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An Empowerment Evaluation of Colorado Mountain College's Mountain Scholars Program via Latino Alumni Aspirational Goals and Outcomes

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Abstract

This qualitative inquiry evaluated Colorado Mountain College's (CMC) in-house Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) via semi-structured interviews with five of its Latino alumni. This study's assets-based social justice/transformative philosophical framework included David Fetterman's methodological empowerment evaluation and Tara Yosso's conceptual community cultural wealth (CCW) theory. This dissertation in practice examined the gap in literature with regards to an in-house student support services program evaluation that partners with the community and focuses on Latinos' aspirations and aspirational outcomes. I wanted to be a worthy witness to the student demographic group at CMC, as well as at most American postsecondary institutions, considered the most at-risk for dropping out: first-generation Latinos. A review of the literature showed that successful completion of a postsecondary education for men of color is staggeringly low (Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Martinez & Castellanos, 2017; Ramos, 2018; Rodriguez-Muniz, 2021; Sladek et al., 2020). The federally funded TRIO student support services program is a successful model designed to offer myriad intervention resources for underserved populations, but is often unable to meet the needs of many of CMC's first-generation Latinx students, especially in Colorado's rural and expensive mountain towns. Since these limited resources do not meet the needs of its most at-risk students, CMC created the MSP as a mirror wrap-around student support services program to TRIO, but without the federal constraints and with community partnerships.

The study's research questions asked how the MSP impacts the aspirations and outcomes of its Latino students, and what programmatic elements contribute to these aspirational outcomes. The data suggested that all participants had college aspirations before attending CMC and that the MSP offered important support that allowed for aspirational goals to be met. The MSP offers important interventions and support services that the data suggest create a crucial sense of belongingness leading to degree attainment for study participants.

Since MSP is an ongoing program, the recommendations are formative and meant to offer increased capacity building to normalize college attendance and degree attainment for Latinos. This small study cannot be generalized to all in-house student support services or to all first-generation Latino college students. The MSP is, however, an important example of a successful supportive environment for CMC's most marginalized students. This study can be seen as a call to action for all institutions to better witness and support all students, especially those who are first-generation college-going students and new to the collegiate system. Recommendations include being a worthy witness and by intentionally creating opportunities that foster a sense of student belongingness.

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Laura Anne Bruch

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative inquiry evaluated Colorado Mountain College's (CMC) in-house Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) via semi-structured interviews with five of its Latino alumni. This study's assets-based social justice/transformative philosophical framework included David Fetterman's methodological empowerment evaluation and Tara Yosso's conceptual community cultural wealth (CCW) theory. This dissertation in practice examined the gap in literature with regards to an in-house student support services program evaluation that partners with the community and focuses on Latinos' aspirations and aspirational outcomes. I wanted to be a worthy witness to the student demographic group at CMC, as well as at most American postsecondary institutions, considered the most at-risk for dropping out: first-generation Latinos. A review of the literature showed that successful completion of a postsecondary education for men of color is staggeringly low (Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Martinez & Castellanos, 2017; Ramos, 2018; Rodriguez-Muniz, 2021; Sladek et al., 2020). The federally funded TRIO student support services program is a successful model designed to offer myriad intervention resources for underserved populations, but is often unable to meet the needs of many of CMC's first-generation Latinx students, especially in Colorado's rural and expensive mountain towns. Since these limited resources do not meet the needs of its most at-risk students,

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"The wound is the place where the light enters you." —Rumi

Problem Statement

This evaluation comes after a monumental COVID-19 catalyst-changing

landscape exacerbating increased national job dissatisfaction; increased housing and food

insecurities; increased politically charged macro and microaggressions of racial biases

and assumptions; increased burden of student and family financial responsibility for a

postsecondary education; the changing demographics of Latinx peoples as a rapidly

growing minority demographic in the United States; and, finally, increased awareness

that Latino men are the least present Latinx gender in higher education (Huerta &

Hernández, 2021; Martinez & Castellanos, 2017; Ramos, 2018; Rodriguez-Muniz, 2021;

Sladek et al., 2020). These variables are necessary to acknowledge, even if they are not

explicitly discussed in this dissertation, to frame the heartache that many of us are feeling

because of the gross cultural mismatch and epistemological disconnects (Nguyen &

Nguyen, 2020; Sladek et al., 2020; Tibbetts et al., 2018) happening in our communities

and around the nation in situating this study. Colorado Mountain College (CMC)

President and CEO Dr. Carrie Hauser and Lumina Foundation President Jamie Merisotis

wrote in a recent *Inside Higher Ed* guest column that the outdated "nomenclature of

structures designed decades ago for an entirely different profile" no longer meets the needs of our rapidly changing communities and that a key strength of being a dual-mission institution is being able to meet "increasingly diverse students where they are" (CMC, 2021c, para. 1).

Purpose of Evaluation

The purpose of this research was to acquire current knowledge from an asset-minded epistemology regarding how CMC's Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) impacts the lives of its Latinos by asking the following guiding research questions:

1. What are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

    1a. How do these experiences impact MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

2. To what extent, if at all, are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations impacted by MSP?

    2a. What were these programmatic elements?

    2b. How do they impact MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

3. Using Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) model, what MSP programmatic elements contribute to MSP Latino students' aspirational outcomes, if at all?

Significance of Latinx in the Community and in Higher Education

For clarity, Hispanic is a term for any ethnicity of any race from Spanish-speaking populations, whereas the term *Latinx*, especially in academia, refers to descendants of

Latin America (Salinas et al., 2020). Latinx is gender neutral and Latinxs is the plural

form; the term Latinx has gained popularity in higher education since 2016 (Salinas et al.,

2020). In this program evaluation, to the best of the researcher's ability, Latinx

demographics was the focus. The U.S. Census Bureau, however, until the 2000 Census

used Hispanic or Latino heritage as one category, creating confusion in distinguishing

groups of people (Olmsted-Hawala & Nichols, 2020; Salinas et al., 2020). The scope of

the growth for this population must be deemed significant when considering how to best

leverage successful community building. In 1970, there were 9.6 million Hispanics in the

United States and, in 30 years, that number has grown to 60.6 million. In 2019 alone, the

U.S. Hispanic population increased by 930,000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a). By 2050,

Hispanic/Latinx population projections are "expected to triple to 98.2 million, accounting

for 24.3 percent of Americans" (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021a, para. 13).

In 2017, Latinxs accounted for approximately 18% of the total U.S. population, of

whom only 59% earned a high school degree or less, and only 25% had a 2-year degree

or some college. It was also noted that 19% of Latinxs were living in poverty (Jones,

2017; Salinas et al., 2020; U.S. Census Bureau, 2018). The systemic oppression of overt

and covert microaggressions, assumptions, and biases, as well as the lack of equal

funding and resources to support Latinx students' education in the K–12 system, is being

exposed as a systemic problem that has created many cultural and intergenerational

wounds that must be corrected (De La Cruz, 2020; Gándara & Contreras, 2020; Martinez

& Castellanos, 2017). Those with the power, privilege, and voice to make community-

wide, life-altering decisions must be held to higher ethical standards in speaking out

against systemic inequality while working toward equality. Inequality affects all human potential because inequality creates harmful power and privilege dynamics that affect individuals, organizations, nations, and global communities (Baker, 2021; Kavadias et al., 2020; Noguera & Alicea, 2021). Inequity negatively affects myriad health and well-being indicators, and most detrimental is that inequality is preventable.

Although recent studies have reported that more Latinxs are going to college and earning associate's degrees (up 117%) and bachelor's degrees (up 103%), and that 88% of Latinx students surveyed believe a postsecondary education is necessary for financial security (Bernal, 2002; Carnevale & Fasules, 2017), too few Latinx students successfully persist in earning a degree (Carnevale & Fasules, 2017; Espinosa et al., 2020; Excelencia in Education, n.d.; Garcia, 2017, 2020). Currently only 20% of Latinx students who go through the U.S. K–12 systems are obtaining a college degree (Pierce, 2019). Unfortunately, Latinxs without postsecondary degrees are more likely to experience security issues with their health, jobs, housing, and food (Barshay, 2021; Espinosa et al., 2020; Kolodner, 2021). In addition, the financial burdens are often more profound as many Latinxs who are first-generation, low-income students who aspire to graduate from an institution of higher education are undocumented and therefore do not qualify for federally funded student support programs like TRIO. As a former TRIO counselor, I have seen the successes and challenges of the TRIO program.

Figure 1.1 shows the 2020 median weekly earnings and corresponding unemployment rate for U.S. workers based on the level of educational attainment. Note,

however, that skilled workers without degrees often earn higher wages than entry-level jobs that require a college degree. Past research has reported individual or cultural deficiencies as the cause for staggering disparities between Latinxs' aspirations and outcomes in higher education, but more recent studies have continued to suggest that the American educational system is failing its students, and that, for a sustainable and healthy community, earning a bachelor's degree is the minimum standard (Baez, 2021; Brooms, 2020; Ramos, 2018).

Figure 1.1

Earnings and Unemployment Rates by Educational Attainment, 2020

	Median usual weekly earnings ($)	Unemployment rate (%)
Doctoral degree	1,885	2.5
Professional degree	1,893	3.1
Master's degree	1,545	4.1
Bachelor's degree	1,305	5.5
Associate's degree	938	7.1
Some college, no degree	877	8.3
High school diploma	781	9.0
Less than a high school diploma	619	11.7
	All workers: $1,029	Total: 7.1%
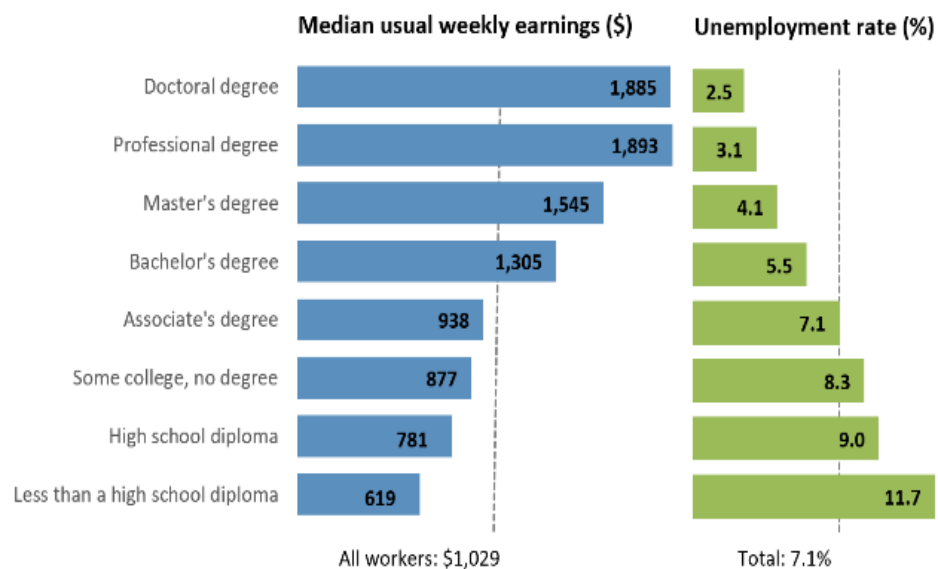
Note: Data are for persons age 25 and over. Earnings are for full-time wage and salary workers.
Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey.

Serving Latinos at Colorado Mountain College

In addition to the disparity of the cultural mismatch and epistemological disconnect of Latinx students in higher education, another concerning trend in higher education, especially since the pandemic, is the disappearance of Latino men on campus (Martinez et al., 2021). The COVID-19 landscape further exacerbated the growing gender disparity in higher education in general, as well as intensifying the widening gap of socioeconomic instability in Colorado mountain communities. Colorado, adding almost a million new residents in the last 10 years (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021b), has stretched many communities' affordability as housing and food costs escalate with no relief in sight. "Mountain and Western Slope housing markets have risen the most in the past two years. The median price of a single-family home sold statewide was $529,995 last month, up from $400,000 in December 2019, a gain of 32.5%" (Svaldi, 2022, para. 11). Latinos' postsecondary goals are often not their priority during these times. Dr. Mathew Gianneschi, chief operating officer and chief staff officer at CMC, noted the concern not only for CMC students but also faculty and staff, acknowledging that most people cannot afford to move into CMC communities and that many are being forced to move (M. Gianneschi, personal communication, June 26, 2021). Latinos' postsecondary goals are often not their priority during these times.

CMC, in the heart of the Rocky Mountains, is the perfect partner in this program evaluation; the college has made great strides in being relevant and supportive for all of its community members, and it has been my place of employment and the sponsor of my doctoral degree. CMC has three residential campuses, eight commuter campuses, and one

central service administrative campus situated over 12,000 square miles serving nine counties. CMC offers its 15,000 annual students, of which 4,900 are full-time students, credit and noncredit opportunities though 5 different types of learning modalities. Additionally, 30% of CMC students are considered low-income, as indicated by their receipt of federal Pell Grant aid (CMC, 2022a).

In 2021, CMC was the first recognized dual-mission institution of higher education in Colorado state law, and it was also designated a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) by the U.S. Department of Education (CMC, 2022a). The dual-mission model for a postsecondary institution involves "the practicality and accessibility of a community college, combined with the rigor and seriousness of a four-year teaching institution" (Shumway, 2018, para. 3). This dual-mission identification allows CMC, a multi-campus, rural, open-access institution of higher education, the continued fluidity to adjust both its academic and student support services programs to best meet the needs of its communities. Gianneschi stated that CMC must do all it can to "stay relevant" by not only creating leadership from within its institution but also creating academic and student support programs to meet the needs of all of its communities (M. Gianneschi, personal communication, June 26, 2021). CMC's commitment as an open-admissions, dual-mission institution opens postsecondary achievement to a wider range of local community members without their having to relocate to obtain a degree (M. Gianneschi, personal communication, February 8, 2022). CMC, as a dual-mission institution, now has eight bachelor's degree programs, 54 associate's degree programs, and 77 certification programs (CMC, n.d.).

Most recently, to be in better alignment with community needs and to serve the community, CMC created academic programs focusing on ecosystem science and stewardship, nursing, law enforcement, and addiction counseling, as well as expanded community and educational partnerships bringing thousands of high school students into college classes (CMC, 2022a). An important note here is that as a result of living in expensive rural, mountain communities, many CMC students not only do not qualify for the federally funded TRIO student support services programs, but often move in order to attain a 4-year college degree, accumulating significant debt along the way. This reality affects the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and recruitment of faculty and staff of color.

In the fall of 2022, in an effort to be further community-serving, CMC created the Colorado Mountain Promise (CMP) that covers tuition for dependent students with a family income of less than $70,000 and for independent students earning less than $50,000. Seventy students took advantage of the CMP in that first semester (CMC, 2022b).

Another crucial aspect supporting the program evaluation at this time is that CMC is a newly designated HSI.

> CMC is the first HSI located in Colorado's rural, high-cost mountain resort region. Only about one-third of Colorado's public colleges have been granted HSI status. There are just over 500 Hispanic-Serving Institutions in the United States (about 10% of roughly 5,000 colleges and universities nationwide). (CMC, 2022c, para. 2)

The new HSI designation is a result of CMC's 28% Latinx student enrollment and meeting "several performance objectives to grow and retain CMC's Latinx student

population" (CMC, 2022a, para. 1). This sense of belonging, a recent initiative for CMC, can be very beneficial for Latinx students (Cuellar, 2015, as cited in Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021). Dr. Gina Garcia (2017, 2020) addressed the importance of being more than simply a Hispanic-enrolling institution and being a Hispanic-serving institution, insisting that Hispanic serving is too big an umbrella term and that institutions must find the nuances and lean into the discomfort of becoming a "racially-just institution as a process," embracing new organizational identities. CMC has recently begun to 'speak to the soul' of its institution and has reported that "student success is at the heart of everything we do" (CMC, 2021a, para. 1). CMC is in the unique position to offer other institutions of higher education lessons learned and best practices in its success at closing the 66% degree attainment achievement gap. Gianneschi (personal communication, June 26, 2021) stated that "Latino students at CMC became the highest performing population (when designated by ethnicity) among all students at the college."

CMC has undergone tremendous shifts to be relevant in not only its communities, but also in the field of higher education. As a result of CMC's commitment to innovative academic and student services programming, and despite 2 years of COVID-19 jockeying, CMC just graduated its largest class, many of whom were Latinx students. Latinx students at CMC are some of CMC's most persistent students in attaining their academic degrees or certifications. As Sarah Ahmed (2012) wrote in *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*, "Every research project has a story, which is the story of an arrival" (p. 2). I know that as a result of my life's purpose, this program

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evaluation and doctoral journey, I see not only myself arriving, but more importantly I see CMC at the precipice of a major arrival.

Definition of Relevant Terms

Belonging: Cherry (2021) defined belonging as follows:

> A human emotional need to affiliate with and be accepted by members of a group. This may include the need to belong to a peer group at school, to be accepted by co-workers, to be part of an athletic team, or to be part of a religious group. A sense of belonging involves more than simply being acquainted with other people. It is centered on gaining acceptance, attention, and support from members of the group as well as providing the same attention to other members. (paras. 1-2)

Capacity building: Social Protection (2020) defined capacity building as follows:

> The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources that organizations and communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world. An essential ingredient in capacity-building is transformation that is generated and sustained over time from within; transformation of this kind goes beyond performing tasks to changing mindsets and attitudes. (para. 1)

> Fetterman considers reflexivity, dialogue, and action as necessary components in creating capacity building.

Empowerment evaluation: An evaluation approach designed to help communities monitor and evaluate their own performance. It is used in comprehensive community initiatives as well as small-scale settings and is designed to help groups accomplish their goals (Fetterman, 2005, 2017a, 2017b).

Minding the gap: In Fetterman's empowerment evaluation, the researcher's comparison of the espoused action of a program's resources with what the data analysis shows is the actual practice of the program (Fetterman, 2005, 2017a, 2017b).

Security: As defined by Maslow, "a feeling of confidence, safety and freedom that

   separates from fear and anxiety, and especially the feeling of satisfying one's

   needs now (and in the future)" (Cherry, 2022, para. 3).

Self-efficacy: Carey and Forsyth (2009) defined self-efficacy as

   an individual's belief in his or her capacity to execute behaviors necessary to
   produce specific performance attainments. Self-efficacy reflects confidence in the
   ability to exert control over one's own motivation, behavior, and social
   environment. (para. 1)

   Bandura said that self-efficacy affects every area of human endeavor.

Social justice worldview: According to the United Nations (2006), a social justice

   worldview is

   broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of
   economic growth; however, it is necessary to attach some important qualifiers to
   this statement. The conception of social justice must start with the right of all
   human beings to benefit from a safe and pleasant environment. Social justice is
   impossible unless it is fully understood that power comes with the obligation of
   service. (pp. 7-8)

Worthy witness: Process of humanization at the center of research. The study

   participants' stories are centered as evidence. Paris and Winn "insist that

   researchers' access to various sites and people demands humanization of both

   their participants and themselves" (Shelton, 2017, p. 157).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

"Hardship may dishearten at first, but every hardship passes away. All despair is followed by hope; all darkness is followed by sunshine." –Rumi

Chapter 2 begins with a brief overview of the impact that the federally funded student support services TRIO program has had nationwide as a significant and successful student support services model, creating ways for educational institutions to offer different wrap-around intervention practices for education's most marginalized and underserved populations. TRIO is an important consideration in that Colorado Mountain College (CMC) is committed to serving all students using TRIO-like wrap-around student support services to help all its students persist to a college degree. I also introduce CMC's Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) housed at the Summit commuter campus, which is the focus of this program evaluation. The MSP is a significant and successful community partnership intervention program for first-generation low-income students. This program evaluation collected and analyzed five MSP Latino alumni's 'lived experiences' to measure MSP program effectiveness from an assets-based paradigm. Finally, I discuss the assets-based operational theory of Tara Yosso's cultural community wealth (CCW) theory of student capital in relation to the MSP.

TRIO

The federally funded TRIO programs are outreach and student support services programs "designed to identify and provide services for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds," as well as veterans and individuals with documented disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, para. 3). TRIO is considered a large umbrella "wrap-around" program that includes eight smaller programs "targeted to serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs" (CMC, 2021b, para. 1). Currently, there are TRIO projects in every state. "California has the largest number of projects with 405 projects, followed by Texas with 266 projects, Illinois with 152 projects, and New York with 111" (Cahalan et al., 2021, p. 243). Many studies have indicated that TRIO programs have had a positive impact not only on students' college persistence and graduation, but also on healing and motivational components that need to be acknowledged (Jehangir & Romasanta, 2021; Stevens, 2020; Vaughan et al., 2020). However, even after over 50 years of passionately building TRIO programs, staggering student need still exists. "TRIO reaches only about 1 percent of the eligible population for the more intensive TRIO programs and only about 3 percent for the more extensive outreach programs in any given year" (Cahalan et al., 2021, p. 225).

TRIO's original 1964 creation of Upward Bound was part of President Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act "to eliminate the paradox of poverty in the midst of plenty" (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, para. 1). By 1968, the Student Services for

Disadvantaged Students became the third program, thus coining the TRIO name. By 1990, the Upward Bound Math/Science program became the seventh program, and, in 2001, Student Support Services (SSS) was the eighth program created (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). TRIO's data have shown its profound impact on generations of families, communities, and our nation at large. For instance, in 1965, TRIO served 3,261 participants. In 2020, 808,545 participants were served. "Participation in TRIO programs experienced a 247 percent increase in the span of 56 years" (Cahalan et al., 2021, p. 240; U.S. Department of Education, 2020). TRIO funds have continued to provide resources and change lives for students and families who might not have invested in their postsecondary education otherwise. As wonderful and significant as these statistics are, we go back to the staggering statistic of TRIO serving only 10% of the eligible population (Pitre & Pitre, 2009). There are too many students in our communities and nationwide who could benefit from TRIO student support services who do not receive them.

The Impact of TRIO's Student Support Services on Colorado Mountain College

The SSS program goal is to "increase the college retention and graduation rates of its participants" (U.S. Department of Education, 2020, para. 2). To be eligible for program services, students must be enrolled in a postsecondary institution, come from a low-income family, be a first-generation college student, or be a student with a disability and documented academic needs. TRIO counselors *must* support students with academic tutoring, advising and registration advice, counseling services designed to improve financial and economic literacy, assistance with locating and applying for financial aid

programs, and aid with enrollment in 4-year programs. TRIO counselors *may also* support students with individualized counseling for personal and career options, exposure to cultural events or mentoring programs, and/or securing temporary housing (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The Department of Education provides funding to CMC of $595,500 annually for TRIO-SSS (CMC, 2021b) for a number of counselor positions and projects, but these funds are not sufficient to meet the needs of CMC's student population.

