latino students reported cost to be an important factor. Seventy-nine percent of Hispanic or Latino and 72% of non-Hispanic or Latino students considered it “very important.” Some students were looking to schools that offered the most in scholarships while others were looking for lower tuition costs. One student said, “It depends wherever I can get a full ride. I don’t want to go into debt… That’s my main thing.” Other students were only considering Arkansas schools in order to avoid out-of-state tuitions.

An important theme that emerged from the focus groups was the importance of a return on their investment. Although cost of attendance and availability of scholarships were perceived to be very important, students were particularly concerned with the time and money spent in college leading to a job that they could not have gotten otherwise. Many students mentioned knowing people who went to college and could not find jobs. A few students commented that they would not mind spending a little more for a program or college if it would guarantee a better job. A majority of the students reported interest in pursuing career-oriented majors, favoring programs in technical and professional careers, such as teaching, medicine, business, engineering, welding, cosmetology, and nursing, over liberal arts programs. More Hispanic or Latino students showed interest in technical programs than non-Hispanic or Latino students.

When asked about what types of schools interested them, both Hispanic or Latino and Non-Hispanic or Latino students were primarily interested in traditional four-year schools (Figure C5). Seventy-nine percent of Hispanic or Latino and 83% of non-Hispanic or Latino students were interested in attending a four-year college or university. Hispanic or Latino students reported greater interest in two-year colleges. Sixty-one percent of Hispanic or Latino students were interested in attending a two-year college, compared to 38% of non-Hispanic or
Latino students. Less than 10% of both Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students reported interest in vocational programs. However, many students showed interest in dual credit vocational programs for high school students during focus group discussions. A few saw the dual-credit programs as an opportunity for students to learn a skill they could rely on for employment while attending college, or as a “back-up.”

A large number of students were interested in completing core courses at a two-year college and then transferring to a four-year university. Eighty-four percent of Hispanic or Latino students were interested in transferring, compared to 50% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. While most students reported finding this option as an attractive way to save money on tuition, a few students also felt starting at a smaller, local two-year school might help them experience a smoother transition from high school to a four-year university. They felt they could get a taste of college, getting through their first semesters of classes, in a familiar environment where they could also save money on tuition and rent.

**UA-Cossatot**

When considering attending UA-Cossatot, 13% of both Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students strongly agreed that it is a reputable school. Sixty-one percent of Hispanic or Latino students responded “agree” and 57% of non-Hispanic or Latino students also responded “agree” to the statement “UA-Cossatot is a reputable school.” Many reported considering attending UA-Cossatot upon high school completion. Seventy-six percent of Hispanic or Latino students are still considering applying to UA-Cossatot while 55% of non-Hispanic or Latino students answered they would consider it. Additionally, 28% of non-Hispanic or Latino students answered “no” when considering attending UA-Cossatot, compared to only 3% of Hispanic or Latino students who answered “no.”
Students were also asked to rank their agreement with several statements about UA-Cossatot. When asked if UA-Cossatot is too expensive, 63% of Hispanic or Latino students agreed, compared to only 5% of non-Hispanic or Latino students. Regarding the location of the schools, students responded to the statement “I like the location of the UA-Cossatot branches.” Twenty-one percent of Hispanic or Latino students and 20% of non-Hispanic or Latino students strongly disagreed. Sixty percent of Hispanic or Latino students and 52% of non-Hispanic or Latino students agreed. Along with expenses, distance was another important factor when deciding on whether or not to attend UA-Cossatot. “Distance from home,” “location and environment are the prime concerns,” and “my biggest concern is being far from home…” are three answers that were voiced during the focus groups. Location also plays a role for those responsible for contributing to the family or would like to make frequent visits. To many students, UA-Cossatot has branches in locations the students believe are favorable.

