

Oh my, I mean like it changed my life! Yes, it like- I – ewe I'd be a lost puppy, if I was not in that class! (laughs) I think it gave me direction, not only in my life, like my personal life but like in my educational life. It really gave me, it wanted me to change my life, it changed my world. I will never be able to see the world the same way because of this class... It has like a really special place in my heart... this became my favorite class. (Luis, 2015).

The data for this study, collected in the summer of 2015, contributes to research that aims to document the impact college can have on students during and after their participation in a purposeful college retention program. This study was conducted for my dissertation, which was completed in Spring 2017. I was interested in understanding whether or not student participation in college retention programs had any impact on them during and after college. This paper provides a background on the demographics of the state and those of participating institutions, along with a description of the Diversity Scholars Program (DSP), to provide context for the study. A qualitative approach was utilized to articulate the causal impact of the DSP in relation to the change in students' attitudes, values, and identities.

In the following sections, I illustrate the ways that Chicax/Latinx DSP alumni spoke about the impact of the ethnic studies course under four common themes: *Making the PWI Theirs to Claim*; *Ethnic Studies as a Minor/Major*; *“Somos Como Uña y Tierra”*: *Friendships Established*; and *Career and Graduate Choice*. I focus on ten students' narratives about their academic, relational, and shifting perceptions of Students of Color (SOC) and themselves. I share their experiences to illustrate their understanding about the systemic problems occurring within education and society. Moreover, the findings of this study inform potential practices and policies that higher education institutions can adopt to increase the success of Chicax/Latinx college students. I conclude this article with a summary on the purpose of this study and the significance it could have as we continue to find ways to best support Students of Color's academic and personal success during and beyond college.

Statement of the Problem

It has been nearly eighty years since Stephen M. Corey (1936) published one of the first studies regarding the impact of college on students as a way to better understand the attitudinal differences among college students (Feldman, p. xi, foreword in Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Yet, there is still little known about how students change as a result of going to college. This continues to be the case, although, as Pascarella & Terenzini (2005) have pointed out, the most prolific scholars in this area, like Alexander Astin, Kenneth A. Feldman, and Theodore M.

Newcomb, have been “instrumental in precipitating a virtual torrent of studies on the characteristics of collegiate institutions and their students and how students change and benefit during and after their college years from college attendance” (p. xv). Yet despite years of studying college students, there remain many missing pieces towards understanding how students’ aspirations, values, goals, and identities are affected during and beyond college as a result of particular educational or co-educational experiences while in college.

One of the reasons why we continue to know so little is because it has been methodologically difficult to attribute changes in students’ dispositions and experiences during college to attitudinal and behavioral changes they may demonstrate after college (Villalpando, 2002). Research in the field of higher education has clearly established that students change during and after college, but it is still unclear whether the students have changed as a result of their experiences *during* college. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) questioned whether these documented changes in students are due to *maturational changes* among 18–26-year olds, or whether students have truly *developed* new and enduring identities, personal characteristics, values, and attitudes as a result of the particular environment in which they participated during college.

The fact that most of the research on *whether* or *how* college impacts students has relied almost exclusively on quantitative analyses of survey findings further complicates this question (Kuh, 2001; Cabrera, Nora, & Castaneda, 1993). These findings at best, assert relationships between a particular experience and its corresponding outcome (Creswell, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991, 2005). Indeed, the belief that utilizing quantitative methodology can lead to cause-and-effect outcomes continues to be a highly contested issue (Creswell, 2014).

Conversely, qualitative research in the field of higher education often includes accounts by participants who relate changes in their attitudes, values, identities, and beliefs to specific experiences or environments during college (Creswell, 2013). These two distinct methodological approaches led to the present state of tension where the field of higher education research generally finds studies of college student change and development inconclusive. This tension leads higher education researchers to temper their conclusions by noting that the changes or development recorded in students during or after they graduate from college might only be short-term in duration. The convention in higher education research is to assume that unless follow-up, longitudinal studies determine that changes in students during college have persisted long after graduating from college, those changes observed during college should only be considered transitory. However, in qualitative studies, when students themselves make attributions between a particular outcome originating from a specific environment, then a researcher is at greater liberty to describe the existence of a possible causal relationship, but only because the

participants themselves have drawn that conclusion (Creswell, 2014).