Colorado Mountain College's Mountain Scholars Program

The MSP is housed at CMC's Summit commuter campuses in Breckenridge and Dillion. The Summit campus had a TRIO grant providing resources from 2015 to 2020, but eligible students' needs were not being met. What began as a mentoring program in 2013 became MSP in 2018, which was created to replicate TRIO intervention programming (A. Walker, personal communication, February 15, 2022). MSP is "a program designed by community leaders committed to supporting first-generation, academically motivated students with financial need in earning a four-year college degree or postsecondary certificate by providing both financial and academic support" (CMC, 2022e, para. 1). MSP partnerships include the Summit Foundation, Summit School District, and CMC. Partners saw successful student transfers from the high school Pre-Collegiate Program into CMC with counseling and mentor support, but students "needed much more, in both financial and support services, to reach their goal of a 4-year college degree" (CMC, 2022d, para. 2). Partners understood, and research supports, that if students have to leave school to work and pay for tuition, there is an increased risk they

will not return to college and earn a 4-year degree. Finances became a major barrier in keeping students in school for their junior and senior year (CMC, 2022d). See Appendix C, which provides the MSP 2022-2027 Strategic Plan.

All MSP members receive one-on-one mentoring, academic coaching, degree and career counseling, college and transfer navigation support, financial navigation support, and additional support services as needed (CMC, 2022e). Scholarships are given up to $900 for freshman and sophomore year and up to $4,000 for junior and senior year through The Summit Foundation (CMC, 2022e). Participants of the MSP are expected to be

- First generation student (neither parent has completed a four year degree).
- Local to Summit County (2+ years in the county and established in the community).
- Enrolled at CMC Summit at least for year 1-2.
- College 101 course taken in the first fall semester.
- Meet with community mentor one-on-one at least once a month (including the spring workshop).
- Provide updates and set goals with mentor and CMC Pathways Coordinator.
- Achieve and maintain a minimum 2.0 GPA or higher for Associate level classes and a minimum 2.5 GPA for Bachelor level classes.
- Have plans to enroll in partnering four year program at CMC or a college/university and graduate with a four-year college degree or career certificate. (CMC, 2022e, para. 4)

Members must fill out an application that includes many educational intention questions as well as questions about work and community involvement outside the classroom. Members must also agree to meet with MSP mentors (Appendix D). Mountain Scholars who apply for membership in their junior or senior years must provide financial information, including a copy of their estimated family contribution and how the student thinks they will pay for college, as well as provide an unofficial transcript and share degree and career plans. Junior and senior MSP members must also answer the following prompts in extended paragraphs: 1) Identify a goal and steps you have taken to achieve that goal. 2) Explain a situation when you have struggled and how you overcame the situation. How will you use these skills to be successful in college? 3) What would you tell an incoming student in your shoes about how to be successful in college? (CMC, 2022e).

The MSP has impacted over 115 students so far, and of those students, 83% who earned an associate's degree stayed in school and earned a bachelor's degree or career apprenticeship (CMC, 2022e). "Nationally, only about 12% of First Generations students complete a post secondary degree. However, 60% of Mountain Scholars have earned a post secondary degree, exceeding the national average by 48%" (CMC, 2022d, para. 3). Table 2.1 shows the total number of MSP participants, alumni, and current students based on their self-identified ethnicity since its inception in 2013.

Table 2.1

Mountain Scholars Program Demographics Since 2013

Group	Total	Latinx	Latino
Participants	114	95	29
Alumni participants	50	40	14
Active participants	64	55	15

Note: Source: A. Walker, personal communication, February 15, 2022.

Tara Yosso's Cultural Community Wealth

"Theory is manifest in who we study, what research questions we ask, what sources we utilize, and the narrative that we write and present" (Garcia & Yosso, 2020, p. 61). I believe that Tara Yosso's CCW theory offers a strong theoretical and methodological perspective from a person of color's lived experiences, which I do not have. Even though I have been an educator in a segregated community in Richmond, Virginia, and at a global community in Fairfax, Virginia, a graduate student in California, and more recently a doctoral candidate in Denver, Colorado, CCW as a theory is a new framework for me. Yosso (2005) argued against Pierre Bourdieu's 1970's social phenomena themes of habitus and capital regarding how power is maintained and transferred generationally in social classes. Bourdieu focused on economic, cultural, social, and symbolic types of capital. Yosso created CCW as a critical race theory to challenge the outdated nomenclature of Bourdieu's predominantly White theory. Yosso centralizes race and argues that communities of color have abundant cultural capital and that cultural knowledge is a strength to be acknowledged and celebrated (Acevedo &

Solorzano, 2021; Ballysingh, 2021; Becerra, 2020; DeNicolo et al., 2015; Luna &

Martinez, 2013; Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016).

CCW challenges the historically quantitative and historically deficit assessment of

students of color and provides a counterstory showing the students' strengths of cultural

wealth. Cultural wealth is a "set of dynamic, interrelated, and often overlapping

knowledge, skills, and abilities possessed by people of color that are often unrecognized

and unvalued" (Burbridge, 2019, p. 142). Cultural wealth as connoted as knowledge,

skills, and abilities also suggests a fluidity of problem solving, which as Yosso and others

have suggested is most prevalent within individual and community building in

developing "critical navigation skills" (Yosso et al., 2009, p. 660). Table 2.2 describes

the six cultural capital elements that make up CCW.

Table 2.2

Six Elements of Capital in Community Cultural Wealth

Element	Description
Aspirational	Hopes, dreams, and aspirations students hold despite educational inequities
Navigational	Skills for maneuvering through social institutions not created with Latinxs in mind, especially educational spaces
Linguistic	Communication and language skills students bring to campus, especially the role of storytelling
Social	Peer and social connections and contacts on campus
Familial	Cultural knowledge nurtured among *familia* (kin) that carries a sense of community history, memory, and cultural intuition
Resistance	Capital coming from parents, community members, and a historical legacy of engaging in social justice

Yosso's CCW theory supports educational spaces that are intentionally warm spaces of ethical care, tending to both inter- and intrapersonal student development. This strong assets-based transformative, social justice perspective was paramount in my collaborating with CMC and helping CMC gather rich, in-depth lived experiences regarding what experiences influenced Latino men's persistence in achieving their aspirational goals while in the MSP. Yosso argued that one's aspirational persistence is a collaboration of one's collected capital from several different elements (Ballysingh, 2021; Yosso, 2005; Yosso & Burciaga, 2016). From this place of acknowledging and bucketing strengths, many Latino men in the MSP incorporate these strengths into their aspirational goals and perseverance to their outcomes. Yosso found that these aspirational and resiliency elements are capital in spite of overt and covert inequities; by creating the CCW, she hoped to challenge the deficit mindset that communities of color do not aspire to be college educated or care about their social mobility (Burbridge, 2019; Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). Not only does CCW celebrate an assets-based social justice approach, but since Yosso's creation of it, CCW has been cited in more than 7,000 published studies (Acevedo & Solorzano, 2021).

In choosing Yosso's theory as a framework for examining Latino men's aspirations and outcomes, I found a number of studies that use CCW theories, but often in conjunction with other theories such as critical race theory, LatCrit theory, or even Laura Rendon's student validation theory (Niehaus et al., 2016; Pour-Khorshid, 2016; Vasquez et al., 2020). This study used the researcher's critical hope and liberation expertise and passion with Fetterman's empowerment evaluation and Yosso's CCW as

the social justice framework to offer the MSP data-driven findings as a formative assessment in improving their program as they move through the next iteration of strategic plans (see Conceptual Framework in Appendix A). The MSP program evaluation offering specific CCW elements to strengthen can be easily incorporated into best practices or themes discussed in Chapter 5 recommendations. Changing behavioral or attitudinal aspects is an easier and quicker way to begin building momentum and achieving quick capacity-building wins before moving into heavier program or organizational changes.

Summary

This dissertation examined the gap in literature with regards to an assets-based instead of deficit discourse in examining Latino educational aspirations and aspirational outcomes at a dual enrollment and HSI's in-house student support program. Student support programs, like TRIO and MSP, are essential interventions for students who come from families that are not adept at navigating postsecondary spaces, spaces not created for marginalized, low-income, first- generation students and families. By using an assets-based CCW epistemology and focusing on CMC's innovative, in-house student support program's MSP, I presented the lived experiences of five Latinx alumni as important feedback and evidence from which to effect change from an assets-based paradigm.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

"Our greatest strength lies in the gentleness and tenderness of our heart." —Rumi

This program evaluation sought to assist leaders at Colorado Mountain College (CMC) in becoming even better informed decision-makers regarding important wrap-around student support services by using a transformative epistemology with an empowerment evaluation qualitative research design that encourages stakeholder participatory and empowerment practices. This evaluation collected evidence of lived experiences as told through Latino alumni who received support from Summit's Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) to determine to what extent the program supported Latinos' aspirations and aspirational outcomes, and to what extent community cultural wealth (CCW) capital played a conceptual role in supporting the participant. By knowing how CCW supported participants' aspirations and outcomes, the MSP can better align with CCW capital elements. As Garcia and Yosso (2020) said, "Oral accounts bring tremendous depth to our understandings of the human experiences of segregation" (p. 71).

This chapter details the evaluation's epistemological approach, my researcher positionality and reflexivity, the qualitative research design, the setting and participant recruitment process, the data collection and analysis process using David Fetterman's

empowerment evaluation model, and the ethical considerations and limitations of this program evaluation. The intended result of this chapter is to instill confidence in the reader as to the ethically minded protocol with which this study was conducted, the rigorous and strategic data collection and data analysis process used, as well as the integrity and robustness of the report findings.

Researcher Epistemological Worldview and Positionality

A qualitative inquiry research design was best suited for this program evaluation, as its purpose was to use participants' lived experiences as data to inform program decisions. Qualitative research has been gaining momentum as an important option in data collection and analysis, especially with communities who have been invisible, marginalized, and oppressed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetterman, 2018). Historically, research focused on scientific, quantitative, empirical data collection and analysis, where White postpositivists offered a single truth that further made invisible marginalized and oppressed people. More recently, however, research designs are offering meaning-making from several perspectives. From this contemporary meaning-making paradigm, this program evaluation used a qualitative research design.

An important component of a trustworthy qualitative study is that the researcher must offer substantial reflexivity to be responsibly situated in the research. "Reflexivity informs positionality" (Holmes, 2020, p. 1). Positionality not only informs my worldview, but it allows the research at hand to grow in understanding. I am a veteran English and humanities teacher, having taught in both urban and rural, high school and college settings for 30 years. I have held roles in both academic and student support

positions of leadership. For CMC, I was hired as an instructional supervisor in charge of remedial classes, all learning labs, adult basic education, English language learners, and the first-year experience program. I also held roles as a college counselor as well as a TRIO Student Support Services counselor. Over the last 30 years of being an educator, I've been a guide of witnessing students and faculty's storytelling and their learning the importance of their own voice and narration as they become reliable witnesses of their own navigational journey. The relationships built around storytelling are paramount to my epistemology as an educator, community member, listener, and friend.

Based on the framework and language of Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2014), I am theoretically and methodologically positioned between the postmodernism/ poststructuralism epistemological stance of deconstructing colonialism and the constructionism meaning-making stance. Operating from this postmodernism/ poststructuralism stance allowed me to inquire from a critical lens that centers the theoretical identities of the 'lived experiences' of marginalized peoples and rejects "the notion that knowledge is definite and univocal" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 63). By using the framework and language of Creswell and Creswell (2018), I have leaned even further into the transformative worldview that asks for a collaborative action agenda to confront oppression wherever it occurs. From this transformative worldview lens, important social issues should be addressed collaboratively so that all stakeholders have ownership and "reap the rewards of research … and become a united voice for reform and change" (p. 9).

From this place of dismantling, I turned to indigenous research methodology to learn and to add to the depths of my global humanity. Linda Tuhiwaii Smith (2019) noted the need for women to be involved in building inclusionary spaces. Smith, also addresses the power of the narrative, stating that the past is lost, but the present is community and hope. Eve Tuck (2013) spoke of repatriation to disrupt colonization and uncover "layered wisdom." Somewhere between a past that is lost and uncovering layered wisdom is my desire to be a 'worthy witness' (Paris & Winn, 2014) in building relationships, creating spaces, engaging in conversations, being in community and in hope to act on a better imagined future in a culturally sensitive collective solidarity that is pluralistic and inclusive. In *Humanizing Research: Decolonizing Qualitative Inquiry with Youth and Communities,* Paris and Winn (2014) shared the important concept of being a worthy witness while conducting research. Although the term *worthy witness* was new for me, I embraced what it means to be a worthy witness in educational spaces as a collaborator in learning. To be a worthy witness is to acknowledge that ethical considerations, trustworthiness, and participatory empowerment are paramount in designing and implementing this program evaluation meant to awaken and disrupt the colonized status quo of marginalizing or allowing certain populations of color and gender to be invisible.

I also consider bell hooks important, as she reinforced that "when we write about the experiences of a group to which we do not belong we should think about the ethics of our action, considering whether or not our work will be used to reinforce or perpetuate domination" (2015, p. 43). I was introduced to hooks over 30 years ago when I earned my Masters of Teaching English from Virginia Commonwealth University, where I

learned intentionality and reflectivity as a learner and a teacher in addition to writing my

master's thesis on literary criticism focusing on feminist deconstructionism. hooks

insistence on radical classrooms as places of self-discovery came from knowing that the

only way to achieve love and solidarity is through the tough conversation of equality, or

lack of equality (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; He et al., 2021; hooks, 1994, 2003, 2010;

Wahab, 2021). I appreciate hooks for her powerful belief that critical examination from a

place of hope and self-recovery is key to not only improving social justice's needed

changes but also dismantling systemic and oppressive systems of power and privilege,

much as Freire believed (Camangian & Cariaga, 2021; Kirylo & Boyd, 2017; Montero,

2009). We are all colonized peoples, and I feel that I have a responsibility to help us

collectively heal the intergenerational and cultural wounds. From this place of self-

consciousness and self-reflection, I acknowledge that I am being seen as a middle-aged,

White woman investigating Latinos, and I am an outsider. In 'locating' myself in this

program evaluation, I understand that as an outsider I do not have a similar 'lived

familiarity' as the study participants.

 Paulo Freire and bell hooks offer an unshakeable foundation from a sense of

belonging and love, where the result must become hope and liberation. Freire believed

that when people are engaged from a sense of critical awareness and belonging in their

learning, they are better able to empathize and think critically about situations

(Fetterman, 2017b; Freire, 1972, 1985; Kirylo & Boyd, 2017). This sense of belonging

and collaboration is a theme that will run throughout this program evaluation because

belonging is crucial in true liberation. Freire's pedagogy of liberation requires that (a)

people dialog, (b) people listen, (c) people participate with humility and respect, and (d) people critique and exchange knowledge—and in this way people recognize that schooling means life (Freire, 1972, 1993, 2021; Kirylo & Boyd, 2017; Montero, 2009). I am acutely aware of the power and influences that radical classroom spaces and educators and storytelling bring in guiding students to metacognition, self-awareness, and freedom. I understand our individual and collective dreams and nightmares, our ancestral wounds, and our souls' desires to move from a place of courage, love, forgiveness, healing, and peace and that fear often divides healing and solidarity.

Finally, an appreciative nod to Brené Brown, whose initial research on shame and vulnerability is changing the way we relate to ourselves and others both in our personal and professional arenas and who, I believe, is helping us bridge the gap to intergenerational and cultural healing from a new space. Brown's current grounded theory research focuses on language and meaning-making. She considers one's biology, biography, behaviors, and back story all necessary components in understanding our meaning making and shared that "having access to the right words can open up entire universes. Naming the experience gives us the power of understanding" (Brown, 2022, p. 42).

As I continue to deepen my practice as an inclusive excellence scholar and educator, I have been revisiting my history and intersectionality with my lived experiences with power and privilege (or lack of it), witnessing both the microaggressions and macroaggressions done to me, and that I unconsciously may have done to others. I believe that our legacy, our consciousness, and our evolution depend

upon our looking critically with love at how we can be and do better. From this declaration, I recognize harms done; I recognize binary language and limitations; and I witness my own framing of this study wishing inclusionary research and practices where all feel a sense of belonging. I understand the feelings of being both invisible and privileged regarding systemic oppression. And because of my lived experience, I am hopeful that others see, feel, and know that I have the emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aptitude to be a worthy witness for not only the CMC Latino men who chose to be participants in this program evaluation, but for all of us in the field of education striving to be the best role models and collaborators.

Empowerment Evaluation

I chose David Fetterman's empowerment evaluation theory of change approach for this program evaluation for a number of reasons. The first consideration is that empowerment evaluation is on the "Use" branch of Alkin's evaluation tree (see Appendix B). The evaluation tree shows how qualitative evaluation theory is categorized. The base of the trunk is built on an epistemology as well as social accountability and social inquiry. Social accountability is concerned with the rationale for the evaluation, and social inquiry is the method a researcher uses to collect and analyze the data collected (Alkin et al., 2021). I chose to use an evaluation method from the Use branch because the data collected are centered as factual, unlike the other branches that focus on the value of the data or the value of the evaluator of the other two branches. I was interested in letting the lived experiences of the study participants be the data, as words and stories carry important meaning that should speak for itself.

Another reason I chose Use branch methodologies and the empowerment evaluation specifically is because I respect Fetterman's work in the field. Fetterman's (2005) empowerment evaluation principles include

> (1) improvement, (2) community ownership, (3) inclusion, (4) democratic participation, (5) social justice, (6) community knowledge (knowledge closely related to practice), (7) evidence-based strategies (e.g., interventions, practices), (8) capacity building, (9) organizational learning, and (10) accountability. Practice represents the application of principles to real-world settings. However, practice is messy, often filled with nuance, compromise, and built-in tensions. (p. 42)

In addition to these principles, Fetterman was foundational in bringing rigor to the qualitative research process and product as well as being concerned with stakeholder buy-in and engagement in the evaluation.

Fetterman (2005) defined empowerment evaluation as "the use of evaluation concepts, techniques, and findings to foster and improve self-determination" (p. 2). Fetterman believed that his approach is one that aims to increase the probability of success by offering tools that are flexible enough to meet the individual needs of evaluands. Fetterman created an easy-to-use three-step process—(1) establishing the mission, (2) taking stock of the current status, and (3) planning for the future—and later created a more intricate 10-step evaluation process discussed in Chapter 5 recommendations (Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018).

I was able to use three of Fetterman's tools in sharing his theory of change model for this program. The first tool in framing the method of the research was the three-step approach mentioned above. The second tool was from Fetterman's second step, "taking stock of the current status," which comprised the data collection and data analysis portion

of the evaluation, resulting in what Fetterman called "minding the gap." This information is offered in the Chapter 5 discussion section. The third tool used was from the third step, "planning for the future," and is a capacity-building framework tool to share data analysis and results with stakeholders (Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). That framework is offered in my recommendations section.

Fetterman's theory of change is about stakeholder problem-solving, leadership, and decision-making, as well as about collaboration, participation, empowerment, and shared innovative best practices. I chose Fetterman's theory of change as an evaluation tool for a number of reasons. First, Fetterman's theories guide empowerment, self-determination, process use, and its theory of use and action, which all align with my personal and professional purpose and passion. Second, there is flexibility in the role the evaluator takes. The evaluator's role in the collaborator framework suggests that the evaluator is still in charge but includes the stakeholders as much as possible (Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). The evaluator's role in the participatory framework is one of the program evaluations being "jointly shared." Participatory control can begin with the evaluator, but the participating members design, analyze data, and implement best practices. The evaluator in the empowerment theory is the one in control of the evaluation, and the evaluator is considered a "critical friend" (Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). I saw my role as a collaborative evaluator, including the stakeholders as much as they wished to be involved. As I continue to envision the possible replications and uses of this program evaluation, I see how this evaluation can be a pilot evaluation for other CMC programs and demographics, and from this vantage point, I can be a critical friend

or evaluation coach at other CMC sites or at other institutions. Third, Fetterman's concepts of action and reflection, from the stance of being a critical friend, are an important critical inquiry lens and process. Fetterman's evaluation framework works whether it is in the deconstructing of a large systematically oppressive space or a more intimate relationship. Fourth, Fetterman's theory of change is brilliant and simple in that it compares a program's theory of action and its theory of use, resulting in what Fetterman calls "minding the gap" (Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Finally, Fetterman's stakeholder focus on program evaluation is structured to enable both a formative and a summative evaluation, and it is also meant to offer transformative practices that empower the holistic wellness of both the individuals and communities who use this evaluation methodology.

This program evaluation using empowerment evaluation offered critical and reflective narratives that allowed me to be a worthy witness to participants' storytelling and be part of a healing process that further facilitates solidarity, creates study findings that advance a larger counterstory and narrative, and offers ways to create new understanding as an empowering pedagogy (Bain, 2010; Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018; Kelly, 2021; Rodríguez-Campos, 2012). One of the reasons I was excited to use an empowerment evaluation method for this program evaluation is because by sharing knowledge, a collective consciousness of critical mass becomes possible. Many understand that youths, marginalized or not, who become more critically conscious of their surrounding experience improve their relationships with themselves and others, enhance their overall mental health, create better educational and occupational outcomes

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for themselves, and become more engaged in their communities (Cadenas et al., 2018; Delia & Krasny, 2018; Godfrey & Burson, 2018). By sharing conversations with all stakeholders, but especially students, and by asking critical questions, I hope that I can change community consciousness, awakening and transforming it. Montero (2009) wrote, "It is impossible to produce liberation in a one-sided way, like it is impossible to have a conversation where only one person talks" (p. 89).

Setting and Recruitment

In establishing the needs of this qualitative inquiry (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and completing Fetterman's first step of establishing the mission, a number of conversations with various CMC stakeholder-employees over a year-long period resulted in situating the research within the MSP. I shared my vision of the importance of centering the college's most marginalized demographic, Latino men, and shared that my hope was to be a "worthy witness" to their stories and lived experiences from an asset-based study. A number of important conversations culminated in my confidence in conducting and completing a significant study. The closest CMC employee to the MSP is Andrea Walker, coordinator for the MSP at Summit campus. She has a master's degree in curriculum and instruction and was hired in 2018 as the first coordinator for the MSP. Ms. Walker acknowledged interest in learning more about a program evaluation involving CMC's Latino men in our first meeting and agreed to work with me in supporting my study. Ms. Walker has been tremendously important in collaborating with me in a gracious and timely manner, which has allowed me to work seamlessly in collecting and analyzing data. She provided a list of Latino alumni demographics that

allowed me to determine an appropriate sample size. In the history of the MSP, there were 14 Latino alumni, and I chose a sample size of five. She sent the 14 alumni the study recruitment letter that I wrote, as well as sent a follow-up letter when I had not recruited the five participants I wished to have for the study (see Appendix E). When the participants agreed to the program evaluation, they replied to Ms. Walker; Ms. Walker then connected both the participant and me with well wishes. Selecting the study participants was a coordinated effort between Ms. Walker and me, as recommended by Fetterman (2017a, 2017b, 2018). In addition, Ms. Walker being involved immediately created an important connection for the participant and me.