Students were also asked about their knowledge of the programs offered at UA-Cossatot. During the focus groups, some of the expressions given by students were “It’s cheaper to go here [UA-Cossatot] first and then go wherever you want” followed by “Most people get their basics there.” Overall, students seemed to feel fairly confident that they had adequate knowledge. Over half of both the Hispanic or Latino and non-Hispanic or Latino students reported feeling knowledgeable about the programs offered at UA-Cossatot; however, less than 10% of either Hispanic or Latino or non-Hispanic or Latino students reported strong agreement. The final attitude statement asked whether UA-Cossatot offers a variety of programs that interest the students. Eleven percent of Hispanic or Latino students strongly agreed, followed by 60% agreeing, 20% disagreeing, and 9% strongly disagreeing. The non-Hispanic or Latino students answered with 17% strongly agreeing, 43% agreeing, 27% disagreeing, and 13% strongly
disagreeing. It would appear that Hispanic or Latino students are fairly knowledgeable in the variety of programs they are more interested in at UA-Cossatot than non-Hispanic or Latino students. All responses to attitude statements regarding UA-Cossatot can be found in Figure C6.

Discussion

Limitations and Potential Biases

Through this facilitation we identified the following factors that may have limited our work:

- Research Framework: We conducted a case study with De Queen High School. The case study is specific to the barriers facing eleventh and twelfth grade Hispanic or Latino students considering post-secondary education at De Queen High School in De Queen, Arkansas. While this research may serve as a foundation and guide for further studies, the results may not be generalizable to other populations.

- Stakeholder Identification: In the development of our research instruments, we did not include stakeholders outside of De Queen High School. This might have included community members, religious leaders or Hispanic or Latino leaders. Incorporating this larger group of stakeholders might have helped to gain more insight into and from the community prior to designing research instruments. For example, the high school teachers provided insight into the importance of early intervention and the need for awareness of college opportunities; however, we were not able to incorporate this information into our survey instrument because we had already gone through IRB.

- Communication: More extensive communication with Veronica, the UA-Cossatot school liaison, would have been helpful earlier in our research to better define the survey and
focus group process and facilitation with teachers prior to our IRB. For example, we were not clear that we would only be working with two teachers and be able to use class time to facilitate both the surveys and focus groups. If we had known this at an earlier date, we may have been able to more effectively communicate our project plan during IRB and complete the IRB process more succinctly. This time might have allowed our team to integrate more into the community of De Queen and De Queen High School’s eleventh and twelfth grade classes.

- **Teacher Influence:** The teachers actively worked from all angles trying to maximize student participation, including allowing students to miss a class period to participate. This proved to be a major incentive for the students. We do however recognize the potential ethical concern with a high level of teacher involvement. Students may have felt more obligated to participate because of the teacher involvement than if only the researchers had spoken to the students.

- **Structural Environment:** The structural environment of the school also limited our work in our ability to interact with students. All research had to be scheduled within the 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. school day, Monday through Friday. This coupled with the distance to the site limited our opportunities to employ alternative methodologies such as observations, or multiple sessions with student groups. Additionally, a traditional power structure exists within the school system. Operating within the school may have limited student responses or encouraged them to respond in certain ways. Students might have felt more comfortable if the discussions were held away from the school grounds and environment. Students may have perceived us in the same regard as their teachers or other members of faculty and staff and responded to us as such.
Research instruments: As we could only ask the questions outlined in the approved IRB documents, our results may have been limited by the selection of questions included in the research instruments. For example, we asked whether students were citizens, but did not inquire as to whether students or their parents were born in the United States. Because some of the literature suggested that native-born and foreign-born parents might present different challenges to pursuing college, this might have been useful information to glean in the study.

Reflecting on the limitations of our research, we recognize a few potential biases that may have impacted our final results. These included the association with UA-Cossatot, and the physical location of the facilitations.

One potential bias may stem from the projects partnership with the university. Our research was sponsored by UA-Cossatot, which may have caused some potential biases in the research results. Partnering with UA-Cossatot and focusing on one school, De Queen High School led some students to regard us as employees of UA-Cossatot, rather than independent researchers. This perception may have presented itself as a bias in student responses. Students may have responded differently under this impression than if they had perceived us to be working for the De Queen school district or as independent researchers. For example, when conducting focus groups and surveys, several students asked us UA-Cossatot-specific questions assuming we were representing the school. Moreover, both Veronica, the UA-Cossatot school liaison and Martin, UA-Cossatot’s school ambassador were present during some of our introductions to students, which may have further connected our study to UA-Cossatot.

Finally, the location of the facilitations themselves may have resulted in a research bias. Our research was conducted inside De Queen High School. Being located within the school may
have influenced students’ responses. They might have responded differently to questions about their school and preparation due to the proximity of faculty and staff.