Yet, although the body of qualitative research in higher education has expanded considerably during the last twenty years (see: Denzin, 2009; Maxwell, 2004, 2012), including studies that draw more causal conclusions between changes in students and particular student outcomes (Merriam, 2014; Lather, 2004), many still challenge these studies as methodologically ambiguous and lacking the type of rigorous methodological controls to support causal conclusions (Creswell, 2014). The research literature on the impact of college on students has generally concluded that students do indeed change as a result of attending college (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005). However, these findings have been contested due to the inability to conclusively determine whether the effects of college are transitory if they are genuinely “caused” by their exposure to a particular set of collegiate experiences, or whether the observed changes are developmental or maturational (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Feldman & Newcomb, 1969). Therein lie the major challenges and tensions in assessing the impact of college experiences or environments on students. This study emphasizes that college does indeed change students, but this particular study looks at how Students of Color reflect on their participation in an ethnic studies course.

This study draws from qualitative methodological approaches to better understand *whether, how, and if* an ethnic studies course, where Students of Color are exposed to a particularly intensive and race-conscious set of learning experiences at IMU¹ in the State of Utah, has impacted and changed students. This study focuses on such a race intensive ethnic studies course to further support research on the benefits of ethnic studies courses for Students of Color (Stovall, 2014; Cammarota & Romero, 2014; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Morrell, 2002) Of particular interest is how these race-conscious learning experiences influence the development of *social consciousness* through their participation in critical service learning, which is a component of the ethnic studies course. Social consciousness is defined as combinations of values, attitudes, and activities students engage in out of a purposeful interest to enhance socially just conditions in their home communities (Villalpando, 2002). Social consciousness can include contributing or *giving back* to their community within a social justice framework. A qualitative approach is best suited for this study to answer the questions on the impact of the Diversity Scholars Program and draw the conclusions on how participants identify the impact of the DSP on their learning, their social consciousness and academic success. This is the basis for my data collection.

Despite being the largest group of Students of Color at IMU and on a majority of most other American college campuses (Almanac “Chronicle”, 2014),

1 Inter-Mountain University (IMU) is a pseudonym.

Chicanx/Latinx² undergraduates continue to be understudied and underserved in higher education (Gandara, 1999; Solórzano, Villalpando, and Oseguera, 2005).

This study contributes to the research literature on Chicanx/Latinx college students, by answering the following questions involving a longitudinal analysis concerning the impact of the Diversity Scholar Program on their development of critical, race and social consciousness during their first year experience in college, by taking into account their initial predisposition toward a race-conscious identity during their first year, and then by assessing how the DSP had an influence in the student's development after college. Thus, this study is guided by the following question:

How do Chicanx/Latinx students who participated in the *Diversity Scholars Program* (DSP) describe their experience and involvement in the program, five to seven years after enrolling in it (presumably at or near graduation)?

Background and Settings

Utah's Changing Demographics

In 2008, the United States Census Bureau declared Utah the state with the fastest growing population in the country. Such changes became more apparent between April 2010 and July 2012, when the U.S. population experienced a 1.7 percent increase, while the state of Utah experienced a nearly doubled population increase at 3.3 percent population change (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). Accordingly, the total estimated population in 2012 for the state of Utah was 2,855,287 in comparison to 313,914,040 of the U.S. population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

Latin@ and Asian American/Pacific Islander new births and immigration almost exclusively drove this tremendous population growth in Utah. The racial and ethnic makeup of Utah consists of approximately 80 percent white population in comparison to 63 percent of the total white population in the U.S. The Latin@ population in Utah is above 14 percent and is considered the fastest growing racial/ethnic group both in Utah and in the U.S., where it constitutes 17 percent of

²This is a recent gender-neutral term used to replace Latino, Latina, Latina/o as it exceeds gender binaries and makes room for trans, queer, a-binary, gender non-conforming, and non-binary individuals (Ramirez, "Huffington Post", 2016). Otherwise Chican@/Latinx includes students who self-identify as Chicana women, Chicano men, Latino men, and Latina women (Villalpando, 2003; Aldama, Sandoval, & García, 2012). "Chicana/o" is an identity adopted by people of Mexican descent who primarily reside in the U.S., whether born in Mexico or in the U.S., and regardless of citizenship or lawful residency status. The term is an expression of political liberation that gained recognition during the Chicano liberation movements in 1960s and 1970s. Such self-defining term is used among liberal and progressive members who object to the Eurocentric term "Hispanic" (Delgado Bernal, 2002; Elenes, 1997). To disrupt the gender hierarchy and avoid repetition, this proposed study also adopts the convention designated by the @ symbol to reference both males (ending in the letter "o") and females (ending in the letter "a").

the total population. Table 1.1 below provides an overview of the ethnic/racial makeup of Utah and U.S. populations.