Before getting permission from Ms. Walker to evaluate the MSP, I had a number of conversations with Ms. Yesinia Arreola, executive director of the TRIO Student Support Services program and other special diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, a self-identified Latina who has a master's degree in social work. Ms. Arreola was very supportive of the idea of conducting a program evaluation witnessing Latinx students and offered to assist in any capacity. I spoke with Dr. Matthew Gianneschi a number of times, whom I introduced in Chapter 1, and in the most recent conversation he shared that commuter campuses would be the most beneficial study setting. He also shared that "we know the success that TRIO has on our campuses; what we want to know more about is the success that individual commuter campuses have in creating TRIO-like wrap-around student support services without the support of TRIO resources" (M. Gianneschi, personal communication, February 8, 2022). Finally, I had many conversations with Amy Phillips, TRIO success center coordinator at Steamboat campus (a residential campus),

who is a longtime personal and professional friend with whom I continue to dialogue and use as a "critical friend" in the execution of this study.

The discussions with the above stakeholders resulted in the following important conversation topics: strategized alumni as the best study participants, research questions, study limitations including alumni willingness and availability, researcher and participant assumptions and biases, how to best serve all stakeholders, how qualitative research is more than "do no harm, it is to 'do good,'" the creation of the interview questions to focus on how effective MSP is in regards to participants' aspirations and outcomes and how, if at all, Yosso's six elements of CCW are significant in this research, verbiage for the study invitation and consent form, as well as the most advantageous place and modality to conduct the interviews in a natural setting, as suggested by qualitative methods protocols (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 196).

Overview of Data Collection

In Fetterman's second step of taking stock of the current status, I conducted one one-on-one interviews with five Latino male alumni in a natural setting by using semi-structured questions (see Appendix F) that allowed for flexibility in supporting participants to determine the direction of the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b; Mertens & Wilson, 2019). The decision to have five participants allowed me to present a detailed description of their experiences in a timely manner (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The questions that guided the interviews were shared with the participant in an email once the participant and I arranged a time.

Participants were happy to meet via WebEx and be recorded for data collection integrity, as that is the system that CMC uses and what participants were most familiar with. In both the initial written participant invitation to the study and at the beginning of the interview, I addressed participant anonymity. The participant and I secured a name to be used when sharing results. I suggested that we schedule a 2-hour block of time, but assured participants that our conversation would take at the most an hour and a half. I also used the word *conversation* with the participant throughout the process, as I wanted to create a friendly atmosphere and the word *conversation* is less threatening than *interview*. I reiterated that the participant was the one to determine the focus and direction of the conversation, and that if he did not want to answer a question, we could skip it forever or come back to it.

The questions were bucketed into four sets of questions (as recommended by Creswell & Creswell, 2018) about postsecondary aspirations, aspirational outcomes, and challenges, but also about their sense of belonging, self-efficacy, or self-discovery as a college student (see Appendix F). The MSP leadership and I believed that, by focusing on students' aspirations and outcomes from a lens of security, belonging, and self-efficacy, educational institutions can be more intentional in helping Latino men witness and acknowledge their own CCW assets and the MSP can better advance intervention strategies that continue to support their members' degree attainment. The code book included both CCW assets of aspirational, navigational, familial, social, resistance and linguistic buckets, and the MSP resources of advisor, mentor, financial, and large group

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meet-ups. The next round of inductive data collection was the nuanced emotional

decision-making language that the participants used in describing their experiences.

I used field notes before, during, and after interviews to help with inductive data

collection in asking follow-up questions as well as in organizing the data into themes.

Field notes also allowed for emergent data collection to shift in "delving deeper into the

study" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 182). I understand that qualitative research is

recursive and emergent, and as I conversed with participants and witnessed the

participants' lived experiences, I adjusted to best "obtain that information" (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018, p. 182). I loosely followed Creswell and Creswell's (2018) sample

interview protocol that frames basic information about the interview, introduction to the

structure of the interview, opening question, content questions, use of probes, and closing

instructions (p. 191).

In order to create more of a conversational tone and built rapport and trust, I spent

the first 3 minutes or so introducing myself. I shared that I am a lifelong teacher and have

held a number of roles at CMC including being a teacher and a counselor. I shared that I

loved teaching high school most, as I was able to see students every day for a year and

often was able to see students for years, if not in my classrooms at least in the hallways,

at lunch, or around campus. I believe that by introducing myself and bringing up my long

history as a teacher and love for teaching high school students, I shared my authenticity

while also prompting participants to think back on their educational journeys. Some of

the participants were recent CMC graduates, while others had been out of college for a

number of years.

Overview of Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis uses a formulaic process to ensure validity. Validity

involves strategies such as using "rich, thick description" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

when writing up findings; triangulating data sources; member-checking "polished or semi-

polished" findings with participants, which may include a follow-up conversation, peer

debriefing, or using what Fetterman (2018) called a "critical friend"; clarifying researcher

bias in interpreting data; presenting negative or discrepant findings if there are any; and/or

using an external auditor (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 200-201). Validity also involves

acknowledging before data analysis that several other actions have happened; for instance,

I was in different stages with different participants simultaneously and was in the process

of winnowing the data to focus on and aggregate data into a recommended five to seven

themes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 192). Winnowing the data meant that I focused on

some aspects of the data collected and ignored other parts.

Initially, I planned on using a software program to help me transcribe interviews,

but in using WebEx to record the conversations, I found that WebEx's transcriptions

were easy to read through and clean up, allowing me to personally work through each

read through and hand code as an integral part of the process, which allowed for an

intuitive, nuanced approach to intimate knowledge and data analysis.

To create research validity, I followed Creswell and Creswell's (2018) five-step

process in analyzing the data.

1. *Organize and prepare for data analysis*. As already mentioned, I used WebEx

    transcriber in reading each transcript separately and created annotated notes on

what resonated while I cleaned up interview transcripts. For this first step, I
followed Tesch's (1990) coding process that suggests initially using three broad
buckets of expected, surprises, and of conceptual interests (as cited in Creswell &
Creswell, 2018, p. 183). While cleaning each transcript, I found that the expected
bucket had familial influences in it, and that stayed consistent throughout the five
transcripts. In the surprised bucket, I found myself putting in the excitement and
passion with which participants described their relationships with their mentors. I
also put in the bucket that a number of participants mentioned being introverted.
In the of conceptual interests bucket, I found myself putting in one participant's
hope for the future. He hoped that when his younger sibling and cousins are older
that they choose college and help break the negative machismo stereotype of
Latinos. Also of conceptual interest was the varied answers participants gave
regarding receiving financial assistance as a result of being an MSP member.

2. *Read all the cleaned-up data*. It was here that I realized my excitement in the
themes that were emerging and created a better flow in asking questions and
potential follow-up questions for participants depending on their answers.
Because I was able to read the cleaned-up data in-between interviews, I got better
at having a conversation that was able to flow. I began to ask more chronological
questions based on before, during, and after being an MSP member regarding
their aspirations and aspirational outcomes. For instance, I started to ask first
about their high school experiences instead of leading with MSP questions. I
wanted to let them lead the conversation still, but if participants did not mention if

they participated in the MSP partnership program the Summit High School Pre-colligate program, I would ask them about it. I was finding reoccurring themes.

3. *Start coding*. Initially, I coded into five big chunks by a priori themes of CCW elements and MSP resources: (1) participants all had college-going aspirations before enrolling at CMC; (2) participants all had strong familial motivation; (3) participants all faced barriers before and during their CMC enrollment that being in the MSP positively impacted; (4) participants social interactions with MSP advisor, mentors and other MSP members supported their sense of being valued and belonging and eased their anxiety about navigating college; and (5) participants' program improvement recommendations. Second round coding was, therefore, emergent and focused on descriptions based on emotions and their decision-making process. I felt great that I was getting consistent and productive feedback from the participants, but I also cross-labeled data into categories that spoke specifically to the research questions. I did not want to jump into coding only to categorize the research questions, as I was aware of the nuances that might be missed if I was too hasty in my labeling and categorizing.

4. *Generate themes and descriptions*. I felt strongly about keeping as much student voice and lived experience intact and struggled to dissect their stories into findings. Second round coding was, therefore, emergent and focused on descriptions based on emotions and their decision-making process. One way to keep the integrity of the participant's voice was to combine each participant's story with his unique challenges with his program recommendations and consider

Finding 1: The Holistic Representation of Study Participants. I also found that the findings could be told somewhat chronologically since college-going aspirations began before participants entered the MSP. Participants' parents had high college-going expectations for all participants. Participants knew that they would go to college even if they did not know how to go to college or how they were going to pay for it. For some participants when they were in high school, they were strongly influenced to think more seriously about what careers they wanted by being in the high school's precollegiate program. These pre-MSP aspirations for college-going gave me Finding 2 and the answer for Research Question 1 What are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations? as well as the baseline for how the MSP impacted the participants' educational aspirations. I rolled the 1st round themes of (1) participants all had college-going aspirations before enrolling at CMC; (2) participants all had strong familial motivation into Finding 2. I then combined 1st round themes (3) participants all faced barriers before and during their CMC enrollment that being in the MSP positively impacted; (4) participants social interactions with MSP advisor, mentors and other MSP members supported their sense of being valued and belonging and eased their anxiety about navigating college into Finding 3. For Finding 3, I separated out each of the four MSP resources: advising; mentoring; large group meet-ups; and financial literacy and scholarships. By organizing Finding 3 into the four sections of the MSP resources, I was able to share how each of the resources impacted the participants. By organizing into programmatic elements, I was also able to address Research

Question 2 To what extent, if at all, are MSP Latino students' educational

aspirations impacted by MSP? and Research Question 3 Using Yosso's

community cultural wealth (CCW) model, what MSP programmatic elements

contribute to MSP Latino students' aspirational outcomes, if at all?

5. *Present the findings and recommendations*. This step, which involves presenting

information to stakeholders and possibly beyond to advance knowledge gained by

conducting the study, is shown in the last two chapters and is also an ongoing

process (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, pp. 193-195). I was invited to co-present my

research at the CMC Days in May as well as be a critical friend for MSP

stakeholders for a workday of the MSP New Strategic Plan in June. We used this

study's findings and Fetterman's Empowerment Evaluation's Taking Stock,

Planning for the Future, and Capacity Building. See Figure 3.1 on page 40 for

capacity building.

Additionally, as this evaluation was a recursive process, after I created a cohesive

outline of data findings, I shared my findings, on an individual basis, with each

participant in a secure email to have participants "member check" the in vivo outline. I

also shared my findings with Andrea Walker. Walker offered feedback on the chapter as

being significantly important and asking in a follow-up email if we could collaborate and

share my program evaluation with all CMC stakeholders at the next CMC college-wide

CMC days (see Appendix G). I offered that participants could add to what was in the

outline or ask me to take out data. I also offered to share another conversation if the

thematic outline jogged memories that a participant might want to share. It was important

for me to build trust, offer trustworthiness to program participants, and offer a credible

program evaluation that is confirmable and reliable. My hope was for me to build a

relationship with Latino alumni study participants and to obtain rich, in-depth answers,

creating a 'lived experience' narrative with the understanding that multiple realities exist

and that "particularity rather than generalizability" was the preferred treatment (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018, p. 206).

One of the Use branch goals is to make use of the data and data assessment so that

it is a part of the planning and implementation process, known as "knowledge utilization"

(Alkin et al., 2021; Fetterman, 2018). For this step, I returned to Fetterman's third step,

"planning for the future." In this step, the concept tool is called "minding the gap." To

mind the gap involves comparing the espoused theory of action of what the program is

intended to do with the theory of use of the observed behavior. In this program

evaluation, the theory of use is the collection of lived experiences. The comparison

between the two theories is the gap or the findings, or what Fetterman called the evidence

(Fetterman, 2017a, 2017b, 2018). Figure 3.1 is a visual representation of how

empowerment evaluation takes the core evidence of the findings and presents them to all

stakeholders. Knowledge builds as study findings are disseminated and become part of

the "culture of evidence."

Figure 3.1

Key Empowerment Evaluation Concepts
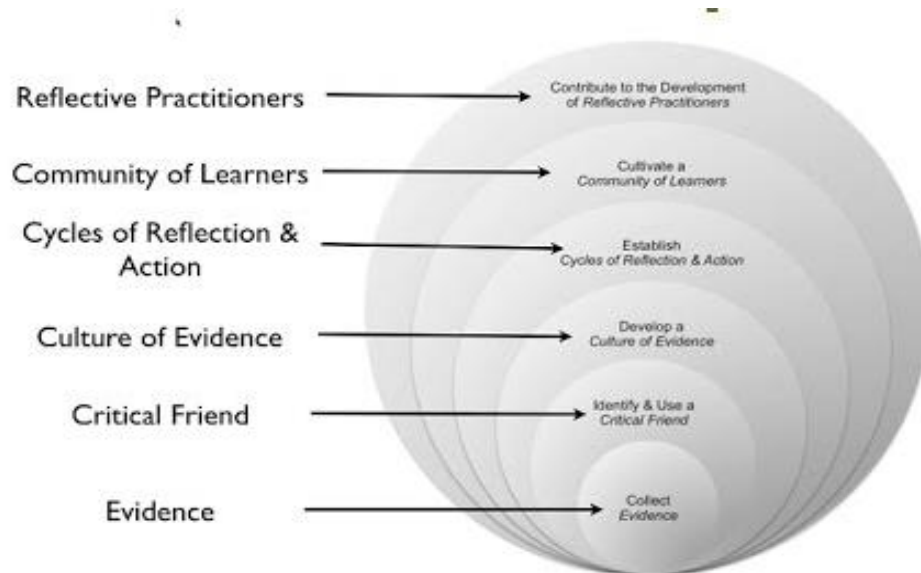
Note: Source: Fetterman, 2018.

Capacity building is a third necessary tool of empowerment evaluation to activate change. This cyclical process invites "critical friends" to ask clarifying questions as simple as "what do you mean by that?" to help build a community of learners and reflective practitioners that culminates in change. This theory of change is in alignment with all aspects of the program evaluation's epistemological, conceptual, and methodological framework. As I write up and disseminate this final report, I see myself in a critical friend role. My reporting and teaching of this evaluation will be an honest account with recommendations not only to CMC and MSP, but also recommendations on how to replicate the study in other CMC campuses, other institutions of higher education, and communities at large.

My hope is to make this final step so collaborative that stakeholders feel a true sense of ownership. Stakeholders who feel a sense of ownership are more likely to use the reflective practices that build capacity and eventually critical mass for social change, which this empowerment evaluation is meant to accomplish. I am excited to continue to share my work with the CMC and MSP.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

I triangulated data by creating field notes and shared data with participants and critical friends. Participants had the opportunity to member check their narratives. I welcomed follow-up conversations and was open to simply listen to content a participant wished to change, delete, or clarify (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I created a codebook to protect against drifting away from intended buckets. I checked for researcher bias, including cross-checking code definitions to ensure that I was not sliding code definitions to fit data into buckets where they did not belong (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, participants created pseudonyms. All sensitive student information was password protected and will be disposed of in an ethical manner at the conclusion of this evaluation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I worked with fellow doctoral candidates as well as Amy Phillips as critical friends and debriefed as necessary. I used reflexivity practices and ethical considerations. I trusted my intuitive good judgment as a veteran educator and my personal integrity to be a worthy witness for myself and all stakeholders, especially the study participants. I created a sense of collaboration and belonging from a place of critical consciousness and pedagogy of hope and liberation, where we are all learners and teachers.

Limitations

This program evaluation was meant to be a snapshot of 'lived experiences' gathered, and not a generalization about all Latino men at CMC (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Even as intentional, diligent, and authentic as I presented myself, I was most likely considered an outsider to the Latinos whom I interviewed in considering the insider/outsider positionality (Holmes, 2020). I did not set out to find a demographic so opposite to me, and I initially considered widening my collection of student voices to include any successful MSP student, but then I would not have been choosing a most marginalized student group at CMC. I see myself as a service-oriented, kind-hearted, radically open, lifelong teacher, but the Latinos whom I interviewed will not know my backstory, my passion and purpose for connection, or my desire for greater equity in all spaces even when I shared this heart-centered energy and conversational tone at the start of our conversation. For those reasons, it was important for me to set up the protocol and introductions at the beginning of our conversation, so that I felt like a trustworthy and comfortable person in which to share an authentic conversation. Only meeting once with each participant, however, was a limitation. Member checking was done, but only one of the five participants reached out to add to the data.

There are other limiting considerations worth mentioning in this study. CMC is a rural, open-access, dual-mission, multi-campus college that has both residential and commuter student support programs. Some campuses have both TRIO-funded wrap-around programs and in-house student support, and some campuses do not have dedicated student support programs. This program evaluation involved just the Summit

campus student support program on a commuter campus. In addition, campuses operate within very different communities, so findings on one campus might not represent or be a best practice on another campus. What works on one campus in one location may not work in another. Limitations related to interviews included that the participant could have shared what he thought the researcher wanted for an answer and that the researcher and the participant may have not been able to relate to each other, as well as any number of assumptions being made (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 188).

Other limitations relate to the time and modality of the interview. If I had had more time, I would have interviewed more participants possibly reaching saturation. After the initial interview, I would have also had a follow-up focus group to further discuss the strengths of the MSP as well as how participants feel improvements could be made. Using a focus group would be a great way to offer more collective energy in moving the MSP to even more inclusivity. I would have opened up the study to any MSP alumni and made comparisons regarding gender and ethnicity demographics. A number of participants mentioned being more introverted than their peers, and that contributed to at least one participant sharing shorter answers in comparison to other participants; I would have further questioned their introversion to see if this was a cultural insecurity. Finally, in winnowing and coding data, I might have excluded important information or I might have misinterpreted data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

"Close your eyes, fall in love, stay there." —Rumi

Introduction

As a reminder, the problem statement framing this program evaluation was the concern shared by CMC President Carrie Hauser that educational institutions have "outdated nomenclature" and are not student-ready in providing enough support for today's student retention and degree attainment (Colorado Mountain College, 2021c). The rapidly changing demographics of Latinx peoples in the United States coupled with the fact that Latino men are the least present Latinx gender in higher education placed the emphasis of this study on Latinos as needing specific interventions for postsecondary success (Huerta & Hernández, 2021; Martinez & Castellanos, 2017; Ramos, 2018; Rodriguez- Muniz, 2021; Sladek et al., 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this research was to acquire current knowledge from an asset-minded epistemology regarding how the Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) impacts the lives of its Latinos by asking the following guiding research questions:

1. What are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

   1a. How do these experiences impact MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

2. To what extent, if at all, are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations impacted by MSP?

   2a. What were these programmatic elements?

   2b. How do they impact MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

3. Using Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) model, what MSP programmatic elements contribute to MSP Latino students' aspirational outcomes, if at all?

The following themes and corresponding subthemes offer evidence supporting my findings regarding how the MSP impacted participants' aspirational goals and aspirational outcomes as well as how participants' lived experiences not only support but add to Yosso's CCW model in the alumni's aspirational goals and outcomes via the MSP programmatic elements. The findings are a result of using a critical inquiry framed around an empowerment evaluation data collection and analysis approach and are structured here to offer as close to a chronological story as possible, beginning with a worthy witnessing of each participant's lived experiences followed by their MSP experiences. As a reminder, participants' names have been changed; participants' dates of attendance have also been taken out. Finding 1 is a biographical impression of each study participant. Finding 2 describes the period before participants entered the MSP program. Finding 3 describes participants' experiences with MSP resources while they were MSP members and also upon reflecting on their experiences as alumni.

Finding 1: Holistic Representation of Study Participants

In providing context and humanity to the study's findings, themes, and subthemes and in following my emphasis of being a worthy witness to participants, I felt it was necessary to offer a more complete and holistic biography of the men who volunteered to converse with me about their MSP experiences. The study's findings pull together the participants' lived experiences leading up to becoming members of the MSP, while MSP members, and as MSP alumni. I felt strongly about beginning my findings' section introducing each participant so that readers also witness each study participant's reflective positionality of how the MSP impacted their aspirations and aspirational outcomes. This finding shares each participant's experiences from a biographical lens and not the fragmented parts of data in the other findings sections.

In addition, this section offers what participants are currently doing vocationally and if they felt like they have achieved or still are achieving their aspirational goals as a consideration in answering Research Question 1 and Research Question 2 and determining how the MSP impacts its Latinos' aspirations and aspirational outcomes. Again, study participants who shared information regarding degrees were sharing information that might give away their anonymity, but participants shared that they would rather share their truth than worry about hiding or giving misinformation. As such, I took out years of attendance and graduation dates but left their words and stories intact.

Alex

Alex's MSP journey, like that of many maturing students, went from overwhelming and concerning uncertainty to arriving. By the time he was a senior in high

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school, he knew that he wanted to go to college, and he knew that he wanted to make his parents proud, but he was unsure of how to navigate the journey. He shared that he had college-going aspirations, and he knew that he wanted to "go one step further than [his parents] were able to and become the first person in [his] family to graduate college." Alex also knew that his familial support and their aspirational goals for him would improve his chances to be the first-generation college graduate in his family. Alex juxtaposed his college-going experience to his living at home. He said that his deep bond with his parents and siblings was familiar and supportive; "it felt like we were all learning and going to college together" and that home was his place of comfort. "You know, when you feel there's a lot of unknown, you turn to the familiar."

Alex offered that while he initially felt overwhelmed and confused by not knowing how to navigate college, especially filling out Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) forms, he and his family became used to the idea that Alex was a college-going member of the family. Alex explained that by becoming a MSP member and using the MSP resources, his confidence grew. "Andrea helped with that, and so many other conversations that helped me feel like I could belong in college." Alex was able to strengthen his social, navigational, and resistance capital by being in the MSP and feeling like he could belong in a college setting. Alex compared his first 2 years at CMC and in the MSP program with his final 2 years at a larger Colorado university, and he laughed when he recalled his mother's dismay at his having to move away from home to attend the larger university. Alex shared that CMC's intimate settings and close proximity to home and work worked really well for him. He offered that he did not feel

the warmth from faculty, staff, or even other students at the larger university that he felt while at CMC. But Alex also said, "Through all of their [MSP and the larger university] collaborative efforts, I was able to graduate college debt free, because I got a full-ride scholarship, and so I'm very grateful to just everyone who helped me in the program get to where I am."