Best Practices

Despite the limitations and potential biases, one best practice for future research of barriers to college with high school students was identified. Veronica Ozura, the UA-Cossatot liaison and De Queen High School career counselor, was a critical resource in the development and implementation of our research. Ms. Ozura helped the UA-Cossatot team develop relationships with De Queen High School staff and the two English teachers, which provided us with a constant stream of communication with all those involved in the research process and the data gathering process. Additionally, Veronica’s relationship with the Hispanic and Latino community was essential in the classroom. For example, during the introduction of our research, Hispanic and Latino students felt comfortable asking Ms. Ozura for clarification in Spanish.

From our research experience, it is key to have a representative within the target school system to help the research team build relationships, gain access and retain trust within the school and targeted Hispanic or Latino community. Without this support we may not have had the high response rate that we received.

The findings we obtained about the barriers Hispanic or Latino students may face regarding pursuit of post-secondary education were generally consistent with the literature. Many Hispanic or Latino students were facing issues associated with being first-generation students and immigrants or non-citizens. We were also able to determine students’ perceptions of the post-secondary environment and application process. UA-Cossatot can use this information, along with the existing literature, to better understand the needs of Hispanic or Latino students.

Currently, Hispanic or Latino students are not enrolling in post-secondary education in
percentages that reflect community demographics. UA-Cossatot may use the information to help fulfill their mission by improving opportunities for Hispanic or Latino students in the De Queen community. Finally, other communities may use the UA-Cossatot/De Queen case study to improve access to post-secondary education for Hispanic or Latino students.

Potential Future Research

Upon completing our research at De Queen High School, we recognized a few opportunities for continued work regarding the barriers Hispanic or Latino students face when pursuing post-secondary education. The following topics or adjustments to the protocol may provide additional insight to the barriers faced by Hispanic or Latino students.

**Statewide assessment.** Since this was a case study of De Queen High School students, it is acknowledged that the gathered data may not be representative of Hispanic or Latino students in other communities. The focus groups and surveys provided very distinct information and needs regarding a specific community of students. The methodology or best practices used in this study could be applied to conduct similar studies across the state.

**College-educated Hispanic or Latino student research.** Another recommendation for additional research includes seeking out those that graduated high school and attended universities, regardless of where they went to study. The students can be studied using similar instruments, asking the students about the barriers they faced during their pursuit of post-secondary education.

**Teacher-based research.** We acknowledge the importance of high school teachers and counselors who work alongside their students and dedicate much of their time to help them succeed and plan for the future. These educators spend many hours a day with their students. They understand the students’ families, other personal information, and their educational
successes and failures. Interviewing the teachers in regards to the barriers their students face in pursuing may be valuable because of their personal connections to the students. However, we also acknowledge that the teachers may have potential biases. With this aside, it would have been useful to acquire data from teacher interviews or surveys. The teachers could have provided insights and examples of students they taught who faced set barriers during their pursuit of a post-secondary education. Discussing the perceived issues would have benefited the overall data and provided a different focus on varying subjects the researchers might not have considered due to lack of knowledge of the area, students, and overall community demographics.

**Positive deviance approach.** The positive deviance (PD) approach might also be a useful tool when addressing the issue of Hispanic or Latino enrollment. Rather than looking to uncover the stem of the problems, in this case the barriers, PD focuses on finding where things are going right. Students, teachers, parents, and administrators could come together to determine those individuals who were able to achieve a college education despite unlikely circumstances, similar to those faced by the majority of Hispanic or Latino students in the community. The community would then work to discover what led deviant students to pursue college, when so many of their colleagues did not. Because the community uncovers the answers, ownership is likely to be high. The data acquired could also help to motivate future students throughout De Queen and the state to learn of ways to pursue post-secondary education, even when faced with difficult barriers. It would also be very helpful to the De Queen community and they would be able to gather together with empowered individuals within the community and enable others who seek out post-secondary education. This would also provide an approach by the community and provide better access to available resources that the high school and UA-Cossatot already provide to the students.
Early intervention research. The students at the De Queen High School felt like they were beginning to get serious about their post-high school options too late. Although many students reported first hearing things about college in eighth or ninth grade, they said they didn’t perceive college preparation to be brought into the foreground until eleventh or twelfth grade. It might be interesting to conduct a study with the eighth or ninth graders to gauge their understanding and perceptions of college and the admissions process and look for consistency in the perception of a lack of early intervention.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine barriers Hispanic or Latino high school students face with regard to pursuing post-secondary education. Our research also explored the possible reasons Hispanic or Latino high school students are not choosing to pursue post-secondary education with the University of Arkansas-Cossatot. By collecting data from eleventh and twelfth grade students of De Queen High School in De Queen, Arkansas, we were able to determine that students clearly demonstrated the importance of post-secondary education and the barriers to pursuing post-secondary education. These barriers included costs, the need for earlier intervention, college information access, family concerns and immigration status when considering UA-Cossatot or other post-secondary education opportunities. The students’ voices provided a compelling argument for further support and research for Hispanic and Latino students pursuing higher post-secondary education in the De Queen, Arkansas area.
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Educational-Barrier-for-Hispanics.aspx