Table 1.1: Overview of Utah and the U.S Racial/Ethnic Population

Utah Population in Comparison to the United States Population Based on U.S. Census Bureau Report 2012		
	Utah	United States
Population 2012	2,855,287	313,914,040
Non-Hispanic or Latin@, White	79.9%	63%
Hispanic or Latin@	13.3%	16.9%
Black or African American	1.3%	13.1%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2.2%	1.2%
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.5%	0.3%
Asian and Asian American	2.2%	5.1%

These demographic and population patterns are important in contextualizing the present study. A state like Utah, where only about 20 percent of its residents self-identify as People of Color raises important questions about how well these communities are faring and being represented in educational, political, social, and economic systems in the state (Vasquez, p. xi, in Castellanos, Gloria, & Kamimura, 2006).

Inter-Mountain University

Inter-Mountain University (IMU) is the public flagship, Research 1 University in the State of Utah. While there has been an increase in the population of People of Color in Utah, IMU has increased the enrollment of Students of Color only modestly and not in proportion to their general population increases throughout the state or nation. Thus, the state's flagship, identified as one of Utah's top three economic and intellectual drivers (Salt Lake Chamber, 2015) fails to serve the representation and needs of its growing diverse population. The underrepresentation of Students of Color at the university helped to spur discussions on the need of a retention program to act on behalf of these students. As a result, in 2007, a retention program that critically takes into consideration the needs of Students of Color was established.

The Diversity Scholars/First-Year Experience Program

During the 2007–2008 academic year, the Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity (AVPED)³ at IMU conceptualized a for-credit, academic

³ Dr. Octavio Villalpando, Professor of Educational Leadership and Policy, served as IMU's Associate Vice President for Equity and Diversity and Chief Diversity Officer from 2007 through

enrichment program for Students of Color with the intent to enhance their retention and graduation rates. Various IMU senior administrative and academic leaders initially challenged the AVPED's idea to create a full three-credit, one-to-two year long, high-impact academic enrichment seminar for first-year Students of Color. In an interview with the AVPED⁴, he provided multiple examples of the fierce opposition he received from high ranking vice presidents, such as a chief academic officer, who questioned whether the AVPED's proposal would lead to admitting more students who did not meet the minimum admissions criteria, or a chief student affairs officer who described the proposal as creating a "ghetto for minority students in classes taught by other minority faculty." One influential dean lamented that the proposal would result in tracking "even more unqualified minority students into his college," which according to him, already housed excessive numbers of "minority students who routinely fail out of the major." At one point, a campus staff attorney even questioned whether the DSP might violate "the Affirmative Action law passed by the U.S. Supreme Court" since it would be designed to "attract minority students."

The AVPED initially framed the DSP around higher education research (including his) that found that when Students of Color at predominantly white campuses begin college with opportunities to network with each other, engage with faculty of color in their courses, participate in staff-led personal and academic enrichment activities, and most importantly, develop the awareness, language, and critical navigational skills to succeed in college, they are more likely to graduate with stronger commitments to contributing to social justice and social equity (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Solórzano & Villalpando, 1998; Villalpando, 1996). To ensure that students were making connections across campus and had opportunities to access academic support services like tutoring and advisement, the AVPED also assigned professional staff that served as academic advisors and program directors in the Center for Ethnic Student Affairs (CESA) to the DSP.

The AVPED built on the CESA seminar, and expanded enrollment to high achieving students, students with merit-based scholarships, and students who had an interest in the creation and expansion of a yearlong ethnic studies course with a service learning component. He based this expansion on research that suggests that students of different academic abilities can thrive when they work together in an academic setting, regardless of their level of prior academic achievement. It was important to recruit faculty that would also best fit this group of students. Therefore, the AVPED also attempted to recruit exceptional instructors of color who were tenured or on the tenure-track to maximize the students' early exposure to faculty of color.

the 2014 academic year.

⁴ Conducted with Dr. Villalpando, November 2015.