When I asked Alex to share what he is doing now vocationally, he proudly offered:

> I work with individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, and so that's what I've been doing since I graduated with my bachelor's in human development and family studies. Tomorrow is my 2-year anniversary. My caseload is 10 to 12 clients or families at a time. I do eventually want to go back to school to get my master's in clinical mental health counseling, so I've been exploring the different programs out there.

Alex has also recently volunteered to become an MSP mentor; Alex is the first MSP alumnus to come back as a volunteer. Alex shared that being the only brown student is both challenging and rewarding, and he wishes to show others that brown-skinned men belong in college as much as any other intersectionality. Alex said of being Latino:

> I feel like sometimes it was hard for me to explain what my issue was because you don't really know and you wouldn't be able to understand because you're not Latino. Sometimes I wouldn't voice my struggle because I felt like, I wouldn't be able to or they wouldn't be able to understand me, and so by having someone who has gone through the struggle similar to me would definitely make more students

more open to share struggles that they're having. Like I said before, sometimes I would just not say what I was struggling with because I don't know if they would be able to understand.

During our conversation, Alex expressed great compassion in having both gratitude for CMC and the MSP. He recognized the difficulty in recruiting staff to CMC's less populated areas and more expensive ski towns and also drew on his experience at a predominantly White institution, noting the need to be "more inclusive and more accessible." Alex continued with his program suggestions by empathizing with CMC's rural mountain town demographics and said:

> I can see it being challenging to recruit staff or faculty who are, um, Latino. I feel like, just because of the area that we live in. If it were a campus in Denver, then I feel like it would be easier, but just because we're a smaller town, it's a little harder. I feel like if we can't recruit faculty of color then maybe recruiting, for example, like, mentors who are, you know, Latino and people of color.

Alex and I were sharing an honest conversation regarding CMC's recent designation as a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) and a dual mission institution, and Alex offered that to have a greater impact on inclusivity MSP should "make the program more culturally sensitive":

> It's one thing to say, "Oh, I, we, speak Spanish too," but it's another thing to say, "We understand your culture." I think being culturally competent and sensitive is really what could make the program even better by understanding where first-

generation Latino students are coming from. You know, what are the home and familial values? For example, my parents are from Mexico and in Mexican culture, there is a collectivist culture rather than individualistic one. Collectivist is just, you know, we do things together, we stick together. We are trying to figure out or coexisting with both our native culture and the culture of the United States.

Christophe

Christophe said a number of times that he was a first-generation college student and that his ultimate goal was to be an architect, but he was also in a bad car accident in his senior year of high school, which ultimately changed his career trajectory. He said that he experienced a lot of pressure as a result of being a first-generation college student and the car accident, as well as watching his parents work very hard.

I feel I'm scared of, like, not reaching my potential. Growing up, I watched my parents work a lot. I saw that they were very hard working. They rarely were at home with me and my brother. So, it was mostly just me and my brother just taking care of each other.

Christophe was not only scared of not reaching his potential and disappointing his parents, but he was also concerned that his car accident would make it impossible for him to be the architect that he wished to be. He said of his cognitive struggles:

Initially I was, I was really bummed out. I was really disappointed that I could no longer do the thing that I wanted to do most, which was architecture. I wasn't about to give up on my future, especially being, like, the first generation of being

in America. I want to make my parents proud, and Andrea really helped me a lot in figuring out my future.

In our conversation, Christophe described his time as an MSP member:

They [MSP] were able to help me by giving me, like, little pushes forward and pointing me in the right direction. They helped by letting me know I still had a chance, that I still have a chance. And knowing they were there just kind of pushed me a little bit more to take steps to feel better and be happier. I hope that the program continues to support students like me.

Because Christophe was only in the MSP for one semester, his membership interactions and experiences were limited, but he said that he wanted to volunteer for this study because he was interested in sharing his educational experiences. Christophe mentioned being in the Summit High School Pre-Collegiate Program, noting that he was a good student in high school. Christophe shared that he did not get to know his MSP mentor but did meet with Andrea a few times and did attend MSP events. Both had a positive effect on him, as he said that he considers himself an introvert. Christophe added that his parents immigrated to Summit County from Mexico and that because of that he is a first-generation Mexican-American. He stated that one of his and his parents' goals is to be sure that he and his brother make more money than his parents do and eventually provide for them in the future.

He shared his final thoughts on his aspirational goals:

I am still achieving my goals. I will begin studying welding in Denver at CCD [Community College of Denver] in their manufacturing center. I want to work in construction, and knowing welding is like fieldwork for knowing buildings and architecture.

Eduardo

Eduardo's parents migrated from Mexico and he grew up in Summit County; Eduardo knew from his conversations with his parents that he would go to college. Eduardo's college aspirations began in MSP's partner space in the Pre-Collegiate Program at Summit High School, and he said that once he decided to go to college he was "very, very disciplined" and involved his family. Eduardo said that filling out financial aid forms (FAFSA) and working two jobs (30 hours a week) made going away to a university unattainable. He said that going to CMC's community college was "the next best thing." He expressed disappointment with the process expressing,

> It was very difficult because I have to jump through a lot and, I mean, a lot of
> hoops to get through FAFSA, um, because of my father's immigration status - I
> didn't see the point of getting the financial information for my family because I
> also help, you know, raise myself. I live with my family, but I take care of myself
> financially to which, uh, schools and government will reply, "No because you still
> live under the same roof as your family." So that was the biggest challenge that
> I've ever faced, just because of constantly talking to counselors and going from
> there.

Eduardo said, to this day, I'm the only one in my family with a college degree. I have younger cousins now entering the real world and I hope to at least give them some guidance if they choose to go to college, so they don't encounter some of the obstacles I encountered and go further than I did.

Eduardo also described some classmates' experience with Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) by saying, "I am a U.S. citizen, but I know of many other kids who were freaking out about DACA during Trump's presidency, and who still to this day are pretty nervous about our family and friends' identities." Eduardo also shared his concern for how expensive a college education is. "My feeling is school is too expensive right now, so I just decided I like the idea of construction. If I didn't have the financial concerns, yes, I would have most likely just kept on going to university." Eduardo shared not only his financial concerns, but also his concern for community:

> I also worked at, uh, Family Intercultural Resource Center because I like helping people advance and learn a little bit better. There are a lot of Hispanic and Latino clients, and I was a front desk person. It was very eye opening because that's when I started realizing I was very naive when I was young, and I was full of sunshine and rainbows, but then I got to hear a lot of stories, which, you know, unfortunately were very, very sad.

Eduardo offered a proud assessment of where he is currently and what his career trajectory looks like in the near future:

> When I left CMC with an associate in arts, I felt like that was just the beginning of what I am supposed to know. I also realized that the social work field was not

for me and decided to find a career as an electrician. I was hoping to learn more about electrical systems and now I am a third-year apprentice in an electrician trade. Yeah, and although I'm not in a typical college or university, I am going to trade school, and once I get my fourth year, I'll be qualified to install and work on electrical systems from there and hopefully get a master's and learn how to run and operate my own business.

Leon

Leon intuitively knew that he wanted to continue his education past high school. He was considering a criminology degree at a larger Colorado university but as the fall drew closer, Leon shared, "I backed out of that 4-year commitment really quick." He decided that he liked being at home, working his full-time job in retail and taking a few classes at CMC. Leon realized he was not ready to move away from home and go to college for four years. Leon decided that living at home and saving money until he learned more about himself would be smarter.

I've been doing full-time school and full-time work and, luckily, my job has been really nice and they, like, let me have these days off and let me leave early for class. They are supportive and have just been great about all that.

Leon said that once he took a psychology class, he knew that would be his major. He said that "CMC is a better choice for me than the school I considered originally because CMC is inexpensive and close to home." Leon continued to work full time and now goes to school full time as well. After talking to the psychology teacher, he was

connected to Andrea and became a MSP member. He said that he "relied on the support and the resources of Mountain Scholars to come to a clearer idea of what I wanted my future to look like while earning an associate's of arts degree." He shared the support he received by talking with Andrea and being in the MSP:

I felt like, no matter what I was getting at home, I had this support at school which made me want to make new connections to my mentor, other students, and also talk with the teachers. After I got the support, it was kind of like, okay, this is what I want and they are ready to help me and they kind of made the road for me. Then CMC came up with a bachelor in the human services degree that I am starting this fall. This is another new starting point to the next level for me.

Leon smiled at how well his educational goals were aligning. He summed up his career trajectory and how he felt about it:

I earned my associate of arts, and I'm just beginning the bachelor of human services degree at CMC. I just want to keep pushing and doing better and, you know, I don't want to get complacent. I want to experience everything that life has to offer. So, when I'm taking a lot of classes, and sometimes I'm like, oh, man, I feel like this might be too much. I'm always like, oh, but it's worth it.

As we continued to talk about his busy schedule, he said that although he lives with his parents, they were all so busy working that they were not spending enough family time together. Leon said that not only was he a full time student, but he also worked full time. Leon shared great gratitude for his relationship at work as his managers

allowed him time off to keep his schooling a priority. In the final moments that we were speaking about his family, he shared that Spanish was the predominant language in the house and that he felt that being multilingual was "another asset" he will bring with him into his career. He hopes to continue with CMC and the MSP as a junior in the bachelor of human services degree and "partake in all the fun events." He ended our conversation by being encouraged that staying at CMC and earning a bachelor's degree would be "a starting point to the next level for me."

Ricardo

Within the first 3 minutes of our conversation, Ricardo offered his excitement and appreciation of the MSP by sharing that because of the MSP, he was not only 1 year out of graduating from CMC with a bachelor's degree in business administration, but he was also 1 week away from closing on a house in the same neighborhood where he grew up. Ricardo generously began sharing his story with me, offering that he was born and raised in Summit County and was very "blessed and grateful" because his parents "sacrificed" by moving from Mexico City to Breckenridge. Ricardo shared that Spanish was the predominant language spoken at home, but that he began preschool when he was a 4 years old. Ricardo said that his educational journey was challenging because English was not spoken at home and he felt shy about his language barrier. Fast forward to his senior year of high school, and Ricardo decided on his own that he would go to a bigger Colorado university because he thought "that's what was normal for American students." He said he tried to get scholarships and make friends his first year, but ultimately he chose to leave that school at the end of his freshmen year in debt and feeling defeated.

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Ricardo said that he worked hard while at the university, declared a major, and earned a

3.3 GPA. He said that he found his way to CMC and the MSP because his girlfriend, also

a first-generation student, introduced him to Andrea and the MSP; the next 3 years

Ricardo attended CMC as a member of the MSP.

Ricardo made many comparisons between his first year at the big university and

CMC and said that the larger school did not offer him the "university life and student

resources that CMC and being in the Mountain Scholars Program provided." Ricardo

continued his story and his comparison of college experiences. He said, "I have just spent

the last 4 years in college, and now I understand so much better how having Andrea there

for us as first-generation students is a starting point." Ricardo recalled his most

memorable MSP experiences and appreciated two MSP events on dressing for success

and financial budgeting. He expressed great appreciation for his MSP mentor, whom he

met with once a month for 3 years, and the scholarships that allowed him to graduate

college debt free. Ricardo said that his mentor was in business law, and so their

conversations were often about "business, the real world, and classes." He also offered

that the whole time he was a full-time student at CMC, he also worked full time for a

commercial laundry.

In the final 10 minutes of our conversation, Ricardo discussed his extended family

and how generationally and geographically his cousins both in America and in Mexico

are breaking the stereotype that Latinos need to go into construction to provide for their

families. Ricardo commented:

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I also have cousins and friends that I went to high school with that just immediately after high school went into a job like construction. I mentioned this because I think seeing me go to college and getting ready to close on a house with my girlfriend and seeing what college can do and does sets the example. I think that in time, it will be beneficial for the next generation.

Ricardo said that two of his older cousins in Mexico had already finished college and two younger cousins in America were enrolled or entering college. While hopeful, Ricardo also added, "But, um, I'm, I'm not sure how you entice more Latinos to give up money or convince them college is different than high school." Ricardo finished his story by sharing that he knew he was going to college because he wanted to take "full advantage of my parents' sacrifices by moving from their homeland" to make a better life for him and his younger sister.

In continuing our conversation in a follow-up reply, Roberto's wanted to offer a thought about encouraging Latinos to continue with their education past high school:

One idea I had was that MSP could help to create or provide some kind of internships for jobs that Latinos generally gravitate towards. In my experience, these tend to be labor-intensive jobs such as plumbing, carpentry, construction, and tiling. These internships could potentially help Latinos see the benefits of going to college by getting first-hand experience after they've studied something that would get them ahead of the curve. The scenario I keep thinking about is a Latino student that gets a bachelor's in business and while they study, they get an internship that helps them either form relationships or start their own company in

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the fields of carpentry, tiling, or plumbing. I think this would help the machismo stigma a bit since it helps merge the two paths instead of them seeming like completely different ones. I'm not sure if it's viable or helpful, but I wanted to share it since I wasn't able to come up with an answer beforehand.

Ricardo's comment about machismo being a negative stereotype for Latinos sent me into the literature about machismo in higher education. As a result of Ricardo's reflective and thoughtful comments on Latinos' vocational choices, I was able to recommend that higher education leadership explore ways to better understand Latino identity. All study participants shared their educational aspirations before, during, and after being MSP members. Strong familial aspirations for study participants to get a college education encouraged them to conquer their fears of whether they belonged in higher education or not. Participants also shared that continuing education and lifelong learning support not only their social mobility, but also their familial social mobility as a constant theme. Participants shared that their MSP experiences were positive because they felt seen and supported by knowledgeable advocates at CMC, which allowed them to have confidence in themselves in learning how to navigate CMC. Study participants agreed to volunteer for this study because they wanted to share their positive experiences and express their gratitude for the people and resources of the MSP.

Finding 2: All Participants Expressed College-Going Aspirations
Before Entering the MSP

As noted in their narratives, all study participants had college-going aspirations before enrolling in CMC and becoming MSP members. Aspirational goals were to go to

college even if the participants did not know the process of applying to schools or the field of study and especially how families were going to pay for college. College-going aspirations were evident in the fact that all study participants allowed themselves to dream of a future that included having postsecondary goals, often without the resources to attain those goals. The following participants shared their aspirational goals of going "one step further" than their parents.

> When I was in my senior year of high school, I knew that I wanted to go to college, but I didn't know exactly where, and everything just felt so overwhelming to me that I was just like, I have no idea where to start. My main goals were to go one step further than my parents did or were able to. And so that was one of my biggest goals . . . become the first person in my family to attend and graduate college. And another one of my goals was to just really expand my knowledge of, you know, everything. We do learn helpful information in high school, but there's just so much to learn after high school. (Alex)

Alex shared that although he had college-going aspirations, he had "no idea" what he wanted to study; he just knew that college would be in his future. An interesting component of Alex's aspirational goals was to expand his knowledge of "everything." Alex wishing to expand his knowledge of 'everything" might have been a result of his not knowing what field of interest he wanted to study before entering college, whereas Christophe and Leon had specific interests in mind that they wanted to study when they went to college. Christophe not only had architecture in mind as a field of study, but he

also mentioned that his parents wanted him to be in a vocation that made Christophe happy where he could earn more money than they do.

> I'm the first of my generation to actually go to college. I do feel very, I guess, encouraged. My parents do encourage me; they want me to be happy and study something to potentially earn more money than them. I know that that's their hope. It was a lot of pressure for me to go to college and to not let my parents down. Ultimately, my goal is to become an architect one day. (Christophe)

While Alex had "no idea" what field of study he was interested in, and Christophe knew he wanted to be an architect, Leon considered criminology an interesting field of study for him until it was time for him to go to college. Leon realized that while a 4-year course of study sounded good, he was not ready for that commitment. Leon instead chose to stay close to home and attend CMC, his local community college. It was while he was at CMC that he reevaluated his program of study.

> At first, I thought about a degree in criminology and then the closer that it got to that point of going to college, I was kind of like, oh, man, like, this is a really cool subject, but I don't think it's for me. And then I was like, I don't think I'm ready for this. So, I backed out of that 4-year commitment really quick and I was like, okay, let's just take some time and kind of learn more about myself first. So right now, I am living at home still with my parents, and we just thought it would be smart to, you know, save as much money as we can right now. (Leon)

Leon, Christophe, and Alex all shared their journey of knowing that they wanted to go to college. They each had the opportunity to reevaluate and refine their college-going aspirations so as to better align their vision with not only their parents' hopes and aspirations for them, but also what career would best suit them as they began living a college-going reality. Equally Eduardo and Ricardo also had college-going aspirations that resulted in their earning an associates degree. Eduardo's educational aspirations evolved into learning about becoming an electrician and he is now interested in going back to school to possibly earn a bachelor's degree in business to start and run his own company. Ricardo, much like Eduardo, has thoughts of possibly going back to school to earn a bachelor's degree in business as his full-time job is with his long-time girlfriend's family business. All participants college going aspirations are continuing to reward their present situation and also guide future dreams.

2a. Participants Described High School Adult Influences as Significant

Participants' aspirational goals for a postsecondary education were influenced by both the local high school's Pre-Collegiate Program coordinator and a high school welding teacher. The local high school's Pre-Collegiate Program worked in partnership with CMC and the MSP as well as other institutions of higher education. The Pre-Collegiate Program's mission is "to help and encourage first-generation students in their quest to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education. We provide academic and community resources to help students formulate and achieve their goals in middle school, high school, and beyond" (Summit School District, n.d., para. 1). Summit's Pre-Collegiate Program indicated that "more than 400 first-generation students

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have achieved their college dreams with an 87% success rate" (Summit School District, n.d., para. 2).

A number of study participants mentioned this program as having a significant impact on their decision to go to college. Both Eduardo and Ricardo said that their college-going aspirations began in high school while they were a member of the Pre-Collegiate Program. Both shared that being a member of a first-generation community where their friends were also members started the idea that they could be a college student too, and then they shared that aspiration with their parents who supported their aspiration to go to college. Eduardo said:

At first, I was not interested in going to college at a young age and figured I would just get a job, but as I joined the Pre-Collegiate Program in high school, I started to look at college more. I initially wanted to do social work. I didn't know anything about getting into college but with the help of Molly from Pre-Collegiate, my father, and the scholarships I received, I was able to enroll and go to CMC.

Eduardo would change his focus in college away from social work and towards a career as an electrician.

Ricardo said:

I was in the Pre-Collegiate Program in high school, and that started the thought that I wanted to go to college, but my confidence level was very low. I still had no idea what I wanted to do with my life. I was just very unsure about my decisions.

But deciding to go to college started with Molly and the Pre-Collegiate Program and then I told my parents, and they were very supportive of my decision.

While Eduardo and Ricardo mentioned the influential Pre-Collegiate Program and program coordinator as the start of their college-going aspirations while in high school, Christophe did not. He did, however, know what he wanted to do for a career. Christophe had college goals to study architecture, but a car accident in the fall of his senior year in high school inevitably changed his career path. Christophe still enrolled in CMC and became an MSP member, but described his struggles:

> Not to brag or anything, but I, I was, I was a good student in high school with a
> GPA of 3.5. But I was in the hospital for a little over 3 months, so when I returned
> [to school], academics became very difficult. I had a tough time in school and
> finally realized that maybe I should start looking for some other jobs that might
> not be as, like, academic and be more like labor based.

Christophe shared that after the accident he began hanging out with his high school welding teacher and learned about the field of welding. Christophe mentioned the influence his welding teacher had on his decision to go into welding. He said that learning about welding shifted his depression to hope. He shared that he really liked welding and found a renewed sense of identity and passion because of it. Christophe shared:

> Initially I was really bummed out. I was really disappointed that I could no longer
> do the thing that I wanted to do most, which was to go to college and become an

architect. I wasn't about to give up on my future, especially being, like, the first

generation of being in America. I want to make my parents proud.

Ultimately, Christophe said his goal is still to become an architect one day, and

earning an associate's degree at CMC still supports this dream. He mentioned that

because of his high school welding teacher, he knows welding, and knowing welding and

buildings, he is one step closer to knowing architecture. Christophe's identity and career

trajectory were positively influenced as a result of an adult during his senior year of high

school; Eduardo and Ricardo were also heavily influenced to go to college from an adult

at their high schools. As a result of Christophe's welding teacher and the Pre-Collegiate

Program coordinator at Summit High School, study participants had a postsecondary

trajectory to become college students as well as influences on their career choices.

Influential, supportive, and friendly adults in the participants' high school setting proved

to be significantly beneficial. Participants creating important relationships with adults

other than their parents in settings other than work and home encouraged participants to

discover themselves and their vocational interests.

2b. Participants Expressed Familial Influences as Significant

Participants expressed college aspirations because of familial influences.

Participants shared that they were motivated to attend and graduate from college not only

to make their parents proud, but also to role model college-going success for their

younger cousins and extended families. In addition, participants were engaging in

college-going to fulfill their parents' aspirational goals. Even before they thought of their

futures, and well before they became MSP students and alumni, they spoke of witnessing

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their parents sacrificing to give them and their siblings a chance at a better life. A chance at a better life meant going to college. Ricardo shared, "My parents moved here from Mexico City. They moved because they wanted a better life for themselves, me, and my younger sister, and are my biggest supporters in going to college." Not only did participants mention their parents' sacrifice for their family's future, but participants also mentioned their own sacrifices as well. Participants were prepared mentally to go to college as a result of the expectations their parents put on them. Here Christophe shared how watching his parents work long hours day after day influenced and shaped his path:

> Growing up, I watched my parents work a lot. I saw that they were very hard working. They were rarely at home with me and my brother. So, it was mostly just me and my brother just taking care of each other. We have a really close relationship because of that. So just seeing my parents' work ethic and that they want to provide for their kids, that I guess kind of fuels my passion for, I guess, college and life. I want to make them proud. I want to complete college and have them be able to say that our family was able to keep pushing and eventually we had someone graduate from college with a degree, and I just think that is really something important that I want to complete.

Not only was familial support shown as foundational, but home was also mentioned as an important place for participants. Alex, like each of the participants, expressed that "the goal was to live at home. We were all learning together. We were all learning about this [college-going] process together." In a beautiful display of familial pride, he added,

So yeah, I like to think that we went to college together. So, yeah, my family was very supportive. And home was my comfort. You know, when you feel when there's a lot of unknown, you turn to the familiar.