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http://www.census.gov/population/hispanic/about/faq.html#Q1

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Appendix A: Survey Instrument

Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

Please click "Continue" to proceed.

* Required

Your participation in the survey will be strictly confidential. You have provided both personal and parental permission to participate. Feel free to withdraw from the survey at any time. If you decide not to finish the survey your responses will be removed from the data. Once your survey is completed we will be unable to get back your responses. Your answers will in no way be traceable to you so please feel free to answer as honestly as possible. Please raise your hand if you have any questions. *

☐ I understand and would like to participate in the survey
☐ I understand but would NOT like to participate. (Please raise your hand so a team member can close out your survey)

Continue »

14% completed

Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

College Interest

How interested are you in going to college or vocational school after graduation?

☐ Very interested
☐ Somewhat interested
☐ Not very interested
☐ Not interested at all

Do you plan to attend college?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ I Don't Know

Have you completed an admissions application?

☐ Yes
☐ No
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Not important at all</th>
<th>Not very important</th>
<th>Somewhat important</th>
<th>Very important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family input</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courses and programs offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Will lead to a job</td>
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<tr>
<td>Extracurricular activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Availability of scholarships and financial aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration of program</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
What other criteria are important when choosing whether or not to attend a college.

How important is a college education to reaching your future career goals?
- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not important at all
- I don't know

What subject(s) would you be most interested in studying?

Which of the following schools might you be interested in?
- Please check all that apply
  - 4-year colleges/universities (University of Arkansas - Fayetteville, University of Central Arkansas, Hendrix)
  - 2-year colleges/universities (UA Cossatot, UA Fort Smith)
  - Vocational/Technical schools (welding, plumbing, electrical, cosmetology, etc)
  - Online university (DeVry, Webster)
  - None of the above
  - Other: __________________________

Back  Continue  28% completed
Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

Preparation

Have you taken any college preparation courses?
- Yes
- No
- I Don’t Know

Are there any college preparation classes you wanted to take, but couldn’t?
- Yes
- No
- I Don’t Know of Any Preparation Classes

Would you be interested in taking a college preparation course?
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

Have any teachers worked with you on preparing for college?
This could be actually getting ready to apply or go to college or just information about going to college
- Yes
- No
- Not Sure

When did your school start preparing you for or teaching you about going to college?
If you are not sure what grade number you may put the estimate. For example “8-9”, or “junior high”

[Blank]
## Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

### Awareness

How familiar are you with federal student aid programs (such as student loans and Pell grants)?

- I know a lot about them
- I know a little about them
- I have heard of them, but I don't really know what they are or do
- I've never heard of these

Do you plan to fill out the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid)?

- Yes
- No
- I Don't Know
- I am not familiar with the FAFSA

Are you eligible for federal student aid?

- Yes
- No
- I don't know
From which of the following sources have you received information about going to college
Please check all that apply

- Parents
- Friends
- Teachers
- Counselors
- College recruiting/admissions persons
- College websites
- Other websites
- Social Media
- Other literature
- I have not received any information about going to college
- Other: [blank]

What types of information have you received?