DSP has been a critical component to the Office for Equity and Diversity (OED) at IMU, not only for their successful retention program but also because of its tremendous success in supporting Students of Color during their first-year (Alemán & Gaytán, 2016). The central components of DSP have remained intact, including regular interactions with faculty and staff of color, mandatory asset-based academic advising, multiple mentoring relationships, and off-campus community engagement opportunities through a Critical Race Service Learning pedagogy (Castrellon & Pérez, 2017; Mitchell, 2008). A total of 80 percent of all DSP students are first-generation college students. The overall retention rates among Students of Color at IMU have increased due to the DSP. Indeed, DSP's first-to-second year retention rate for participating students is higher than that of other Students of Color not participating in the program, as well as students who participate in the university honors program (Valles, 2012; Alemán & Gaytán, 2013).

The Ethnic Studies Course

The DSP is offered under the academic sponsorship of the Ethnic Studies Program. The course aims to provide students with tools to “examine the social, political, economic, and historical context of schooling for Students of Color in K–12 and higher educational systems” (ETHNC 2500, Course Syllabus, Fall 2012), and challenges them to be more reflective regarding their own educational experiences and schooling conditions, and to apply the conceptualizations learned in class towards the analysis of their Critical Race Service Learning experience (Castrellon & Pérez, 2017).

Critical Race Service Learning Requirement

The Diversity Scholars participate in a Critical Race Service Learning (Castrellon & Pérez, 2017) experience as university mentors for one of four learning sites. The vast majority of students is placed at the largest service-learning site, the *Adelante* Partnership⁵, and attends an orientation prior to starting. Between the years, 2007-2012, there were over 500 *Adelante* mentors, who completed 11 service-learning hours per semester, and received service learning course credits.

Critical Race Service Learning

A Critical Race Service Learning (CRSL) model (Castrellon & Pérez, 2017) pays close attention to the inequities placed on the communities served to

⁵ The *Adelante* Partnership at Jackson Elementary School was established by Professors Enrique, Dolores Delgado Bernal, and Octavio Villalpando, with the purpose of forging a stronger relationship between this Title I school, with a large population of working class Students of Color and the Inter-Mountain University.

“deconstruct systems of power so the need for service and the inequities that create and sustain them are dismantled” (Mitchell, 2008, p. 50). It attempts to get at the core of the problem through self-reflections where the Students of Color can make connections between their community experience and the course (Castrellon & Pérez, 2017; Zivi, 1997, as cited in Mitchell, 2008). The course and the CRSL component allowed students to understand the educational injustices they experienced in K-12.

The Purpose of the Study

A fundamental premise of this study is that Chicax/Latinx students enter college with minimal to no understanding of their own educational disparities (Villalpando & Solórzano, 2005). The majority of Chicax/Latinx students, as well as other Students of Color, continue to come from racially segregated schools that often lack educational resources and skilled teachers who have prepared them for the academic rigor of four-year universities (Orfield, 2011; Villalpando, 2010; Valencia, 2015). Their schooling has also failed to provide them with tools to interrogate and challenge institutionalized racism, including the underlying assumptions that maintain their subordination.

Methodology

The study took an open-ended questionnaires approach with ten self-identified Chicax/Latinx students who participated in the DSP between 2007 and 2011. Astin’s (1993) Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) conceptual framework was utilized as a way to organize and assess the impact of the DSP on the Chicax/Latinx student participants before (Input), during (Environment) and after college (Output). The I-E-O model provided a framework to analyze the individual responses posed in this study (see Figure 2). The I-E-O model served as an organizational, theoretical, and practical tool when analyzing the discourse of Chicax/Latinx students and other Students of Color, as it helps support the notion that they enter college with a bank of knowledge and it is just a matter of illuminating that knowledge (good and bad) to (re)conceptualize the way higher education or educational policies can better support their academic success.

The following portion of this paper will focus solely on the *Output: Post-College Outcomes* of the DSP alumni to understand how and if they continue to incorporate what they learned in the ethnic studies course to their current careers or lives. Findings demonstrate the various ways the DSP had an impact on the students’ years after the program.