Eduardo emphasized how he and his family went through his college years together and that their home space was an opportunity for the family to witness Eduardo's being a college student. He said:

I did this while living with my father, his girlfriend, and my younger sister in a two-bedroom home where I lived and slept in the living room. I would ask my family to leave the living room or not make so much noise while I would do homework and write essays. The support they gave me was giving me a space to work and concentrate.

Eduardo chuckled as he remembered his sister peeking around the corner and asking if she could come out of her bedroom because she was getting bored in there. His joy as an older brother shone through his smile.

Leon also shared that familial inclusion of living at home: "Right now, I am living at home with my parents. We just thought it would be smart to, you know, save as much money as we can right now while I finish the bachelor of human services degree."

Leon, Christophe, Alex, Eduardo, and Ricardo all reaffirmed the collectivism of familial decision-making, saying "we" thought, and "we" saved money, and "we" all went to college together. In addition to the support that parents gave participants, participants also shared that they would be supporting family members who want to attend college in the future. Participants shared that the more their confidence grew that

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they belonged in college, the more they were able to relax into having an opinion that they were willing to share. For instance, Ricardo offered:

> I think seeing me go to college and getting ready to close on a house with my girlfriend and seeing what college can do and does sets the example for my cousins. I think that in time, it will be beneficial for the next generation. But, um, I'm, I'm not sure how you entice more or convince more or like change the machismo aspect of going to college.

Much like Ricardo, Eduardo understood and spoke to the hard work it took for him to break the cultural and generational cycle and go to college. Eduardo described the process of moving from the fear of not belonging in a college setting to the hope that his cousins will one day choose the social mobility of higher education:

> I was very, very disciplined and motivated on not giving up on college. Despite all the hoops I have jumped, I at least got a 2-year degree. To this day, I'm the only one in my family with a college degree. I have younger cousins now entering the real world and I hope to at least give them some guidance if they choose to go to college, so they don't encounter some of the obstacles I encountered and can go further than I did.

Christophe offered an additional concern about reaching his own potential and not letting his parents down in terms of their aspirational goals for him: "I am still achieving my goals. I will begin studying welding in Denver at CCD [Community College of Denver] in their manufacturing center." He found himself fumbling with what he wanted

to say about higher education and continued speaking while looking down, saying, "I still feel a lot of pressure being a first-generation American and student. Because I, I don't know, I feel I'm scared of, like, not reaching what I want in life."

Despite being proud first-generation Latino college students and grateful for their familial support, participants still felt great concern in wanting to role model college-going success for their extended families. Ricardo shared,

I have a girlfriend who is a first-generation student, and also a Mountain Scholars, but I also have cousins and friends that I went to high school with that just immediately went into a job like construction or plumbing.

These participants were normalizing Latino college-going and expressed wanting to provide a better future for their parents, siblings, and cousins as well as for themselves. Ricardo continued to share his desire for familial influences by saying, "I think seeing me go to college and closing on a house with my girlfriend, and seeing what college can do and does, sets the example. I think that in time, it will be beneficial for the next generation."

Eduardo not only shared his gratitude for his family's sacrifices while he slept on the living room couch to save money while he was a college student, but also shared his feelings about being a college student:

I was very, very disciplined and motivated on not giving up on college. Despite all the hoops I have jumped, I at least got a 2-year degree. To this day, I'm the only one in my family with a college degree. I have younger cousins now entering the real world, and I hope to at least give them some guidance if they choose to go

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to college so they don't encounter some of the obstacles I encountered and go

further than I did.

Eduardo hoped to be a resource and help younger cousins navigate college as a

result of his being a college graduate. Ricardo summarized what the study participants

shared: "My parents moved here from Mexico City and are my biggest supporters. They

moved because they wanted a better life for themselves, me, [and my siblings]."

Participants described their familial influence, the sacrifices their family made for them

to go to college, and their desire to extend the familial influences they held as first-

generation college graduates in helping cousins and friends navigate and negotiate higher

education now that they had that experience.

Finding 3: How the MSP Shapes Participants' Educational Aspirational Outcomes

The MSP positively shaped and supported study participants' aspirational

outcomes. As this finding indicates, all participants benefitted from the MSP. Participants

aspirational outcomes were in line with becoming college educated and college

graduated. Even Christophe, who was only at CMC for a semester shared that CMC was

a very important bridge for him. Christophe was able to use the MSP resources to

successfully move from high school into an aligned vocation. Christophe's challenges

resulted from a car crash that forced him to reconsider what being college-educated

meant. All participants experienced barriers that made it challenging to apply to college,

go to college, and stay in college. All experienced a strengthening of their college-going

identity as a result of the MSP resources. Participants described specific MSP resources

that contributed to their successful college experiences. Finding 3a addresses MSP

Pathways Coordinator Andrea Walker's impact on the participants. Finding 3b speaks to the MSP scholarships that participants received. Finding 3c describes the importance of interactions with their MSP mentors, and Finding 3d discusses the importance of the MSP social events in creating important relationships with "others who look like me."

3a. MSP Pathways Coordinator

The MSP program has one coordinator, Andrea Walker, and one of her roles is to support MSP members with one-on-one mentoring in areas of financial literacy and navigation, degree and career counseling, college and transfer navigation, and academic coaching navigation, as well as additional support services. All study participants specifically named Andrea and noted how she influenced their college-going experience in not only the moment they needed support, but also in their degree-attaining or career trajectory outcomes.

Leon shared his experience in college before he became an MSP member and after he began working with Andrea. Leon had first considered criminology as a major but worried about the 4-year commitment. He appreciated being able to talk about his goals with Andrea:

> Before I had the support and the resources of Mountain Scholars, I was in college and felt like I'm just taking classes and I don't know what I'm going to do and it felt really weird. I would think: I don't know why I'm here. What am I doing? Is this something beneficial for me? I think what helped me most of the time were my conversations with Andrea; she would really help me. We talked deeper into what I wanted to do in the future, and she would tell me people to reach out to and

have people reach out to me. And at CMC, I had this support at school which made me want to make new connections to my mentor, other students, and also talk with the teachers. After I got the support, it was kind of like, okay, this is what I want and they are ready to help me and they kind of made the road for me. Now, CMC came up with a bachelor in the human services degree and I am enrolling. This is a starting point to the next level for me.

Leon went from feeling disconnected and not knowing why he was in college to recently enrolling in CMC's bachelor in the human services program, and he hoped to rejoin the MSP. We talked about what a mentorship might look like and he said that he hoped that he could be in the MSP again and looked forward to the MSP events where he could show his peers that he was a success story because of Andrea's counseling. Leon ended that portion of our conversation by saying, "This bachelor's degree is a starting point to the next level for me, and I know I would not be here if it weren't for Andrea."

Like Leon, Ricardo began college without support. Ricardo said that he went to a university in Colorado Springs for his freshman year and came back home because he didn't feel like he belonged and it was too expensive:

I first went to university in Colorado Springs, and I didn't like it there. I tried to get scholarships to make it more affordable. In addition to the financial troubles, I just didn't like it. I was undeclared and struggled academically and socially. I didn't feel like I belonged. I only went for my freshman year and then I came back home.

But Ricardo tried again, and this time he lived at home and went to CMC. Ricardo described how he talked to Andrea after transitioning from another university and found her helpful and supportive. When I asked him about the most memorable aspect of the MSP, Ricardo shared:

> I feel like out of all of the Mountain Scholar resources, I talked more to Andrea, and she was very supportive. I felt really comfortable around her. I've always struggled to make friends, uh, throughout my whole life, but I have just spent the last 4 years in college, and now I understand so much better how having Andrea there for us as first-generation students is a starting point. College is so different than high school, and I have a big family and now I feel like I can help my cousins like she helped me.

Several participants commented that the college admissions process was frightening on several levels and that they trusted what the college staff were telling them to do. College staff often share the process with students but leave it up to the student to fill out applications. Alex said that filling out the FAFSA forms was so stressful, especially trying to do it alone, that he almost gave up even trying to go to college, and then he became an MSP member. Alex shared his experience and relief:

> You know, some of the questions, the wording is a little weird and then having to translate that to, um, to Spanish for my parents to make sure I'm filling it out accurately. That was challenging because I wanted to make sure I was filling out these forms correctly to make sure that I could get the financial help that I needed.

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Andrea helped with that and so many other conversations that helped me feel like I could belong in college.

Christophe did not mention his college admissions process as he enrolled at CMC and became a MSP member, but once at CMC he realized that he was still recovering from his car accident and struggling to perform academically. He said, "Andrea really helped me a lot. She reached out to the professors to let them know how I needed my accommodations that would help me out academically." Christophe continued with his desire to be successful and added, "I wasn't about to give up on my future, especially being, like, the first generation of being in America. I want to make my parents proud." Christophe's reflections on his last few years recovering from his accident, earning an associate's degree, and going to welding school caught him off guard emotionally, and he reiterated that Andrea helped him throughout his 2 years as a Mountain Scholar, from transitioning into college to becoming a successful college graduate and helping him find the welding program that he will be starting in the fall. Christophe shared, "Andrea helped me by giving me, like, little pushes forward and pointing me in the right direction and by letting me know I still had a chance."

All participants named the MSP pathways coordinator as a significant influence in helping them feel like they could be successful and that they belonged in college. The fact that each participant recalls specific instances where Andrea supported their continuation in college offers evidence of the importance of the pathway coordinator. Participants all offered warm remembrances of Andrea and how she provided support, guidance, and suggestions to get "one step further" in their college education.

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3b. MSP Financial Support

MSP members are more likely to work to contribute money for their family's living expenses. Although all study participants lived at home while in college, participants had work obligations outside of school. This finding includes comments participants shared about how the MSP scholarships and financial support made a difference to them. Scholarships are given up to $900 for freshman and sophomore year and up to $4,000 for junior and senior year through The Summit Foundation (CMC, 2022e). Students who need to work while enrolled in college often miss engaging in school events and activities that create a more inclusive sense of belonging. Financial support had a significant impact even while participants continued to work. When I asked participants about possible barriers and challenges while being a college student, participants' answers varied more here than in any other finding, but overwhelmingly paying for college and associated costs while in college was the greatest barrier once they were able to get through the admissions process.

The MSP scholarships helped participants stay in college; however, participants also provided a range of responses regarding financing a college education, noting that while financial support is crucial, they had additional concerns. For instance, Eduardo not only commented on the expense of a college education, but also had the most to say about how politics creates an even greater emotional cost of attending college for many Latinos. Eduardo said:

> Even though I have my associate's [degree] and I am a U.S. citizen, I know of
> many other kids who were freaking out about DACA [Deferred Action for

Childhood Arrivals] and how much more an undocumented student would pay for college during Trump's presidency. And my experience right now is school is too expensive so, at that point, I just decided I like the idea of construction. If I didn't have the fear of being a Latino in college or the financial issues that I did have, yes, I would have most likely just kept on going to university.

On the other end of the spectrum of financial attitudes were Alex and Ricardo. Alex said, "Through all of their collaborative efforts, . . . I was able to graduate college debt free, and so I'm very grateful to just everyone who helped me in the program get to where I am." Ricardo shared:

> Financially, [MSP] allowed me to go to college without having to finance school, and graduating debt free is huge and with a degree. Through those 3 years, I went to work full time and school full time. And so that's how I started saving a bunch of money while going to school and then that's how I got to the position where I was able to close on a house. I just wanted to stress the fact that I was able to save because of the Mountain Scholars Program. I feel like I am in a really blessed position. I'm very grateful.

Christophe's comment regarding MSP scholarships and financial support seemed casual, and he shared, "There were a couple of times that I sat down with Andrea, and we looked over all the costs and stuff and I got help with renting books and other financial stuff like rent while I was in school." While Leon did not mention MSP scholarships, he did say that he had a full-time job while being a MSP member and that he "felt lucky" that his job was very accommodating with his school schedule. While member-checking

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transcripts, Eduardo added to his original statement by saying, "The financial support

from MSP did help. I know being in the MSP helped me receive scholarships. The

savings of money helped me purchase another vehicle after I got in a car accident."

Eduardo and the rest of the participants not only shared their gratitude for the MSP, but

also shared their concern and frustration with the college system, noting that finances

seemed to be the most obscure and least relationship-oriented. Not having to stress about

paying for college allowed students more freedom, where work was to cover living

expenses or to save money and they could avoid going into debt for a college degree.

As previously mentioned, MSP members were more likely to have to work to

contribute money for their family's living expenses even though all study participants

lived at home while in college. Study participants mentioned not only work obligations

outside of going to school, but also mentioned how MSP scholarships' financial support

positively affected them. Some study participants shared concerns for how expensive and

political higher education is in conjunction with why they chose to leave higher education

after obtaining their associate's degree. This finding's evidence supports that by

providing financial support, participants more securely enrolled in college classes. Once

participants were enrolled as college students and saw that their financial concerns were

alleviated, then participants were able to focus on becoming college educated.

3c. MSP Mentors

MSP mentors are community members who agree to be trained to create and

maintain a relationship with MSP members. Mentoring requires extensive training and a

significant amount of volunteer time (see Appendix D). Mentors are expected to meet

with MSP members once a month while the member is enrolled in the program. In sharing mentors' names, I discussed with study participants the possibility of their being identified; all participants preferred to name their mentor as a way to recognize them for the important contributions they made. Alex said he's "never had so much support." A common theme running throughout the participants' comments was the special relationship built over years between MSP mentor and participant. Alex noted that he and his mentor met once a month for 2 years and that the conversations were about life updates and not just academics. Alex shared with nostalgia and excitement:

> My mentor, Ed, was Summit County judge, and at first I was intimidated, but he was the best mentor ever. I never had that much support. He was just super supportive in reviewing my scholarship applications and stuff like that. I would say memorable experiences from being in the program would definitely be all of my meetings with my mentor. We met once a month for 2 years. With my mentor, I never had a bad experience meeting with him. It was always a good time, just meeting with him and explaining, you know, giving him life updates, talking about not just academics, but just, you know, life, and so that was also very helpful.

Most participants shared a comparable story about their relationship with their mentor. The excitement with which the participants shared their relationship felt similar. As I came to the question about MSP resources and mentorship, each participant shared a similar story and similar themes of genuine appreciation and anticipation to meet with their person. Ricardo said that having someone to talk to and give him advice about the

world and about school was "really fun." Ricardo described how his mentor provided specific help based on his own business career as well as general support. Ricardo said of his mentor:

> Mike was my mentor and he helped me quite a bit. I think it was mostly just like having somebody to talk to and giving me advice in the business area of the world. And at school, because he specialized in business law. So, it was really fun to get his input into business and life. The plan was to meet every month, sometimes a little more frequently if I felt like I needed to talk to him. I think most of the time there wasn't an agenda; we would just talk and see how things were and catch up. There were some meetings where I mentioned that I wanted to talk about certain things. And if we didn't have a lot of time or certain things to talk about, it was okay. It was a nice mix of getting together to talk about school and life.

Eduardo echoed other participants' sentiments and said that he and his mentor set goals to help him "get ahead in life." Eduardo described a range of support he received from his mentor, Don:

> I met Don and his wife that first day. Don gave me his phone number and I'm just thinking, okay, cool, I got this gentleman's number and we're just going to meet and get to know each other and see what each other's goals are and try to help each other and go from there. So, Don was just very, uh, very relaxed, but also very disciplined. He told me that we just want to make some goals, try to help me get ahead in life. We would meet at this taco place, and he would just assist me.

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Like, one time I told him I didn't have a driver's license. So, my first step was

learning how to drive. He sent me websites about how Colorado's laws were in

regard to driving and, yeah, he helped me get my license that same semester. I

also was already working at age 16, . . . and I had no idea how taxes worked and

he told me. He helped me; we went to the websites and I filed all my taxes for the

past couple of years and got money back. And then after realizing social work

wasn't for me, I wanted to consider working with electrical systems. Don pointed

me in some directions in Summit County on where to work as an electrician.

After moving around the state, I found an apprenticeship and I am now a third-

year apprentice electrician. One more year and I can take a test and be

journeyman electrician. So yeah, I appreciate my mentor, Don.

Leon described how he and his mentor, Jack, would

have coffee together and talk about life and school. We went to Mountain Scholar

receptions together. I felt supported. Now that I am enrolling in the bachelor's of

human services program, I hope to be a Mountain Scholar again, and that I get to

have another mentor.

Leon and another MSP alumni will be returning to the MSP, but this time as alumni

mentors.

Eduardo also offered program improvement suggestions that included more

availability of MSP resources, including more mentors and mentor workshops, because

he said that there are people who "look like me" and who share similar struggles as first-

generation college students. Eduardo offered an important reminder that if it were not for

the Pre-Collegiate Program having other first-generation Latinos, he would not have made it into college:

> Seeing the other mentors and mentees on a higher basis would be great. Granted I know it is hard because of different schedules, but having more workshops with mentors would help future Latinos. As an example, seeing a Latino alumni sharing how other Latino college students navigate college, work, culture, and other aspects of life would help. My mentor was not a Latino but has shared with me trials and tribulations they've encountered that I can relate to. I don't know the attempts of diversifying the school and reaching out to local high schools, but I know as a Mexican-Latino, I would not have gotten into college if it weren't for Molly from the Pre-Collegiate high school program.

Mentors and study participants developed significant and important relationships with each other. Mentors not only provided academic support in helping study participants accomplish more formal applications and paperwork, but also provided valuable deep listening to participants' career wishes, advising them to follow their aspirations as they began to reevaluate and refine their career alignment. Because mentors were available to participants and developed such important bonds, study participants were more confident in many aspects of their life as evidenced by the examples participants gave regarding the important conversations mentors and participants had. Mentors were especially important during times participants were shifting towards their career of choice. Mentors were significant and foundational for study participants in both their academic success as well as their career paths.

3d. MSP Events

Participants spoke about how rewarding MSP events were for them. The MSP documents did not mention specific requirements for attending MSP events, yet study participants described how these events helped them connect in a more informal space to share experiences. Being in a communal space making cookies and sharing stories and experiences and just connecting with peers who "looked like them" offered participants a true sense of belonging. The findings illustrated that participants had good interactions and good memories of the social gatherings. The most significant conversation that I had regarding the social events was with Christophe. Christophe said:

> I am not very social. I am, I guess, an introvert. I try to keep to myself most of the time, and it takes me a lot to get comfortable with people. Mountain Scholars is a first-generation program, so all of the students were in my situation. So, that helped out with my social anxiety since I knew that they were in the same position as I was. I remember we decorated cookies, and we were just talking about what classes or what degrees we were going for and stuff like that. We were just talking amongst ourselves, and it was a really nice experience.

Christophe was not the only one who talked about the social anxiety of being in college and feeling relieved that there was a space for "students like me." Eduardo said:

> I remember at least four or five socials. We would have gatherings with food and just kind of hang out and eventually we would go around the room and talk about how everyone's doing and update everyone's progress and we would just kind of share.

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Alex's story of how he became an MSP member was a reminder of how important it is for educators to ask students about their friends, as often they could use the resources but have not found their way to the program. Alex shared his story of how he became an MSP member:

> I found out about Mountain Scholars when I was with a friend. They said, hey, I have to go to this meeting today. Do you want to come? And then I sat in the meeting and just learned about it. And that's just kind of how it evolved. They're like, well, you should join this program and so I was like, sure I'm going to do it. And I think that's how it happened. Something that I just cherish about the program would be being able to interact with other students in the Mountains Scholars program and hearing from them about what their life experiences have been and realizing that, hey, we share a similar journey. So, it's nice being able to make that connection that someone who identifies with the same possible barriers as you and being able to connect over that.

Christophe and Eduardo offered an important example of how the MSP social gatherings create a sense of collegiality that is different from the academic setting of a college as well as different from the one-on-one resources of advising and mentoring that the MSP resources provide. The MSP social gatherings offer members a chance to gather with other MSP members and share conversations about navigating college as first-generation college students.

Summary

Chapter 4 offered findings that were thematically and chronologically organized to share the lived experiences of MSP study participants regarding their journey into, during, and beyond a postsecondary education. The findings indicated that the study participants had, first, important influences that motivated them to have courage in moving towards a college education. Equally important is that participants were receptive to the influence of the dream of college. The findings showed that participants had strength to lean into the unknown as a result of the communal support and encouragement.

Second, participants had significant and concerning barriers as first-generation students that included navigating college admissions and being able to pay for school. Participants all lived at home and worked to be able to finance college. In this second finding, participants were most appreciative of the MSP pathways coordinator who worked one on one with students, offering support in filling out forms, creating an academic schedule that would fit the participant's work schedule, and providing encouragement when participants needed reassurance that they belonged in college. Not only was Andrea Walker an important MSP resource for the participants, but the financial support was paramount in easing the burden and stress of going into debt.

Finally, participants offered the most positive feedback regarding MSP's social resources. They all mentioned their mentors by name and offered example after example of how this one relationship continued to keep them moving forward in meeting their aspirational outcomes. Participants, as busy as they were, commented on the positive

influences of attending MSP social gatherings. All findings illustrate how belonging to the MSP community was important in supporting participants' aspirational goals and outcomes and how their futures were being refined the longer they were members of the MSP. Participants spoke of the collegial nature of the meetings and of listening and sharing. They shared how these social situations were important bonding events that created important friendships.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

> "Be a lamp, or a lifeboat, or a ladder. Help someone's soul heal. Walk out of your house like a shepherd." –Rumi

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to acquire current knowledge from an asset-minded epistemology and methodology framework from the lived experiences of Latino alumni regarding how the Mountain Scholars Program (MSP) impacts the lives of its members. The study addressed three guiding research questions:

1. What are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

   1a. How do these experiences impact MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

2. To what extent, if at all, are MSP Latino students' educational aspirations impacted by MSP?

   2a. What were these programmatic elements?

   2b. How do they impact MSP Latino students' educational aspirations?

3. Using Yosso's community cultural wealth (CCW) model, what MSP programmatic elements contribute to MSP Latino students' aspirational outcomes, if at all?

This chapter discusses the program evaluation findings and implications of findings as well as recommendations, or what Fetterman (2017a, 2017b) called "minding the gap" or theory of change by looking at the theory of action or what the program espouses to do compared with the theory of practice or evidence collected. The evidence collected comprises the oral accounts of study participants. "Focusing on the specifics of people's experiences helps reveal everyday forms of protest, self-determination, and community organizing" (Garcia & Yosso, 2020, p. 69). From this place of being a worthy witness, listening to my study participants from the Use Branch of research methodology, and using the participants' words, I know that their oral accounts illustrated their self-determination and their words brought "tremendous depth to our understandings of the human experiences of segregation" (Garcia & Yosso, 2020, p. 71).