[Blank text area]
# Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

**Feelings About College**

*Please rate your agreement with the following statements.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is important to go to college</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am more interested in schools close to home</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can have a good job without going to college</td>
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<tr>
<td>I can’t afford to go to college</td>
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<tr>
<td>I do not want to go to college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good grades are important if I want to go to college</td>
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<tr>
<td>I do not know what I want to do with my life</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is important to my family that I attend college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Statement</td>
<td>Response</td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am more interested in schools away from my hometown</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is easy to find scholarships and financial aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know what I want to study</td>
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<tr>
<td>Many schools do not offer what I want to study</td>
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<tr>
<td>I would be interested in completing my core courses at a 2-yr school and then transferring</td>
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<tr>
<td>I know what I need to do to apply to college</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I know where to find information about financial aid</td>
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<tr>
<td>It is hard to find out about applying to college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributing to my family is more important than going to college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Barrier Description</td>
<td>Options</td>
<td></td>
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<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>A college education is necessary for me to be successful</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I feel I will be prepared to start college after I graduate high school</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Resources about college are easily accessible</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>My parents are not involved in my decisions about college</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**What is your biggest challenge or concern with continuing your education after high school?**

Here’s your chance to tell it how you see it!
**Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students**

**UA Cossatot**

Will you be considering applying to UA Cossatot?
- [ ] Yes
- [ ] No
- [ ] Not sure

Please rate your agreement with the following statements about UA Cossatot.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cossatot offers a variety of programs that interest me</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know about the programs offered at UA Cossatot</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I like the location of the Cossatot branches</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cossatot is too expensive</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would consider going to UA Cossatot</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UA Cossatot is a reputable school</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Back] [Continue]  
85% completed
Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

Family and Student Information

Please describe what language(s) are primarily spoken in your home. 

How many people currently live in your household? 

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin or descent?
- Yes, Hispanic or Latino
- No, not Hispanic or Latino

What is the highest level of education completed by your mother?
- Did not complete high school
- High school / GED
- Some college
- Bachelor's degree
- Master's degree
- Advanced graduate work or Ph.D.
- Not sure
What is the highest level of education completed by your father?
- Did not complete high school
- High school / GED
- Some college
- Bachelor’s degree
- Master’s degree
- Advanced graduate work or Ph.D.
- Not sure

What is your current citizenship status?
- U.S. citizen
- Permanent resident
- Nonresident

What grade are you currently in?
- 11
- 12

What is your current GPA
- Above 3.5
- 3.0 - 3.4
- 2.5 - 2.9
- 2.0 - 2.4
- Below 1.9

What English class are you taking this year?

Never submit passwords through Google Forms. 100% You made it.
Going to College: Perceptions of High School Students

Your survey is complete, and your responses have been recorded. Thank you for your time!

Submit another response
Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself.
2. What is your family like?
3. What do you like about school?
4. What do you not like about school?
5. Where can you go to find information about going to college?
6. What kinds of information have you received about college?
7. What do you know about Federal Student Aid and applying for student aid?
8. How do you think your family perceives college?
9. Have you considered applying for college?
10. Why do you think students do not go to college?
11. What might discourage you from applying to college in general?
12. What kind of college programs would you be most interested in?
13. What do you know about UA-Cossatot?
14. What do you know about the programs offered at UA-Cossatot?
15. What might make UA-Cossatot a better option for college?
16. What kind of college programs would you be most interested in?
17. Is there anything else you would like to talk about?
Appendix C: Figures

Figure C1: Reported Level of Parents’ Education

- Father
  - Did not complete high school
  - High school / GED
  - Some college
  - Bachelor’s degree
  - Master’s degree
  - Advanced graduate work or Ph.D.
- Mother
  - Did not complete high school
  - High school / GED
  - Some college
  - Bachelor’s degree
  - Master’s degree
  - Advanced graduate work or Ph.D.
Figure C2.1: Hispanic or Latino (HL) and Non-Hispanic or Latino (nHL) Responses to Student Attitude Statements
Figure C2.2: Hispanic or Latino (HL) and Non-Hispanic or Latino (nHL) Responses to Student Attitude Statements - Continued
Figure C3: Reported Sources of Information About College
Figure C4: Importance of Selected Criteria to Hispanic or Latino (HL) and Non-Hispanic or Latino (nHL) Students When Choosing a College
Figure C5: Students’ Reported Interest in Types of Schools
Figure C6: Hispanic or Latino (HL) and Non-Hispanic or Latino (nHL) Students’ Perceptions of UA-Cossatot