Findings

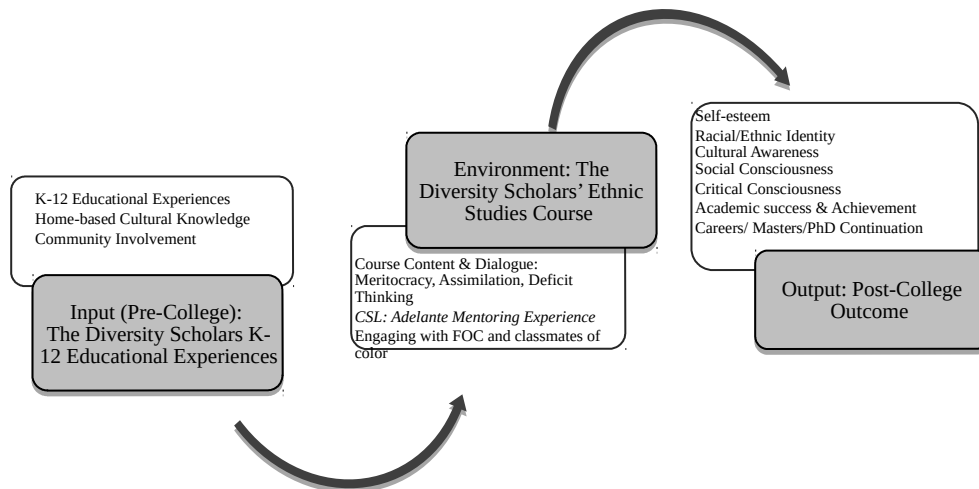
Output: Post-College Outcomes

Throughout the study, the Chicax/Latinx students described themselves

as holding ingrained beliefs before participating in the DSP about pursuing a strong work ethic based on the expectation that, “if you work hard, you will get far” (Luis, 2015).

They initially believed that the main reason they had made it to college was because of the quality and quantity (Astin, 1982) of their hard work and effort. The findings suggest that the exposure they received *during* their first year in the DSP did influence several dimensions of students’ attitudes, values, identities and aspirations even after college. The DSP not only introduced Chicana/Latina students to culturally deficient (Blanton, 2003; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001) theories and epistemologies (see Scheurich and Young, 1997) that frame their everyday life and education, but the program also helped them identify and develop specific perspectives and tools to eradicate these deficit views about themselves and others, and instead catalyzed their ability to see themselves as empowered agents of change. Incorporating the outcomes of the program after receiving their baccalaureate degree helped to best support how the DSP empowered them to make the Primarily White Institutions (PWI) theirs to claim, how the course encouraged some to minor or major in ethnic studies, the friendships they established and the influence it had on their future career/graduate journeys.

Figure 2.1: The Diversity Scholar Framework



Making the PWI Theirs to Claim

An interesting analysis was on the question of whether the DSP alumni felt as if they were part of the university. Some made it clear that the only spaces within the university where they felt welcomed were sites concerned with providing services on the needs of Students of Color such as the CESA office and

the LGBT Resource Center. As Luis states when I asked him if he felt he was part of the university:

... I would say probably not, because... thinking about any other friends that I still have from college - they're all somehow related to that [ethnic studies] class, they are all somehow related to CESA... they're all connected to the LGBT Resource Center...if it wasn't for these kind of really awesome classes, or resource centers on campus, I probably would not have had any friends really, or maintained any friendships after college...

Had it not been for the friendships he built, he would not have felt as though he belonged to the university. More importantly, the continued support he received after his first year through his involvement with CESA and the LGBT center, was often not fully recognized by the mainstream university.

For others such as Eduardo, it was through the course, which connected him to MEChA, located in the CESA office, that he built relationships. Eduardo was very confident in stating he felt part of the university but as he mentioned, it was through the offices designed for Students of Color that he felt welcomed at university. Had it not been for such resourceful programs, there is no way of telling if he would have felt the same or if he would have remained in college.

As for Eva, after taking the ethnic studies course, she was able to compare how the faculty of color in the DSP discussed the same literature in comparison with her sociology class, which provided her with a different perspective and a subsequent level of confidence as. She explains:

... some authors that we read my first year I would read again in say like a Sociology course, but I would get something different out of it... it wasn't from a professor of color. But I'd be like "oh have we ever looked at it this way" you know, so I think it helped me also to be able to be like "yes I am speaking up in class". I was more confident like nobody's going to like make fun of me at like, an academic level.