The difference between the theory of action and the theory of practice is Fetterman's "minding the gap." With this approach, I needed to, as Fetterman suggested, "take stock" of the program. By asking Research Question 1, I was able to see the starting point for study participants' aspirations: All study participants had college-going aspirations before entering CMC and becoming MSP members. By asking Research Question 2, I was able to determine what MSP resources shaped and supported the study participants' educational aspirations and educational outcomes. I was able to "take stock" and compare where study participants started aspirationally and where they were in terms of meeting their aspirational outcomes when they left the MSP. In addressing how the MSP impacted participants' educational aspirations and educational outcomes, participants unanimously shared that without the MSP, they did not think they would

have been as successful navigating college, nor would their career trajectory have been as richly rewarding or aligned with their interests. By asking Research Question 3, I was able to begin to fill the gap in the literature regarding Yosso's CCW theory at a rural mountain town commuter campus designated as a Hispanic-serving institution (HSI) dual-mission institute in addition to the focus on a community-funded TRIO-like student support program focused on Latinos in higher education.

<div align="center">**Discussion of Findings and Implications**</div>

Finding 1: Participants' College-Going Aspirational Influences Before MSP

Participants' aspirations and aspirational outcomes were intimately intertwined with their families' aspirations. This type of generational familial and aspirational capital also influences and supports social mobility and resistance capital. Yosso (2005) defined resistance capital as "those knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality" (p. 80). Resistance capital is built upon normalizing Latinos' college-going and degree-attaining values that not only create social mobility, but also challenge structures of inequality. Because of their aspirational goals and familial support, which is also creating resistance capital, participants were leading-edge change agents not only for themselves, but also for their families and communities, as participants learned how to navigate new spaces that no one in their families had been in before. Christophe mentioned that "our family" pushed and "we" were able to graduate from college. Christophe's language clearly exemplifies the resiliency and sense of

family in aspirational goals and corresponding outcomes to collectively graduating from college.

Similarly, Eduardo understood that his exploratory journey into the unknown world of higher education did create stress, but that stress could be balanced and even alleviated by his returning home and being greeted and supported by his family and the familial. Aspirational, familial, and resistance capital are three essential components of Yosso's CCW theory that were part of this study finding. The courage and vulnerability that participants showed becoming college-going and college-graduating students was in large part a result of the familial and resistance capital that participants came into the MSP with. Even though participants shared that they were motivated by familial and aspirational goals, they still acknowledged that they were in spaces that did not truly and deeply understand them and their culture, and this sentiment is in alignment with other recent studies (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco-Reyes, 2020; Garcia, 2017; Perez, 2017).

Participants' aspirational capital and their "hopes and dreams" of being college educated and the first in their families to be college graduates were evident in our conversations in spite of their nervousness in navigating institutions not designed for them. These "hopes and dreams" in themselves create a resiliency of self-determination and self-efficacy and contribute to their familial capital of now being college educated, up-leveling their cultural knowledge nurtured among familia that carries a new sense of history, memory, and cultural intuition meant to expand individual, family, and community well-being (Delgado, 2002; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Yosso, 2005). As Yosso suggested and as exemplified within this finding, aspirational and familial capital

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overlap with each other as easily as other forms of CCW. This study illustrated, and Yosso further added, that aspirational capital is akin to resistant capital. "This resiliency is evidenced in those who allow themselves and their children to dream of possibilities beyond their present circumstances, often without the objective means to attain those goals" (Yosso, 2005, p. 78). The hope for participants was to get a college degree to make their parents proud as well as role model for their extended families and friends that if participants could get a degree, so could families and friends. Participants mentioned that they watched their parents work hard and make sacrifices so that their children could have a better life, and earning a college education would provide that. All study participants and their parents had aspirational capital for participants to earn a college degree, to earn more money than their parents, and to be in higher skilled occupations rather than toil long hours in a labor-based job. These examples are consistent with the literature that Latinx students come from families that have high aspirations for their children and that a majority of Latinxs believe a postsecondary education is necessary for financial security and social mobility (Bernal, 2002; Carnevale & Fasules, 2017).

Not only were the participants' aspirations influenced and their resiliency capital strengthened because of their families' aspirations, but there was also a need for student support programs like the partnership Summit High School Pre-Collegiate Program designed to help historically marginalized first-generation students succeed in learning about college and career options as well as encouragement for students to learn about themselves and to dream about their vocational futures (Kirp, 2019; Martinez, 2003; Ponjuán & Hernández, 2016; Poppe, 2020). This hope of first-generation Latino college-

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educated family members was well understood among study participants and is also becoming more researched and documented. "Catching Them Early: An Examination of Chicano/Latino Middle School Boys' Early Career Aspirations" authors Martinez and Castellanos (2017) offered similar findings that although participants' parents and siblings offer hope and encouragement to become college educated, they are limited in the practical problem solving of the college-going process. Martinez and Castellanos (2017) affirmed that "institutional agents play a direct role in assisting students prepare and plan for college" (p. 378).

Finding 2: The MSP's Shaping of Educational Aspirations and Outcomes

In understanding the data gathered regarding the effectiveness of the MSP, I used Fetterman's (2017a, 2017b) empowerment evaluation in comparing the MSP's theory of action, or what the program espouses to do, with the theory of practice, or what the data say it does. As a reminder, the MSP theory of action offers resources of one-on-one advising, one-on-one mentoring, career and degree counseling, college and transfer navigation, financial literacy, navigation and scholarships, and one larger all-member event. As this finding indicates, the MSP provided the study participants with important navigational and social support while they were learning how to be in this new place and new role as first-generation college students at CMC. The MSP's impact and shaping of participants' educational outcomes are consistent with studies on students' college persistence and graduation that show that supportive resources and counselors help first-generation, low-income students aspire and persist to becoming college graduates (Jehangir & Romasanta, 2021; Stevens, 2020; Vaughan et al., 2020). The evidence, or the

participants' lived experiences while attending CMC and being members of the MSP, illustrates that the MSP not only shaped the aspirations of study participants, but also positively impacted their aspirational outcomes. Study participants expressed anxiety about not knowing how to attend college or how to be successful as college students, and the MSP resources including advising and mentoring gave participants dedicated people to talk to especially about career and college counseling options. Participants mentioned that not only were advisors and mentors paramount in their adjusting to being in college, but participants also shared that gathering with other MSP members proved to be additional important relationships in helping them feel like they belonged in college. Participants' social and navigational CCW were strengthened by these MSP relationships. All study participants aspired to go to college even if they did not know how to get into college or what they were going to do once in college, or even how they would finance college, and the MSP provided participants with the social, as well as financial support. Once participants met with the MSP advisor and learned how to be successful, their anxieties eased. Mentors also eased the anxiety of the participants by having participants talk to about life and school. The emotional support that was offered to participants by being members of the MSP allowed participants to move from stress and un-ease to a feeling of assuredness. Participants' anxiousness and the role of MSP resources are in line with other student support programs that focus on low-income first-generation students' literature. The literature suggests that support networks that offer career and college guidance as well as offer emotional support can create an important connection for the student to the institution (Kane et al., 2004; Rios-Ellis et al.; Yasuike, 2019).

A number of participants had interests in specific fields of study, including architecture, criminology, and social work, as seniors at Summit High School. However, the three participants who shared precollegiate goals shifted their focus as a result of new awareness and career alignment once they had access to MSP support and resources. Other study participants knew they wanted to earn a college degree but did not know their area of focus. When they entered CMC and the MSP, undeclared study participants did find their interests and recently graduated with bachelor's degrees. The MSP positively impacted and shaped participants not only while they were MSP members but also once they entered their vocation of choice. Christophe shared that when he came into the MSP, he thought he would become an architect, but once he used the college and career advising resources, he realized that he wanted to earn a two-year degree and then become a welder. He is very proud to be a welder with a college degree, and he is glad that he did not let his parents down in going to college and becoming college educated. Leon initially considered studying Criminology, but after the college and career advising, he learned about CMC's new bachelors of human services degree and enrolled into that program instead. He liked the idea of staying in his home and continuing to be an MSP member. The study participants' aspirational goals while in the program were refined once they became MSP members. These findings are supported by several other studies that acknowledge the importance student support programs have in shaping students' identities as college students, as well as their social mobility and career trajectories (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco-Reyes, 2020; Huerta et al., 2018).

What might be a helpful finding for MSP decision-makers and is in alignment with existing literature is that the participants longed for more culturally enriching experiences where they felt like they belong in the deepest sense (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco-Reyes, 2020; García & Garza, 2016; Huerta et al., 2018). Participants overwhelmingly shared that the MSP was already making a difference in not only their lives, but the lives of their families and future generations by providing resources and support that most Latino students and their families do not seek. What was not evident from the CCW lens is whether the program and its resources consider the race or ethnicity of its members. Several theories and studies support the focus on students' identities as a way to support students of color, especially first-generation, low-income students of color (García & Garza, 2016; He et al., 2021; Huerta et al., 2018; Huerta & Hernandez, 2021; Yosso et al., 2009).

As this program evaluation was meant to be a formative discovery for program improvement, MSP stakeholders who are already using the empowerment evaluation in its next strategic plan have an opportunity to consider looking at Yosso's CCW or a host of other theories that center students of color. The MSP is positioned as a result of this program evaluation to, as Garcia (2017, 2020) recommends, lean into the discomfort of becoming a "racially-just institution as a process, embracing new organizational identities," and center its program not only on the CMC community, but on the larger field of student support services in the K-20 pipeline and the field of higher education in general. Again, it is not evident from a CCW lens that the MSP considers specific resources for students of color.

2a. MSP Pathway Coordinator and MSP Mentors

As the findings in Chapter 4 suggest, study participants appreciated the one-on-one advising with Andrea and the one-on-one time with their mentors. These relationships provided great support in strengthening participants' social, navigational, and resistance capital as well as strengthened their focus on their aspirational goals and outcomes in regard to accomplishing their college journey and being the first in their family to graduate from college. In discussing the one-on-one advising and mentoring that participants received, MSP decision-makers can see the importance of any one-on-one time that participants spent with the advisor and mentor as significant, which is also in alignment with existing literature (García & Garza, 2016; Kane et al., 2004; Martinez, 2003). Advisors and mentors are important social support and resources that are crucial in providing the time and space the participants need in order to better adjust to their new role, schedules, and relationships at college. The advisor and mentor provided each participant with not only social capital, but also navigational capital as the participants gained confidence in how to successfully navigate all aspects of being a college student. Yosso's (2005) navigational capital is understood as the skills necessary to navigate or maneuver through social institutions not created with students of color in mind— "or worse yet, hostile spaces" (p. 80). Yosso's social capital is understood as creating networks of people and community resources for students of color.

Participants expressed their gratitude for both their advisor and their mentor as crucial in providing the relationship as well as the resources to help them adjust to the college-going process. Leon, who has just completed his associate's degree, stated that

because of the relationship and support he received from Andrea and his mentor, he now

had the self-efficacy to earn a bachelor's degree. Leon stated that he will be able to help

his family and friends navigate college now that he will have spent 4 years in college.

Leon, with hindsight, acknowledged that he started college without the support of the

MSP resources and felt lost until he started working with Andrea. Leon advanced from

taking classes without real purpose to pursuing a degree and vocation that were right for

him. Ricardo, like Leon, mentioned the important one-on-one advice he received. He

illustrated the tenuous and often isolating path that Latinos experience in wanting to be

college educated but often feeling overwhelmed and alone. Even though Ricardo was in

Summit's Pre-Collegiate Program, he said that his confidence was so low that he "didn't

know what to do" with his life. By having Andrea and his mentor as supportive listeners,

his college identity and confidence could grow. Ricardo achieved his goals. Much like

Leon, Ricardo has now been through 4 years of college and is not only a role model for

his friends and family but can help them navigate the college-going process much how

Andrea helped him.

 As appreciative as all participants were to have a dedicated advisor and a

dedicated mentor to help them in college, Alex noted that the program should have

faculty and mentors who are Latino and people of color and to make the community more

inclusive and accessible. Alex strained to put into words how he felt when he tried to

explain his challenges to someone who is not Latino. Alex confided that sometimes he

wouldn't voice his struggle because he felt like he wouldn't be able to find the words or

the White person wouldn't be able to deeply understand Alex's realities. Eduardo also

discussed these issues. Both participants feel that having more Latinos as faculty, staff,

and mentors would help future Latinos. The participants' feelings regarding more

representation of faculty and staff of color in spaces of higher education is consistent with

current literature (Garcia & Garza, 2016; Huerta et al., 2018; Ponjuán & Hernández,

2016).

2b. Financial Support

Participants shared that the financial support the MSP provided was crucial in

alleviating an already stressful situation in trying to live, work, and pay for school.

Participants acknowledged that the financial support created the opportunity for

participants to continue to dream about becoming college graduates. In considering the

data analysis of the contributions of financial support, I am juxtaposing Yosso's

navigational and social capital in this section. As Eduardo said, in his experience, school

is too expensive so he decided he would find a job in construction. He added that if he

didn't have the fear of accruing financial debt, he would have stayed in college. Eduardo

was part of an older cohort of MSP members who did not have the financial support to

earn a bachelor's degree. The financial concerns of participants are in alignment with the

existing literature, in that low-income college students (Pell Grant recipients) face greater

problems balancing the demands of school, family, work, and socializing (Hines et al.,

2019; Nguyen & Herron, 2021). In their study, Nguyen and Herron (2021) offered that

several studies support the claim that the financial stress of accruing debt or having to

work to go to college creates obstacles for students to feel like they belong in college.

Because the MSP now offers generous scholarships, participants shared great gratitude in

not having to go into debt to go to college and indicated that working had more to do with paying their own way or contributing to the family's bills.

This finding indicates that by receiving a generous and comprehensive financial package, participants stayed in school on their terms until they were ready to declare majors and earn degrees. Important and timely one-on-one meetings with Andrea helped participants manage the stress of thinking about financing college, and this allowed participants to continue to hope and dream about becoming a college student. Participants worked with Andrea to fill out their Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) form, and from this initial and powerfully liberating meeting, participants spoke of their ability to breathe again once the financial barriers were eliminated by providing them with the financial literacy, navigation, and scholarships that the MSP provides. Financial barriers are considered one of the root causes that keep students from going to college, or worse, lead to them going to college but dropping out with student debt and no degree (Genthe & Harrington, 2022; Llamas et al., 2020; Nguyen & Herron, 2021; Perez & Farruggia, 2022; Squire & Liu, 2022).

2c. MSP Events

What was not espoused in the program resources but talked about by all of the participants in supporting their college-going journey was their appreciation and enjoyment of the larger group meet-ups with other first-generation students who "were like me." The data showed that participants suggested that more large-group meet-ups would continue to encourage, support, and benefit all MSP members via other member stories regarding how to overcome challenges and barriers. This finding is in alignment

with recent studies (see Llamas et al., 2020, for more). Yosso (2005) addressed the *mutualistas* or mutual aid that immigrant societies use in supporting each other while trying to understand and assimilate into the dominant culture (p. 81). To further impact the MSP members, larger gatherings are a place to strengthen the sense of belonging that has become imperative for CMC.

Time and space to gather create the opportunity for MSP students to be in "we" space during larger meet-up times. "We" space is an intentional coming together in a space that is not school and is not home, but a space where a student's authentic self can begin to feel welcomed, constructing a knowledge of getting to know self and other without pressure to perform a certain way with a certain outcome. It can be framed as a social-cognitive space, a spiritual space, or a familial space that Yosso classified as cultural intuitions (De Andrade et al., 2022; Rodriguez-Valls & Ponce, 2013; West & Goss, 2016; Yosso, 2005). The "we" space has been said to offer "transformative cultural practices towards learning and development" and has "two major functions: (1) enabling collective thinking-in-action; and (2) simplifying communication" (De Andrade et al., 2022).

The large all-member social aspects of the MSP program offered the most CCW elements, in that participants felt more connected to a familial community sharing linguistic, social, aspirational, and resistance capital in continuing to navigate college. Participants shared being in a communal space making cookies and just connecting where peers who "looked like me" offered more than social capital; larger group meet-ups offered linguistic capital of storytelling and a deeper sense of belonging. Alex stated that

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he "cherished" interactions with other MSP students, adding that by spending time with other MSP members he was able to hear their experiences in life, whether it was in school or in the community, with a certain teacher, or their plans after they graduated from college. Alex shared that listening to other MSP members helped him realize that he was not alone, and that filled his heart with hope. He appreciated being able to make connections with others who have the same identity and the same possible barriers. Christophe, who self-identified as an introvert, said that the larger group get-togethers with other first-generation students helped ease his social anxiety, since he knew that they were first-generation students too and "in the same position as I was." Christophe continued to comment that he felt comfortable with other MSP members and that connecting with other MSP members was a really nice experience.

These social gatherings most resembled Yosso's linguistic capital, as it is said to include "the intellectual and social skills attained through communication experiences in more than one language and/or style" (Yosso, 2005, p. 79). Linguistic capital was mentioned in the larger group setting when participants spent time with other Latinx students who were sharing stories and was also mentioned a number of times when participants were making recommendations on how to strengthen the MSP in the future.

At least one participant mentioned that larger gatherings, like those that occurred when he was in the Summit High School Pre-Collegiate Program, where more of 'his people' are, made it easier for him to go to college. This finding also suggests Yosso's (2005) social capital, in that study participants had their peers who looked most like them and who were also first-generation high school students, and students used these

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precollegiate contacts to help navigate access to college as they moved from high school to college (p. 73).

Resistance capital needs to begin with normalizing college-going for Latinos. Much of this resistance capital needs to be supported in high schools, if not earlier, as suggested in relevant literature (Collatos et al., 2004; Oliva, 2004; Rutter et al., 2020). The MSP partnership with the high school's Pre-Collegiate Program is an important resource that can be further enhanced to not only support Latinx students towards a college opportunity, but also create a space of belonging that reflects and supports students' racialized experiences and cultural heritage(s). Resistance capital is a culmination of the other types of CCW capital in building an identity of worthiness and belonging. These spaces, especially in college, create resistance capital, which Yosso suggested is "social justice positioning that gives students of color higher education training and leverage to enter social institutions better prepared to solve challenging problems" (Yosso, 2005, p. 76).

Finding 3: Belongingness as a Golden Thread to CCW

This program evaluation extends prior CCW research. Based on the study findings, I believe that belongingness deserves to be considered a golden thread connecting all CCW capital elements. The MSP was essential in creating a sense of belongingness for study participants. Participants all mentioned feeling anxious, scared, stressed-out, fearful of disappointing their parents and overwhelmed about going to college. Because belongingness is considered a feeling or an emotion and not a skill, knowledge, or ability, as the other forms of Yosso's capital are, the feeling of

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belongingness can provide a new focus that envelops all CCW elements. Emotions play a crucial role in our decision-making process (see Brown et al., 2003; Immordino-Yang & Damasio, 2007; Santos et al., 2018 for more), and much of the participants' educational journeys and corresponding study evidence rests on the participants' describing their feelings. Belongingness, especially for first-generation students, is paramount in student motivation, retention, and graduation rates, as well as creating both social mobility and disrupting stereotype threats (Llamas et al., 2020; Martinez & Munsch, 2019; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Strayhorn, 2012). Pittman and Richmond (2007) noted that "first-generation college students who did report more involvement in college-related activities had higher levels of perceived support and adjustment" and that "school belonging may be more important in promoting a positive school adjustment among first-generation college students" (p. 281).

Yosso created CCW as an asset-based lens offering that students of color bring a variety of cultural strengths with them into spaces that were not designed for them almost 20 years ago before belongingness became an additional component of the diversity, equity, and inclusion paradigm (Yosso, 2005; Yosso et al., 2009). In the last 20 years there has been a research surge in better understanding the modern science and psychology of belongingness. In fact, only in the last 7 years have there been CCW studies that mention belonging (see Brooms, 2018; Jehangir, 2010; Knotek et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2021; Ventura, 2017 for more). This networking and interwovenness of belongingness are so integral in each and all of the participants' stories of their educational journeys as well as in the CCW elements because belongingness is deeply

rooted in one's ability to safely adjust and grow in the world (Kaufman, 2018, 2021, 2023). Study findings illustrated that all participants mentioned feelings of belongingness as essential in their successful transitioning into and through college and noted times they did not feel like they belonged in educational spaces. Participants shared examples of feeling belongingness before, during, and after being an MSP member.

Alex first spoke of home as being his comfort after spending time in campus spaces that felt unfamiliar. Alex shared that his many conversations with Andrea increased his feeling that he could and did belong in college. As Alex became more comfortable with being a college student and being on campus, he said his confidence began to rise and he was willing to speak up in his classes. Findings suggest that it was important for Alex to meet with the other MSP members as well as with Andrea, as he was able to make a connection with other first-generation students who identify with the same possible challenges.

Leon enrolled at CMC but did not feel like he belonged until becoming a member of the MSP. Leon enrolled in CMC without the help of a counselor and was taking classes without a plan or purpose. He had a teacher who suggested he reach out to Andrea. Leon shared that what helped him most feel a sense of belonging were his conversations with Andrea. He and Andrea talked about what Leon wanted to do in the future, and Andrea expanded his social networking by suggesting people for Leon to reach out to. Andrea created connections for Leon, as she does for all MSP members. But Leon emphasized his genuine appreciation for Andrea, adding that no matter what his home was like for him, he now knew that he had support at school. Leon added that

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because of Andrea's networking, he wanted to make new connections to his mentor, other students, and his teachers. In hindsight, Leon realized that once he received support, he could dream about a future where he was college educated. Leon's sense of belonging in the MSP allowed him to dream and up-level his educational aspirations. His educational aspirations and outcomes were shaped by a sense of belonging to the MSP.

Eduardo spoke of belongingness when he mentioned that moving into the electrical trade felt like a better fit for him than being a social worker. He thought that being a social worker would be a good career for him as he was considering what college field to study. Eduardo graduated with an associate's degree and realized that he wanted to go to work as an electrician and learn a trade. He mentioned how proud he was that he was able to be in so many different spaces and felt more confident about who he was as a result of being a college graduate. This finding that Eduardo knew himself better as a result of going through the MSP and had a higher level of comfort with himself in various times and places is a testament to his discovering himself and having confidence in what he was discovering.