In her interview, Eva shared how she was not used to literature that spoke of her in an asset-based way, and therefore, she was hesitant to share her thoughts in the ethnic studies course, but by the second year it helped her find the confidence to speak up. Eva was able to see the different ways a reading can be interpreted by faculty of color in comparison to a white professor. The ethnic studies course provided her with the tools to fully engage in other classes outside of the DSP; it also helped her speak up and demonstrate that the voices of Students of Color need to be more represented and acknowledged among white faculty.

Ethnic Studies as a Minor/Major

There was a total of five DSP alumni out of the ten who minored in ethnic studies and one who majored in it once it became available. It could have possibly been more had the major been available for the first cohorts. Eduardo, who was part of this group noted:

...I didn't have to take classes to continue to learn about the topic... I was doing it by myself, studying by myself and just having conversation with other people that were studying that subject, ethnic studies.

Eduardo stated there were not many undergraduate courses offered after the first year. However, he continued to do his own research on the experiences of People of Color, and interacting with others who were interested in an ethnic studies minor but were very limited due to it not being offered. For him it would have been too late to minor in ethnic studies as he was getting ready to graduate.

Ana was another student who as a business major did not continue taking any other ethnic studies courses. She was glad for the one course she attended during her first year of college since it allowed her to navigate what would be the remainder of her college years with the right language and tools to speak up as one of the few, or in some cases the only, female of color in a space dominated by white males. Ana shares:

...Yeah, no, and there were so many issues that came up in the business program, that if it hadn't been because of the ethnic studies class my first year, I wouldn't have known how to like handle that, or deal with that, or like even how to respond. So that was so helpful!...

This is another example of the major impact the ethnic studies course had on Ana as she continued with her degree in business. In asking what role the course played during her remaining years, Ana named one experience and made connections with literature learned in the course, such as that on microaggressions, to understand society's lack of knowledge about students' race/ethnicity and their cultures. Additionally, one thing that cannot be denied was the strong friendships all the DSP alumni built and the networking opportunities they developed with others.

“Somos Como Uña y Tierra”: Friendships Established through the Diversity Scholars Program

A powerful example of how the DSP was able to nurture and empower students' academic success and achievement was through the lasting friendships the students established in the ethnic studies course. For many, it was the relationships they formed in the classroom that helped them survive their

remaining college years. When asked about how their friendship developed in the course, Luis states:

... one of my really close friends was Erica. We still keep in touch. Even though this was a very emotional experience for me, and very new, it was really cool to know that I wasn't the only one that believed in meritocracy. I wasn't the only one that had internalized racism. It was really cool to share that and process that with people...after class we'd walk together like Oh my God, and talk about the class and discussions, and things that we learned, and we went thru our phase where we would call everything out, and everything was- that's racist! that's oppression! –you know, we were like these children who learned something new and used that fancy word all the time, like Pedagogy, Pedagogy! Oh my God, that was like my favorite word! It was really cool to share that with people. Erica was definitely the one that stands out the most, and so there's definitely connections that I still maintain...

Meeting other Students of Color, who, once introduced to the course could relate to feelings of guilt for falling into what he defined as internalized racism, was major. Luis shared how prior to his first year in college, he was ashamed to identify as Mexican, for he was told it had a negative connotation. Once he found out there were other Students of Color in the course who also shared the same experiences, they were able to make sense of it and move forward with interrogating everything else they had been told about their lives and experiences. His passion for learning these “fancy” words transpired more than that and it became a tool or survival mechanism for the remainder of his college years, as he and other DSP alumni were able to call out racism and name their own experiences.

For Eva, who expressed that while she valued the presence at the university of her longtime friend, whom she has known since preschool in Head Start, the course allowed her to meet other Students of Color. She states:

... when I came to the university, I didn't know anyone except my friend... but we were in completely different majors. She never did ethnic studies but you know she made a lot of friends but I was like I'm meeting other Students of Color that I liked being around... people who had long term goals similar to mine, that's what I loved...

For Eva, the DSP course allowed her to make friends just like her friend but she noticed most of her friends were particularly students of color. These friends of color, in addition to having relatable experiences, also identified common long-

term goals of returning to their communities to better serve them.