Ricardo, like Eduardo, shared feelings of not belonging at first. He initially went to university in Colorado Springs and said that he didn't like it there and felt alone. Choosing to go away from home to a big school, he tried to get scholarships and make friends, but ultimately came home at the end of his freshman year, in debt and feeling defeated. Ricardo said that in addition to the financial troubles, he just didn't like it. He was an undeclared student who struggled academically and socially. He shared that he didn't feel like he belonged. Ricardo illustrates the tenuous and often isolating path that

Latinos experience in wanting to be college educated but feeling overwhelmed and alone. Ricardo, however, came home and tried college again, this time at CMC. As a result of the navigational, social, and financial support that being a MSP member provided to him, Ricardo said his time as a college student was very fulfilling and he liked it so much he stayed to earn a bachelor's degree. Ricardo attributed his sense of belonging to the MSP community as paramount in his decision to stay in school. He continued to share how and why the MSP membership mattered so much to him. He said that Andrea was very supportive and that he felt really comfortable around her. He acknowledged that he felt like he struggled to make friends. With hindsight, he said that he understood how having Andrea there for first-generation students was "a starting point."

Christophe's aspirational goals and sense of belonging came from, as he said, being a Mexican-American. But Christophe also said a number of times that he was a first-generation college student and articulated that being in the MSP offered him the connection with other first-generation students that helped ease his social anxiety and helped him stay on track with his educational goals. Finally, Christophe shared that by being in the welding field, he felt he had a new sense of excitement, purpose, and belonging. Christophe's aspirational capital and sense of belonging in each of these spaces offered him additional social and linguistic capital as well as the cumulative navigational and resistance capital that he never thought possible after his car accident his senior year of high school. Christophe thought he was doomed because of his car accident, but because of the MSP, he had hope, direction, and friends.

What is missing in the findings from a CCW lens is that the MSP intentionally considers a students race in its program resources and program decisions. There is no mention of racial identities or racial experiences in any MSP advertising, it's mission statement (see Appendix C) or its mentor training (See Appendix D). But as a result of the study's findings that participants where and when they felt the most sense of belonging this study enhances the CCW body of literature. Findings indicate that participants appreciated the one-on-one advising and mentoring, and having that relationship was crucial in supporting participants transitioning into college, but participants all felt like they belonged when they were in the large meet-ups with other MSP members all of whom were first-generation college-going students and many who were Latinx students.

Conclusion

Study findings suggested that participants' aspirational goals and outcomes were strongly tied to Yosso's CCW. Participants' ability to navigate transitioning into college, as well as thriving while in college, was significantly impacted by the MSP. Participants offered that the various components of the MSP allowed them to connect to important relationships and resources that made becoming a college graduate a reality. Participants' realities of being CMC college graduates largely rested on their sense of belongingness.

Finally, in adding to Yosso's CCW theory, this study shows that there is an inherent belongingness that deserves to be highlighted by naming belongingness as a golden thread for participants in reaching their aspirational goals. Belongingness was mentioned throughout this study, as evidenced by participants' sharing their feelings

about what kept them engaged in the CMC community. Belongingness was named as an integral weave as participants shared that having a sense of belonging at CMC helped them persist in earning a college degree. Belongingness is as ancient as humanity itself, and social scientists, artists and poets, and even scientists have long written about belonging and tested belongingness theories (see Brokenleg, 1998; Gregg-Jolly et al., 2016; Kirova, 2001; Maslow, 1943; Østergaard, 2017; Wenger, 1998 for more).

See Appendix J for Maslow's groundbreaking hierarchy of human motivation as well as Kaufman's updated and more contemporary hierarchy of motivational needs sailboat analogy (see Appendix J) as the social sciences are understanding belongingness is an essential component for a security need that must be met before growth, love, and purpose can support one's self-efficacy and self-actualization (see Kaufman, 2018, 2021, 2023; Maslow, 1943, for more).

When participants felt the golden thread of belongingness, they were able to move about with confidence that they belonged in spaces and with people who were not their own. And although participants wish to see more Latinx students on campus, they acknowledge that they are change agents by being first-generation Latino college graduates who now role model college as an option for social mobility who used their CCW, self-determination and self-efficacy to thrive in an education system not built for them (Garcia & Garza, 2016; Huerta, 2018; Perez, 2017).

Recommendations for Practice

As far as recommendations go, as Fetterman (2014) said, "You are in charge, I am a coach leveraging possibilities" (12:10). With this adage in mind, I wish to offer both

creative and practical recommendations as a result of the participants' lived experiences as study evidence. Study participants were motivated for social mobility and a college education, and the MSP supported their aspirations. These recommendations come from not only study evidence, but also from a place of global consciousness and humanity, critical hope, critical liberation, and mindfulness, as suggested by my teachers Paulo Freire, bell hooks, Thich Nhat Hahn, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell. Recommendations are bucketed into what MSP leadership can do immediately as well as a second bucket of recommendations regarding what CMC leadership can work on creating. By adopting the following recommendations, the MSP specifically, and CMC in general, will be more intentional in their programming, resources, and activities, which will create stronger belongingness bonds, building more student self-efficacy, agency, and community building and organizing for the good of the student, their families, and their communities. Fetterman (2017a, 2017b) called this part of the process Step 3, planning for the future.

MSP Recommendation 1: Combine CCW, Empowerment Evaluation, and a Community Collaboration Approach for Strategic Planning

CMC as a newly eligible HSI must use an assets-based CCW in looking more deliberately at its faculty, staff, students, communities racial identities and racial experiences. The MSP housed in and funded by CMC must follow suit in centering Latinx students. I urge using this study's findings and CCW elements as a starting conversation to see how to strengthen your new strategic planning to create more opportunities for Latinx students to feel a sense of belonging on campus.

By using CCW, Empowerment Evaluation and a community collaborative approach of either a community driven development or a community learning exchange, a combination of a critical assessment approach that centers student needs and student voices by illuminating the role of students as teachers and teachers as learners "as the fundamental gesture of a transformative education" (Bain, 2010, p. 14) that "distills down to two core concepts: solidarity and agency" (Kelly, 2021, p. 3). Creating a strategic plan that centers on student needs and voices from a racially-just lens built on solidarity and agency is foundationally sound practice as a newly eligible HSI. By integrating student voice, as I have in this program evaluation, students become more validated and confident in their knowing (Kane et al., 2004; Kitchen, 2023; Martinez & Munsch, 2019).

Having witnessed both MSP and CMC leadership, I am confident in their deep listening to the needs of their students and community. The study findings suggest participants need CMC as a whole to have more cultural awareness and cultural diversity. By integrating student voice, as I have in this program evaluation, students become more validated and confident in their knowing that they are stakeholders and change agents (Kane et al., 2004; Kitchen, 2023; Martinez & Munsch, 2019). I do believe that CMC is willing to embrace a community-driven development theory to "promote the empowerment, participation, and agency of even the most marginalized groups" (Kelly, 2021, p. 1; Garcia, 2017).

Incorporating a community-driven development or a community learning exchange approach speaks to the collectivism that study participants already named as being important for their sense of belonging at CMC. By using CCW's racial lens,

empowerment evaluation's critical assessment lens and an asset-based, community collaboration approach, CMC will show itself to be a leader in its core principles of being welcoming, innovative, and focused on student success.

MSP Recommendation 2: Increase Efforts to Bridge High School to College Transition

The findings suggest and literature supports that students of color need a more intrusive bridge between high school and college (Allen, et al., 2020; Vela, et al., 2020). High school faculty and staff offer a good deal of influence over students. Even though the MSP is in partnership with the Summit High School, participants would benefit from more guidance to get from high school into college. Participants used words: scared, stressed, anxious, fearful, and overwhelmed the closer they became to becoming college students.

Only two participants mentioned being in the Summit High School Pre-Collegiate program. Of those two, one went away to college for his first year and had a very challenging experience coming home in debt and further confused. He mentioned hanging out with a friend and coming to an MSP event where he learned about the MSP and became a member. One participant said he learned about the MSP after he was enrolled in CMC and from talking to a teacher. If the Summit High School Pre-collegiate program coordinator and the MSP coordinator worked together to build a roster of eligible students and nurtured those students throughout their high school careers including field trips and college visits, more students would know about the MSP. The literature shows that creating a strong and consistent connection between high school and

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local colleges increases the chances that more students will be college bound (Casanova & Cammarota, 2019; Coleman, 2011; Halcon, 1988).

MSP Recommendation 3: Create an MSP Calendar which includes a Family Fall Formal gathering

MSP members, including MSP members' families, would not only benefit from having both a semester-long and year long calendar, but having an MSP calendar would help create the community that study participants longed for. The MSP calendar could be a combination of MSP, CMC, and Summit County events. By creating a calendar of events that ranged from more intimate MSP events to larger Summit County event dates would benefit MSP members and MSP friends and family outside of the MSP but still wanting to be social and connected to the MSP member. One of the first events on the calendar should be an event that introduces the MSP members' families to CMC and the MSP. By having a fall semester family gathering would include the family who is an essential support system for the MSP member. Having a large fall gathering also build community as those who participate might see others who also participate in various places in the community and say hello. By having a formal dress requirement allows the family to get excited about having a reason to get dressed up and celebrate their family member being in college. Having an MSP calendar of events which includes a Fall Family Formal is an opportunity to be inclusive and celebrate each other.

CMC Recommendation 1: Have a Latinx Cultural Center

As CMC looks to its next iteration of strategic plans as both a dual mission institution and an HSI eligible institution, I recommend that the planning committee dream aloud. What does a successful MSP community space and time feel like, and sound like, and taste like, and look like? From this envisioning the future, find space on campus to dedicate to a Latinx Cultural Center.

Findings suggest that participants were craving to spend more time on campus with other Latinx students in spaces that embrace their Latin culture. Participants spoke of enjoying their time together in larger meet ups sharing stories of how they were negotiating spaces, classes, teachers, homework, and adjusting to being a college student. MSP study participants are looking for more storytelling and they are looking for more people who look like them to witness their stories. They are looking not only to learn more about themselves, but they are looking to connect with others as well. The positive comments and recommendations by participants for more large group meet ups are evidence that a Latinx Cultural Center would be a welcome addition to your campus. Recent research on Latinx Cultural Centers show that they are a safe and enjoyable space where music, artwork, food, color, conversation, and community support Latinx students sense of belongingness (Castillo-Montoya & Verduzco Reyes, 2020; Diaz, 2019; Lorenzo, 2014).

Yosso's linguistic capital was the least present for the study participants, but one of the most important connections to the participants' cultural heritage. Not only is the linguistic element important in grounding participants, but so is the vibrancy of the arts in storytelling. Appendix I shows a Latina student's art that she shared that was the catalyst

for an entire classroom of her peers to witness her as both a storyteller and a hero on her own journey in a recent World Mythology class that I teach. Students and I also spend a great deal of time discussing those who accompany the hero as crucial capital for the hero, not unlike the social and familial capital creating navigational and resistance capital moving into harsh unknowns with tricksters, villains, and dragons. Hubl and Avritt (2020), authors of *Healing Collective Trauma: A Process for Integrating Our Intergenerational and Cultural Wounds,* began their book with a well-known Joseph Campbell (2008) quote from *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*:

> We have not even to risk the adventure alone, for the heroes of all time have gone before us. The labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path, and where we had thought to find an abomination, we shall find a god. And where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our own universe of our own existence. And where we thought to be alone, we will be with all the world. (p. 1)

"Where we have thought to be alone, we will be with all the world" suggests that by being courageous and vulnerable, and by being seekers, we learn self-efficacy, and when we recognize that our seeking is being witnessed, we sense community, and when we sense community, we belong. Participants all shared their anxiety in leaving the known and arriving in the unknown. Creating a community space for Latinx students would be the right thing to do and says, "We the institution, see you."

From this place of witnessing your Latinx students, a collective liberation will happen. Harper and Kezar (2021) recently created a leadership framework for student affairs professionals that centers on community cultural commitments such as empathy, love, community, inclusion, and creativity. "Collective liberation recognizes that all of

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our struggles are intimately connected and that the work of liberating the oppressed and the oppressor falls on everyone" (Harper & Kezar, 2021, p.10). Celebrate the growth. Celebrate the hero within. Celebrate the community building and organizing. Celebrate the HSI eligibility with a Latinx Cultural Center.

CMC Recommendation 2: Pursue Opportunities and Research Organizations that Support the HSI Identity and Policy

As a newly eligible HSI there are many federal grants for which CMC is eligible to apply for. In 4A, I have listed three grant opportunities available to CMC. By securing federal funds, CMC and MSP can use those funds to better recruit, retain, and graduate Latinx students (Perez, 2020; Santiago et al., 2016). Perez's study discovered that Title V grants strongly correlated with Latinx earning bachelor's degrees (2020). 4B is a recommendation to peruse other institutions of higher education for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) ideas as well as a DEI checklist from the Colorado Department of Higher Education.

Research Grant Opportunities

Within the Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education division is the HSI Division, whose mission is to "provide grant funding to institutions of higher education to assist with strengthening institutional programs, facilities, and services to expand the educational opportunities for Hispanic Americans and other underrepresented populations" (U.S. Department of Education, 2022, para. 12). The HSI Division offers webinars to help institutions determine eligibility. Currently, the HSI Division manages three grant programs:

- Developing Hispanic-Serving Institutions (DHSI) – Title V, Part A

- Hispanic-Serving Institutions Science, Technology, Engineering, or Mathematics and Articulation (HSI STEM) – Title III, Part F

- Promoting Postbaccalaureate Opportunities for Hispanic Americans (PPOHA) – Title V, Part B

Research Websites of Institutions of Higher Education

Make DEI content visible for all faculty, staff, students, potential students, and community on the CMC and MSP webpages. See Appendix J, as it provides a recommended checklist and the rationale for DEI content visibility for Colorado institutions of higher education; I co-authored this checklist and rationale as a fellow for the Colorado Department of Higher Education. DEI content that is forward facing on websites shows a commitment to engaging in eliminating inequity.

Recommendations for Future Research

This MSP program evaluation focusing on Latinos exemplifies that motivated first-generation students still must be met with resources that support their college-applying, college-going, and college-graduating aspirations. As study participants shared, they did not know what they didn't know until they had the hindsight to see what the college-going process was about. Additionally, MSP participants, although grateful for the resources, crave more culturally inspiring spaces, conversations, and linguistic capital. In my years of being a witness and participant at CMC, I am thrilled to see CMC's innovative programs and policies that focus on universal student success through retention and increased graduation rates. This revitalization in student retention and

increased graduation rates is in line with Fetterman's capacity building, in that CMC faculty and staff are working together to reflect and take action to change policy and programs to better serve all of its students.

CMC in stating that receiving the HSI eligibility designation is just the beginning of its HSI inclusionary journey is a great mindset in being open to exploring potentially challenging conversations about what recommendations to listen to and what changes are needed to make all spaces more inclusionary and equitable. In looking specifically to be more Hispanic serving and not just Hispanic enrolling, as Garcia (2020) implored, use the following recommendations for future research.

Recommendation 1: Examine the Latino Identity in Higher Education

In order to better serve all students, the CMC community needs to examine the Latino college student identity. This study's CCW conceptual lens of Latinos in college from an assets-based cultural wealth is rare. Previous studies suggest that Latinos have hyper-masculine energy and that college is feminine energy where they will become emasculated in order to perpetuate blue-collar jobs (Cerezo, et al., 2013; Ponjuan et al., 2012). Previous literature on men of color on campus is from a deficit lens; Two recent studies, however, are suggesting that focusing on Latino's identities is necessary in offering counter-stories to a machismo stereotype (See Estrada & Jimenez, 2018; Ramirez, 2018 for more). Ramirez's research on machismo in higher education as well as this study's findings suggest that college-going Latinos are often in a double bind. This study's participants felt obligated and even fearful to be college-educated and not let their parents down because as participants expressed their parents have sacrificed so much to give

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participants better opportunities. Participants also acknowledged that college was hard and being a welder and electrician "fit better" than continuing in school to earn a bachelor's degree. Ramirez (2018) found that the double bind was in the deeper analysis of understanding machismo better within a culture that both "values and demonizes machismo" and suggests using machismo as "a tool of resiliency and liberation" (2018, p. 26). From this place of an assets-based lens, the findings on MSP resources of one-on-one advising and mentoring as well as the larger group meetups is verified in the literature supporting Latino students transition into being a college student; additional Latino student support is to have both a Latinx Cultural Center and a specific support group for Latinos addressing the specific needs for Latino students in light of their cultural stereotypes and nuanced needs while choosing higher education (Estrada & Jimenez, 2018; Ramirez, 2018). Conversations need to extend beyond an either/or scenario. For example, this study shows that two participants both earned a college degree and went into a specialized construction occupation. Extending conversations and examining identities and their specific needs and interventions is in line with best educational practices.

Recommendation 2: Consider Expanding This Program Evaluation in Other CMC Locations, Departments, and Programs

This study focused on Latino alumni on a commuter campus. There are other CMC commuter campuses with limited student support programs that would benefit from using this program evaluation on its campus. In addition, this program evaluation could be used on CMC's three residential campuses, each with TRIO programs. I understand that Steamboat's residential campus is in the beginning stages of creating an MSP. In

addition to other student support programs, what if academic programs or departments used this program evaluation? I believe that by using an empowerment evaluation program evaluation, all stakeholders would benefit, including academic programs.

Recommendation 3: Explore Additional Studies That Nurture Belonging, Security, and Self-Efficacy, Including PsychCap or a Number of Other Theories

Again, based on the study findings, participants craved more connection. They craved connection both in relationship building as well as in cultural connections. Using psychological capital, or PsychCap, could be an important juxtaposition to the CCW capital that builds the skills, knowledge, and abilities to navigate in spaces from a place of asset-minded growth. PsychCap has been researched extensively and offers hope, resilience, and optimism in the workplace, especially for historically displaced Latinos (see Albarracin & Valeva, 2011; Masse et al., 2010, for more). In addition, study participants long for belongingness, security, and self-efficacy as they transition out of high school and into the world. CMC and MSP need to focus on these important areas of human growth and development. Another option is to consider using Brene Brown's cultivating meaningful relationships theory, or Laura Rendon's student validation theory for additional scholarship on understanding belonging, security, and self-efficacy. Any of these theories in conjunction with CCW offers empowering the whole or embodied student as well as offering a growth mindset for all stakeholders.

Recommendation 4: Consider Expanding the Demographics as Well as Using a Mixed-Methods Methodology

This qualitative study would be enhanced and more fully understood if a larger more inclusive study was conducted to a variety of demographics. Not only would expanding the demographics of participants give CMC a greater sense of understanding, but also by using a mixed-methods approach, including data surveys and data from CMC's Institutional Research Department, would provide numbers to the narrative, qualitative lens.

Conclusion

CMC is a leader on many higher education fronts. CMC is radically flexible in its ability to shift directions to better align with creating policy and programs focused on student success. The faculty and staff at CMC are passionately connected to not only their students but also their communities. Because of this holistic alignment, the faculty and staff are able to create important partnerships that again support CMC students who are our community members. This program evaluation provides the lived experiences of CMC's most marginalized demographic as an example of what CMC, its partners, and its students can do when working together for a common good: to educate, to empower, to liberate through self-discovery and self-recovery.

The data show that student support is crucial for first-generation students who feel overwhelmed. By giving students the human connections of one-on-one advising regarding college navigation and one-on-one mentoring from community partnerships, the participants felt seen and cared for, and their anxiety turned to confidence. When

students were able to meet with other students who "looked like them," they connected even more to the college campus as a place they belonged. As a result of the MSP, participants' lives have been changed. Their pride in being college graduates was palpable. And participants' aspirations had matured to the next step in their social mobility. Participants were buying houses, going to graduate school, and role modeling and supporting upcoming first-generation students to go to college. This program evaluation provides the study participants' lived experiences from a space of gratitude and celebration, acknowledging the hard work and sacrifices that their families shared in for the participants' aspirational outcomes to align with their dreams of a college education. Congratulations, CMC, for paying attention to the needs of your Latinos by creating the MSP community-based partnership in-house student support services program to not only help close the gap of attainment, but to create a space where participants felt like they belonged.

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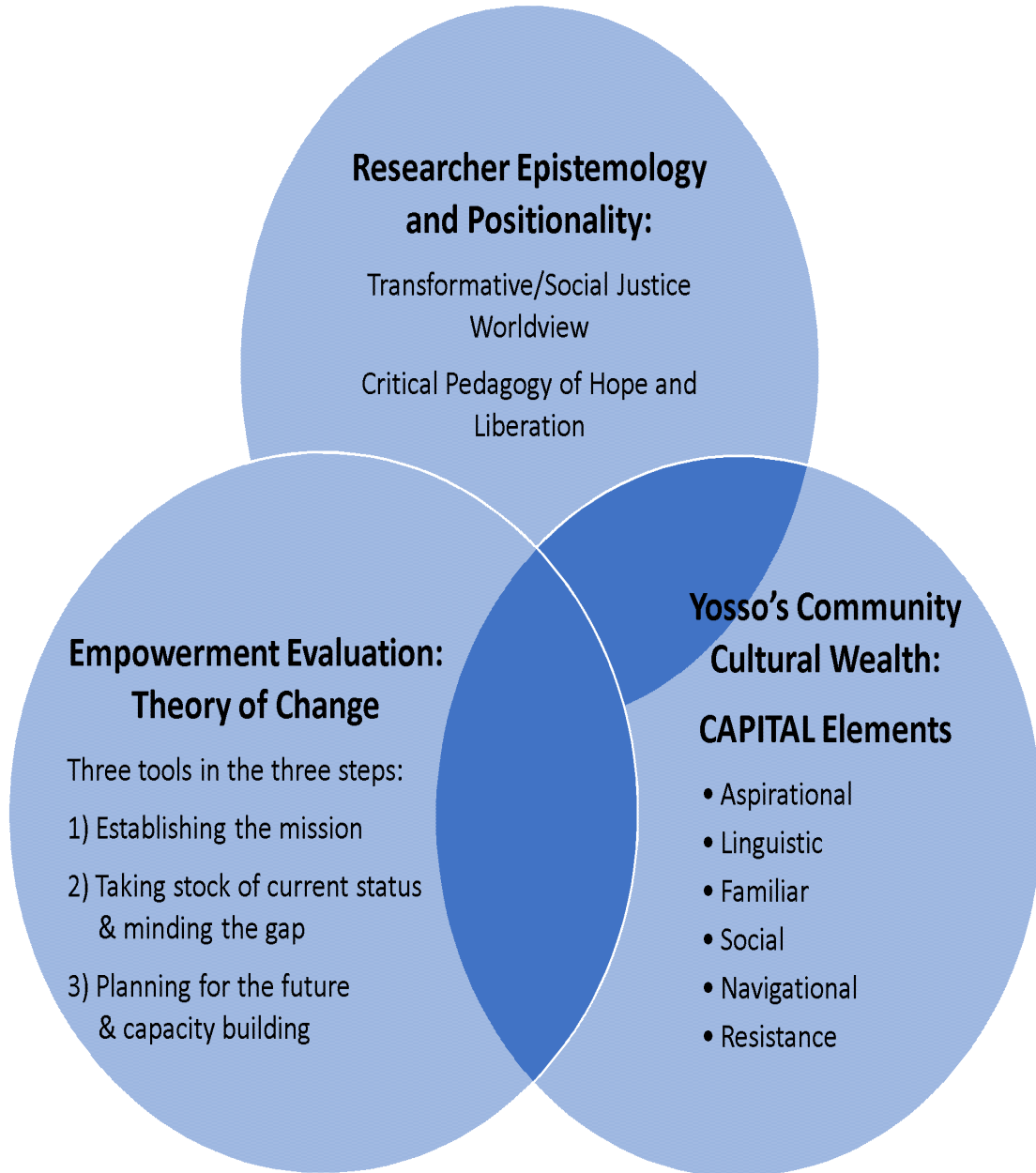Retrieved February 27, 2022, from https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/CO

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**Researcher Epistemology
and Positionality:**

Transformative/Social Justice
Worldview

Critical Pedagogy of Hope and
Liberation

**Empowerment Evaluation:
Theory of Change**

Three tools in the three steps:

1) Establishing the mission

2) Taking stock of current status
   & minding the gap

3) Planning for the future
   & capacity building

**Yosso's Community
Cultural Wealth:**

CAPITAL Elements

- Aspirational
- Linguistic
- Familiar
- Social
- Navigational
- Resistance
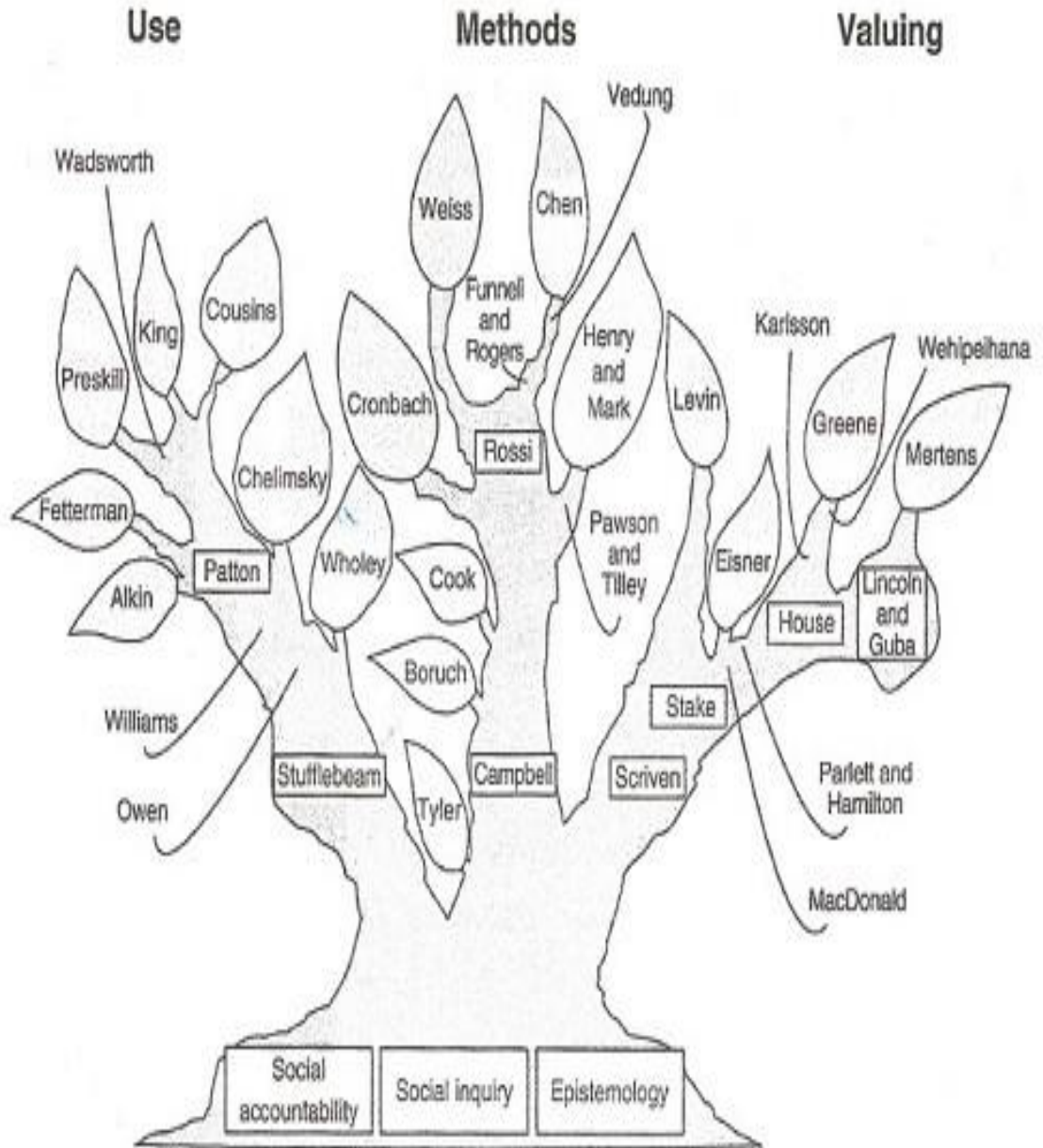
APPENDIX C: MOUNTAIN SCHOLARS STRATEGIC PLAN

Mission: Support Summit first-generation students to complete a postsecondary or bachelor's degree.

Goal 1: Student Access & Success
Continue to provide inclusive first-generation student recruitment, access, support services, and academic pathways that result in improved retention, completion, and preparation for our Mountain Scholars.
- Provide services successfully long-term to maintain one-on-one mentoring, academic coaching, degree and career counseling, financial navigation, college and transfer navigation, and program scholarships
- Value of education in long-term is to become productive member of community, higher lifetime earnings, and employment and benefit stability (student completion), confidence in being in college and completing personal goals (personal growth)

Goal 2: Community Mentors
Best practices for mentors are implemented for recruitment, screening, training, matching, monitoring and support, and closure for student success.
- Mentors are matched one-on-one with students to provide academic, personal, and professional support, encouragement, and growth
- Recruit and develop successful community mentors to build relationships and support for students to process experiences to become resilient and persistent
- Build and implement sustainable systems for mentor best practices

Goal 3: Collaboration
The college, the local foundation, the school district, and community members work together in collaboration to implement the Mountain Scholars Program through regular discussion on program goals and student needs.
- Collaborators will continue to talk and listen to each other the best way to make the program and student success
- The partners will continue to gather resources and clarify role for the program benefit

Goal 4: Funding and Fundraising
Create a sustainable and diversified funding structure for the Mountain Scholars Program that allows for greatest program success.
- Collaboration among community partners to secure funding from individual donors, foundations, and grant support
- Financially plan for long-term sustainable funding streams, including endowments

Goal 5: Data Driven

Data on best practices, the program outcomes, and financial accountability is utilized for programmatic decisions.

- The program continues to adapt and change as data drives our decisions.

APPENDIX D: MOUNTAIN SCHOLARS MENTOR ROLE

AND PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT

Role of Mentors in the Mountain Scholars Program

A. Benefits of mentoring: Research on mentoring shows strong benefits for both the mentor and mentee.
   1. Having a trusted mentor to process experiences allows mentees to learn from the situation and overcome adversity.
   2. Mentors connect mentees with needed resources in the community.

B. Mentors are matched one-on-one with students to provide academic, personal, and professional support, encouragement, and growth.

C. Mentors build relationships and are a support network for students to process experiences to become resilient and persistent learners and young adults.

D. Criteria for accepting mentors
   1. Bachelor's degree
   2. Agree to be a mentor for at least 1 year and ideally through the student's graduation
   3. Commit to meeting monthly with your assigned mentee. More face-to-face meetings are especially needed in the beginning. It is understandable that sometimes schedules do not align or mentors may be out of town. However, try to stay in contact and connect virtually if needed.
   4. Maturity and experience (at least 3 years older than the mentee) is needed to
      a) build trust and create a safe space for the student
      b) listen and help student process
      c) have self-awareness
      d) ability to support student's journey regardless of career choice
      e) have the skills to support mentees navigating their own journey

E. Role of a Mentor
   1. A mentor is a good listener and advocates for the mentee and the mentee's story.
   2. A mentor is not a professional tutor, social worker, or counselor. However, the mentor should help the mentee access those services when needed in partnership with CMC Staff.
   3. A mentor should contact CMC staff anytime and particularly when
      a) You have not heard from your mentee within a week of contacting them
      b) Your mentee needs additional support beyond what you can provide – this can look different for every student

     c) You are not sure how to handle a situation with your mentee

F. Expectations for Mentors and Students in the Mountain Scholars Program
1. Establish expectations early with your student for a successful partnership. Use the guidelines established in the Mountain Scholars Program Goals, Expectations, and Agreements (attached) as a resource annually.
2. Complete the Mentor Intake Form annually.
3. Establish a clear expectation for communication: Mentors and students should reply to each other within 24-48 hours.
4. Try to participate together in the activities provided once a semester by the Mountain Scholars Program. Typically, this includes a cooking class in fall and a spring workshop.
5. Recruitment: Know someone who would be a good fit for the program? Please refer them to CMC Staff to provide more information about the program and begin the process if they're interested! Your referral is the best compliment.

G. Application Process for Mentors
1. Face-to-Face Interview: Prospective mentors will interview with CMC Staff for program overview and mentee matching
2. Complete the Mentor Intake Form
3. Complete Background Check—you'll receive an email with steps after you complete the steps above

H. Required CMC Training and Onboarding
1. Each mentor will be matched with a student
2. An initial meeting will be arranged for the mentor and the student
3. Each mentor will be assigned a lead mentor when you join as a mentor. This peer is available to provide guidance from the mentor perspective. You can connect with your Lead Mentor individually, or at mentor events throughout the year.

SUBJECT: Invitation to Participate in a Mountain Scholars Program Evaluation

INTRODUCTION: Hello, my name is Laura Bruch, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Denver. I am working on an evaluation that uses a critical inquiry to examine the effectiveness of the Mountain Scholars Program for Latinos in the program. Since you are an alumnus in the Mountain Scholars Program, I would like to ask you about what actions the Mountain Scholars Program took in supporting your aspirational goals and aspirational outcomes. Because you have been recommended by Andrea Walker, I am writing to invite you to participate as a conversation partner in this evaluation.

Description of the study and study procedures: I anticipate that our conversation will take approximately 1½ hours. We can meet in person on campus or over WebEx depending on your preference. After our conversation, I will send you a transcript of our conversation to ensure accuracy. Additionally, I can share my interpretation of the Mountain Scholars Program with you if you wish to further offer accuracy of my findings based on our conversation. I will be interviewing five Mountain Scholar alumni.

PURPOSE: This evaluation proposes to use a critical inquiry to identify effective student support strategies in the Mountain Scholars Program.

RISKS & BENEFITS: I do not foresee any harm to participants. The conversation with program alumni is meant to be a reflective conversation about how the program affected the program member. If there are any negative or traumatic experiences the study participant went through while in the Mountain Scholars Program, that might cause an emotional reaction. At any point we can change the conversation. Interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. All audio files and transcriptions will be encrypted and password protected, and the passwords will not be shared. Additionally, participant information will be anonymized in order to protect the identity of those participating.

CONFIDENTIALITY: When I am finished with this evaluation, I will include findings and analysis in my final paper. These publications will not include your name. Study records that can identify you will be kept confidential by storing data in encrypted and password-protected files.

VOLUNTARY: Voluntary means that you do not have to be in this program evaluation. If you agree to participate and become uncomfortable at any point during the interview, you are welcome to end the interview. You can also skip any of the questions you do not want to answer.

QUESTIONS: You can ask Andrea or me questions now or whenever you wish. If you want, you may call or email me at (970) 819-2035 or laura.bruch@du.edu. For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study, you may contact me or my faculty sponsor, Dr.

Mike Hoa Nguyen, Assistant Professor, Department of Higher Education, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver at mike.nguyen@du.edu.

CONSENT: Should you wish to participate, please reply back to Andrea Walker, as the sender of this email, as soon as possible letting us know that you are interested in participating in this evaluation. Please also let us know if you prefer to meet in person at the campus or if Webex would work better.

If you consent to being my conversation partner, I will send you a formal consent agreement for you to sign and return it to me. The consent agreement restates that this evaluation is completely voluntary and that you can leave at any time as well as agreeing to be audio-taped if we meet in person or video recorded if we meet over Webex.

Thank you again for considering to be my conversation partner in this study. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,
Laura Bruch

APPENDIX F: OPEN-ENDED, SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions or types of questions framed the research questions:

1. How did you choose CMC? How did you find out about the Mountain Scholars Program? What do you remember about your Mountain Scholars experiences?

2. What goals did you have for attending college? How did the Mountain Scholars Program support you and your college goals? Do you feel that you have or still are achieving your goals? Why or why not?

3. When you think back to your time at CMC, were there any barriers or challenges that you had to overcome socially, academically, or financially? How did you overcome those challenges? How does it make you feel now when thinking about overcoming those challenges?

4. How supported did you feel going to college and being a college student? Did you feel like you belonged in the spaces you were in? Why or why not? Did you feel more or less supported in certain spaces? Can you tell me a time when you felt more or less supported? How supported did you feel while learning? What challenges and support structures did you experience while learning?

APPENDIX G: MEMBER CHECKING FEEDBACK FROM ANDREA WALKER

RE: Chapter 4 Findings document draft
Walker, Andrea aswalker@coloradomtn.edu
Wed 1/18/2023 2:57 PM

Laura,

I just finished reading Chap 4 and I am so impressed! What an amazing job you have done of collecting the students' stories and lived experiences, and digesting it into helpful and easily understandable take-aways. This is an amazing piece of work that will really well inform us as we move forward in our program work. It really helps to confirm and prove that what we believed to be going well is truly coming through to the students and to help me focus on the parts of the program that are critical and could even use some expansion. I also really enjoyed hearing the students' suggestions for improvement.

I appreciate your note and sharing your Recommendation #1 about celebration—what a great take away! I see in your table of contents that you have another Recommendation #2 called "Be Heart-Centered When Making Decisions." Can you give me an idea of what you're thinking of this? I'd love to see your Chapter 5 when you feel comfortable sharing it.

I think I will share a brief summary of my understanding of your findings at the Mountain Scholars committee meeting next Wednesday and send the drafts of Chap 1-4 with my meeting notes for members to see your work after. Does that work for you?

I so appreciate all the work you are doing!! It will make a big difference within our program and also within what CMC looks to do in the future I anticipate. Will you be sharing your findings with Yesenia and Matt G too? I'm guessing they both may be very interested to hear your results.

Best,
Andrea

CMC Days Session?
Walker, Andrea <aswalker@coloradomtn.edu>
Wed 1/18/2023 3:06 PM

Laura,

I was just thinking, do you plan to share your results more widely at CMC? If so, how? Would you consider doing a breakout session at CMC Days? I've always considered leading one, but never have because I couldn't decide what to focus on or how to share it. Maybe we could collaborate on sharing your results and the successes and recommendations for the program? Just a thought. Think about it and let me know what you think.

Best,
Andrea

Schedule an appointment here

ANDREA WALKER, M.A. Curriculum and Instruction
Pronouns: She/Her/Hers
Student Support Services / Pathways Coordinator
970.989.1304 **/** aswalker@coloradomtn.edu

Colorado Mountain College Breckenridge & Dillon
107 Denison Placer Road, PO Box 2208 **/** Breckenridge, CO 80424
ColoradoMtn.edu   **do something MAJOR**

APPENDIX I: TRANSCENDENCE SAILBOAT OF NEEDS

MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

SELF-
ACTUALIZATION

ESTEEM

LOVE AND BELONGING

SAFETY AND SECURITY

PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS
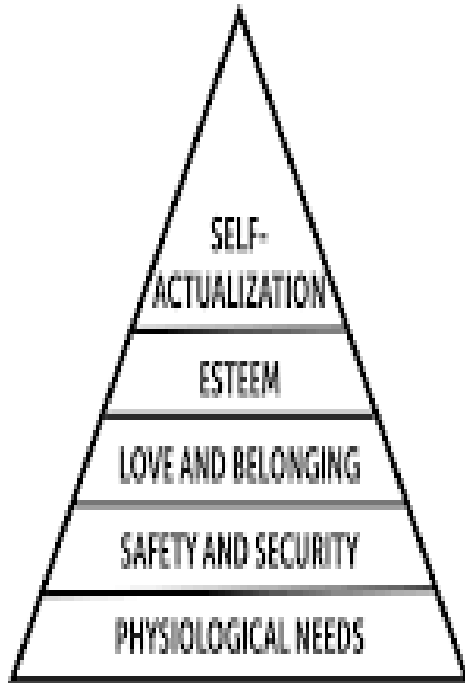
KAUFMAN'S SAILBOAT OF NEEDS

GROWTH

PURPOSE

LOVE

EXPLORATION

SELF-ESTEEM

SECURITY

CONNECTION

SAFETY

APPENDIX J: COLORADO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION VISIBILITY CHECKLIST

Colorado Department of Higher Education

Policy Fellows: Laura Bruch, Catherine Grandorff, Dustin Fife, Karen Jaramillo, Amber McDonnell

DEI Content Visibility

Recommendations for Colorado Institutions of Higher Education

OVERVIEW

We reviewed the presence and visibility of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) definitions, statements, and plans from community colleges in Colorado. Findings included 60% of these institutions featuring a diversity plan, 80% of them embedding DEI goals within their larger strategic plans, and 66% of these institutions with DEI information readily accessible via their online platforms. Recent societal and political upheavals such as insurrections, ongoing police shootings, Covid, and many institutions moving exclusively to online learning platforms for a time have highlighted the need for higher education programs to reflect on the ways in which they address diversity, equity and inclusion within their organizations. This is paramount because "the lack of consistency in codifying and treating DEI work as a merit-worthy endeavor for all employees—that is, worthy of investment, visibility, and other rewards—threatens its success. Claiming that DEI is important while penalizing those who are more apt and willing to engage in it (i.e., women, women of color, racial minorities) is a racist and sexist practice. Further, penalizing those who want to do DEI work (and telling them not to do it or not rewarding them for doing it) while incentivizing and rewarding those who need to be convinced to do it is discriminatory."[1]

Following the lead of Governor Polis and CDHE, we believe that DEI work must be made visible, be rewarded, and incentivized. One important step involves practices around visibility so that students, community members, faculty, and staff know unmistakably that DEI is part of the plan for higher education in Colorado.

GOALS:

1. Identify best practices regarding visibility of DEI terms and goals among Colorado community colleges. Visibility means that information related to DEI is easily discovered by IHE stakeholders to include prospective and current students, faculty, and staff.

2. Based on these best practices, offer those charged with DEI work in IHE contexts recommendations to use when reviewing their DEI content with the goal of making the information both findable and current.

Best Practices

The Colorado Community College System was an important group to analyze because of the work they have begun, though they also have work to do in regards to visibility. They feature a system-wide equity commitment and are on track for all system colleges to have plans using the *CCCS "DIALED" (Diversity, Inclusion, Achievement, Leadership, Equity, and Development) into Equity* framework. CCCS offered several general insights for IHEs regarding effective practices for DEI content visibility. Below are recommendations based on the practices observed across the Colorado Community College System.

Feature a Diversity Plan

The majority of two-year institutions that we reviewed featured a diversity plan. While the content of these was unique to each campus, the existence of these plans demonstrated a commitment to DEI as an institutional value.

Embed DEI Goals within Strategic Plans

Of the fifteen institutions, twelve featured goals for diversity, equity and inclusion within the larger context of their strategic plans. Including DEI objectives within their strategic plans connects DEI work to the main vision for the campuses' future.

Make DEI Content Easily Accessible

Two-thirds of the institutions reviewed had material concerning DEI easily accessible via their online platforms. This included definitions for the terms, diversity plans, and related goals within their institutional strategic plans.

Create Explicit Timelines and Ongoing Review Processes

Best practices from community college institutions in Colorado showed that DEI plans should have explicit timelines with achievable goals that go beyond statements and definitions.

Institutions should also create accountability through yearly reports and a review of objectives at least every two years, along with other measures.

Create and/or Maintain Accessible DEI Committee

Several Colorado community colleges with robust DEI content included information on a corresponding DEI committee. This included members' names and contact information. This transparency correlated with strong DEI material and goals, and we therefore recommend this as a characteristic for other institutions to replicate.

Review the DEI Visibility Best Practices Checklist

The subsequent page features a checklist that IHEs can use when considering their approach to DEI visibility.

ROI

Higher education is a key pathway for social mobility in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education's *Advancing Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education: Key Data Highlights Focusing On Race and Ethnicity and Promising Practices*, a key return on investment for higher educational institutions to promote DEI initiatives is to address continuing educational inequities and access opportunity gaps in completing degree programs. Based on the report's finding, roughly 2.5 percent of the unemployment rate for college students was about half of the national average. Among Hispanics, adults who had only completed a high school diploma earned $30,329, compared with $58,493 for those who had completed four-year college (or higher). Among blacks, adults with a high school diploma earned $28,439 compared with $59,027 for those who held a bachelor's degree (see pages 10-14).

To provide equitable, valuable experiences to students of color, low-income students, and other underrepresented populations, colleges and universities can implement DEI practices designed to co-create a vibrant ecosystem of dignity, respect, and a visceral place of belonging. We believe that to begin building equity, higher educational institutions must first maintain a visible presence of their commitments to DEI work with the goal of equal outcomes for all Colorado college students.[2]

[1] Creary, S. (2020). https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/elevate-diversity-equity-inclusion-work-organization/

[2] U.S. Department of Education. (2016). https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/research/pubs/advancing-diversity-inclusion.pdf

DEI VISIBILITY CHECKLIST

The following is a visibility checklist based on the proposals above for IHEs to use when revisiting their DEI approaches.

Checklist Item Yes/No/In Progress

❏ My institution has a plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion featured on our website.
❏ My institution has a plan for diversity, equity, and inclusion featured in our strategic plan.
❏ My institution has definitions for diversity, equity, and inclusion featured on our website.
❏ My institution has definitions for diversity, equity, and inclusion featured in our strategic plan.
❏ My institution has an explicit timeline to formulate or address DEI goals.
❏ My institution has a diverse committee to address and review DEI concerns.

❏ The contact information for my institution's DEI committee is easily accessible via my institution's website.

❏ My institution has a plan to produce an annual or biannual DEI report.