Rafael shared how it was his favorite course by far as an undergrad. He explains:

... definitely this was the class that stood out to me the most out of all of them. Even up to date, whenever they ask me like you know what was the best class I've ever taken, ethnic studies, first semester, first year of college! Straight up! Like, I've never taken a class as good as that one, that one changed my life completely. Villalpando's piece on like self-segregation, self-preservation, I think that I really maybe unconsciously took that to heart and the following semesters we would try to like take it with like a few others, maybe not intentionally, or intentionally, or I don't know, but we would end up taking classes together...whether it was in sociology or general classes, just to have that support...

Rafael always knew he had more to offer but did not have the language to articulate that until the ethnic studies course. Indeed, he and a few other DSP alumni made sure to enroll in the same courses to support one another as Villalpando (2003) suggested, and to associate with other Students of Color to increase their chances of academic success and achievement.

Career Choice and Graduate School

Lastly, in terms of where most of the DSP alumni were five to seven years later is very telling as they all had graduated before or during the same year they were interviewed. All DSP alumni had earned their baccalaureate degree between the 4-6-year period, and six out of ten later went on to graduate school.

All ten students went on to do amazing social justice work in one capacity or another. For example, Eduardo earned his Jurist Doctor degree at Northwestern University School of Law in 2016. Both Rafael and Jose continued working together, doing several community-based works while also completing their Master's degree in an Educational Leadership and Policy department. Both graduated in May 2016. Since their involvement in the DSP and *Adelante*, Eva and Luis continued to be involved in serving communities of color, specifically working with the Latinx community by providing resources and education. The concept of *giving back* has been expressed among all the DSP alumni, whether it was giving back to their parents, communities, siblings, or other students.

Rafael, in addition to attending grad school, also became a DSP Advisor and played a major role in implementing change in the program. While Jamie did not complete her education at IMU, she took the tools learned from the ethnic studies course into her career as a Case Manager, and expressed that it had helped

her in her field. For Laura, the course had such a huge impact on her life in just that one year, that she wanted her brother to gain those same tools at his institution as he was also struggling as the only Student of Color in Atlanta. When she learned of his experiences, she was shocked that there were no programs being offered for Students of Color and realized her experience in the DSP was unique.

At the end of my interview questions, I asked the DS alumni how they felt about opening the course to white students, and all ten students answered no. They were concerned that it would change their willingness to participate in the classroom and would not share as much as they did in a room full of Students of Color. One student expressed her concern of how it was already hard enough for her experience as a Student of Color to be questioned by another Student of Color, and that allowing white students in the DSP would take away its uniqueness and make it like any other course that questions her experiences. While the possibilities of having unique programs such as this are rare and difficult, the hope here is that this program inspires others to take on similar approaches in creating these learning communities not only within ethnic studies courses but also other offices, departments, colleges, and institutions as a successful retention, diversity, and educational policy. It was clear that the course had a significant impact on all ten students that participated across cohorts. The richness of the program nurtured and empowered the academic success of all the Students of Color in this study and beyond the institution.

Recognizing this study only explores one particular program, within one institution, for a particular group of students, without doing a comparison with another group, can have implications. However, the purpose of this study was never to do a comparative study but rather to offer an example of an asset-based approach that has demonstrated improvements in the academic success, retention, graduation, community engagement, and achievement of Students of Color at this particular PWI. Recognizing the inclusivity of this program can further lead to the question of whether or not the DS had already entered with a critical consciousness, for example, and the course only nurtured it. Findings demonstrated that all students continued to work in non-profits or engaged in working with communities of color, and chose to continue surrounding themselves with or participating in activities with People of Color as a result of this exposure in the DSP.

Conclusion

There are both theoretical and practical implications for enhancing our understanding of how the DSP affects the development of critical race consciousness among Chicana/Latina students, and for determining the extent to which this race-consciousness translates into community-oriented involvement

and socially conscious behavior after college. The findings demonstrate how the DSP exerts this type of influence, and therefore there are significant implications for curricular and pedagogical considerations as well as the underlying theoretical premises that undergird them.

As a longitudinal study on Chicanx/Latinx students, this study should broaden our theoretical and practical understanding of how this increasingly important student population is generally affected in higher education. Recognizing the benefits of placing race at the center of education, several studies have been significant in further supporting the unique and advantageous impact a first-year program centered on race can have on students' educational outcomes after college (Alemán & Gaytán, 2013; Hurtado, Cuellar, & Guillermo–Wann, 2011; Valencia, 2015, Delgado Bernal, Alemán, Garavito, 2009).

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